

Ma'ayan, Israeli

I never thought terrible things can happen to me. I was the kind of person who thought that things like that can only happen to other people, to other families. Unfortunately, I was proved wrong.

I remember it was a few minutes after 6 o'clock at evening, I was watching TV, while my younger and only brother played with his friend in the other room. I remember thinking to myself how great it is I can finally sit down and do nothing, after studying so hard for the last couple of weeks, when suddenly, a tremendous explosion brutally cut my thoughts, and tore the silence apart. My building trembled so hard I thought it'll brake down, and all the windows shattered, leaving with no protection from the outside. There was no mistake; I knew exactly what had happened. A bombing had occurred, right outside my house. I stood up, and started crying. I ran over to my brother and his friend, and was relieved to see they were both alright, but my emotions were still rising up inside of me. Even now, at this very moment, I can still hear the people screaming outside my window, the sound of the sirens, the TV reporting what has happened, and the voices inside my head trying to calm me down. I still remember approaching the window and seeing the exact same horrifying sites the TV was showing, while praying and wishing no one I know was there.

I always knew that sooner or later, something like this is bound to happen, since my house is across the street from the mall, where many people spend their time. The thoughts about how easily I, my brother or someone I know could have been there haunt me to this very day. It was the first time, in my whole life, I felt so close, so physically and emotionally close to death.

Unfortunately, this kind of scene, is not a unique one in my country. Over the last 54 years Israel has existed, and especially throughout these last 3 years of the Intifada, my country and my people have endured hundreds of bombing attacks, like the one outside my house, and have known a great deal of loss. As tragic as it may sound, loosing people has become an everyday thing for us, and we have been forced to accustom ourselves to living with death. This situation, in which fear, insecurity and hate are an inseparable part of daily life, has cast shadows over many Israeli's hope, optimism, and faith in peace.

It took me hours after the bombing to pull myself together. I was feeling scared, angry, and mostly shocked, and I think that for one second there, I felt the absolute hopelessness Israelis feel, after being through a frightening experience like the one I've been through. But my experience was somewhat different, because of all the love and support I received from my Palestinian friends who called to check I was OK. It was those phone calls, those sweet words of caring, that gave me the strength not to surrender to feelings of revenge and despair, and convinced me even more than before I do not want that kind of a future for my children, or anybody's children.

To be honest with you, I do not want peace on the paper. I want peace between people. I want trust, understanding, compassion and a feeling of security. I want little babies to be born to a world where they are taught to love, and not to hate. I don't mislead myself by thinking non-seeds don't want the same. But I do know that in the current situation, in which people don't have many choices but the obvious choice of despair and hate, Seeds of Peace allows me, allows us to be true to ourselves, to what we believe in, and work for it.

That is why Tarek and I have been leading co-existence sessions between Palestinians and Israelis.

That is why I brought my best friend to a Seeds of Peace meeting, so she'll see in her own eyes that Arabs are not as bad, as she thought the were.

That is why I spoke to students, to tell them about our organization, and to let them see there is another side to the reality they grew up with.

And that is why, Ladies and Gentleman, I stand here in front of you tonight, three years after my first summer in Seeds of Peace, to tell you my story, and to tell the world there is another way. Seeds of Peace has opened the door for me to a better future, and I just hope I will be able to do the same, for others.