

THE OLIVE BRANCH

Youth Magazine of the Seeds of Peace Program | Volume V, Issue I | Winter 2000/01



The Price of No Peace

Seeds of Peace in a Time of War

SEEDS OF PEACE respond to the escalation of conflict between Palestinians and Israelis

ASEL ASLEH, 1983-2000: Seed of Peace, Victim of Violence

YOUTH PEACE INITIATIVE: Bridging the BALKANS

THE OLIVE BRANCH Survey: The Future of CYPRUS

HOLIDAY CULTURE Around the World



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THE OLIVE BRANCH

The Olive Branch is a quarterly youth magazine written and edited by youth from Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, FYROM, Greece, Israel, Jordan, Kosovo, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Romania, Tunisia, Turkey, Yemen, Yugoslavia and the United States, who are part of the Seeds of Peace program.

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Letters

Passing the Test of Peace

Being a 2000 Seed, I didn't have enough time to base my relationships with Palestinians, or to see some of the "good times" that coming back from camp can offer. The events of the past month came out of nowhere and many times they broke every hope I had for peace in to fractions.

Looking back at the past month, and at my actions, makes me frustrated—not just because I saw the peace running away from the region, but because I was enough of a fool to be pushed towards the hate and anger in the atmosphere. I am disappointed in myself for taking a few steps backwards, and losing faith in some of the friendships that I have built. Thank G-d only some. In times like these what we learned as Seeds is put to the test. In times like these each of us should look at ourselves and ask, "Did I act in favor of peace today?" And each and every one of us should be able to answer yes. Nothing big is needed. Just a little something to take the process one-step forward.

Even though I felt what I was doing was wrong, I didn't see the importance of looking at myself, expecting the other side to take the step forward. Hopefully I will be able to overcome the mess I led myself into, and hopefully my country will be able to do the same.

Ariel Tal (Givon Hehadashah)

Don't Give Up!

Hey Seeds of Peace! How are you all doing? I am so sad because I heard from a friend that some Palestinian Seeds are going to quit just like that! Why? Is it all because of the war? Are you ready to give up on our pure dream of having peace? Are you able to forget all the nice memories that you had with your Israeli friends? When I see the TV or I hear in real life about all of the murdering, I struggle to keep my faith and to still live with my memories from camp in my heart. I right away check my email or just call an Israeli friend of mine to just protect my beliefs and my love!

I am a Palestinian, and I understand how you feel now, I truly do, but that is not an excuse to give up or hang up when your Israeli friend is on the phone. You cannot imagine how happy I was when I called Gal and laughed with him about stupid things, and when I talked with him about the situation here, and when we shared our fears



42nd President Bill Clinton received Seeds of Peace in May at the White House. From Left: Seeds Manal Abbas (Ramallah), Dalia Ali (Cairo), Jamil Zaiqat (Amman), President Clinton, Avigail Shaham (Jerusalem), and Jawad Issa (Gaza).

and our suffering. I talked for about an hour, and in this hour I felt what is peace! Peace is to find only love in your heart and forgiveness. Peace is to laugh with your "enemy." Peace is a smile that you have on your face!

Gal and I came to a solution to write as if you are one of the other side. Just be honest with yourself and write. If you need any help you can email me or email Gal, and you can send us what you wrote. If you want, I can send you something that I wrote! Guys, let's all make peace. I know how hard it is, but this way we can know that we are strong enough. That is where you can find the beauty of this war: to find peace and love in our hearts! I love you all, and I wish that I could be with you!

Lana Khaskia (Tira)

A Seed at Heart

Cherished Seeds, If I had one wish, it would be that for even just one day, you could give me your pain. I wish I could bear the burden you face every time you walk out your door. I wish you could see the world through my eyes and mine through yours. But I can't. What I can do is promise all of you that I heard you. I heard you and I will never forget. Every suffering child, mother, father, brother, sister, and friend has a place in my heart forever. I can promise you that no matter who you are or what your story is, you are welcome in my home, my land, my thoughts, my dreams and most of all my heart. Love has no boundaries, shows no sides, so I choose none. I receive and believe in all. The one thing I love and hate about people at the same time is that they never cease to amaze me. All of you amaze me. I thank you for living, striving, trying. I thank you for reading this, for listening and understanding. I thank you for being who you are, for doing what you can, and that's all anyone could ever ask.

I bought the Seeds of Peace t-shirt tonight. I will wear this t-shirt every night until there is peace in the Middle East (I'll wash it, though!).

I will NEVER give up hope. I know that must be easy for me to say, when I don't have to walk in your shoes every day, but I still think that if everyone has hope, then something positive is bound to happen. If strength of character were measured in pounds, and love and kindness were measured in time, one of you alone could hold up the world on the tip of your fingers for all eternity. Lovingly and forever yours,

Lauren May (Pennsylvania)

The Friend in the Picture

Dear Seeds, I want to tell you about something that happened to me about a month ago. One day, I got into an argument about everything that has been going on with a boy in my class. I told him that I went to Seeds of Peace, and that I learned a lot at camp, and that it was an amazing experience. I tried to make him understand what Seeds of Peace is all about, but he just would not listen to me. At one point of the argument I told him that I have a Palestinian friend from camp. I told him about my friend Marwah, who is one of my best friends from camp, and that she lives in Hebron, and that yes, she is a Palestinian, even though it may be hard to believe. I told him that we talk on the phone and not only about the situation, but also about other things like: school, friends, etc. He didn't believe me. The next day, I brought a picture of Marwah with me to school, and left it on his desk. When he came to class and found the picture, he didn't understand what it was about. I pointed at the picture and said 2 words: "That's Marwah." And that's all it took. We still disagree about different issues, but once in a while he comes up to me and "by the way," he happens to ask me: "so... how is Marwah doing? You know... the friend in the picture."

That's when I knew that I did a good job, and got him to understand and believe in what Seeds of Peace is about.

Tamara Bernstein (Jerusalem)

From the Editors

THE OLIVE BRANCH opens its fifth year of publication with something dramatically different. The new OLIVE BRANCH is redesigned and expanded to reflect the dynamic growth of Seeds of Peace. Since the publication of the first edition in 1996, 1000 new Seeds from twenty different delegations have become partners in peacemaking. This fifth anniversary OLIVE BRANCH was planned as a celebration of Seeds of Peace achievements: the completion of our first full year of nonstop activities at the Center for Coexistence in Jerusalem; Summer 2000, in which Seeds of Peace simultaneously produced three sessions of summer camp in the United States and a diverse, daily regional program for hundreds of Middle Eastern Seeds (see pp. 18-21); a Cypriot Seeds of Peace community three-years-old and thriving (see pp. 16-17); and the Youth Peace Initiative spreading Seeds of Peace throughout the Balkans (see pp. 14-15).

Suddenly, the explosion of violence in the Middle East cast a shadow on our celebration, on the lives of all the people of the region (see pp. 6-13) and the hopes of those who strive for reconciliation. The resumption of daily Israeli-Palestinian fighting has added importance to this edition. As local and international news media highlight calls to hatred and acts of violence, THE OLIVE BRANCH gives a platform for the voices of compassion, understanding, dialogue and tolerance. In this magazine, Israeli and Palestinian teenagers stand together for an end to violence, a respect for human life and human rights, and the renewal of communication between their peoples.

Our writers are not naïve adolescents. These young people live every day with the consequences of their leaders' failure to peacefully resolve conflict. As they document in THE OLIVE BRANCH, it is their homes that are shot at, their buses bombed, their neighborhoods closed off, and their friends killed. These are innocent teenagers who want nothing more than to live a life of peace. Instead they are forced to live in fear.

"Everyone talks about the concessions we make in negotiations, the 'price of peace.' With the life of my son, I personally paid the price of no peace." So said Aharon Barnea, a bereaved father and peace activist, to THE OLIVE BRANCH. The killing of beloved Arab-Israeli Seed Asel Asleh (see pp. 5 & 13) has made us all pay the "price of no peace." Asel was a paragon of the leadership desperately needed in his troubled region. At age 17, he had already built bridges between scores of Arab and Jewish friends, and opened the minds and hearts of hundreds of others to the simple fact of each other's humanity. He died as a result of hatred and violence; a victim of the injustice he worked to end.

On August 17, 2000, only a few months ago, several hundred Israeli and Palestinian Seeds gathered at the Center in Jerusalem for a Talent Show, singing, dancing, laughing, celebrating together their summer of remarkable achievements.

Asel shined onstage that evening, co-hosting the festivities with Israeli friend Talia Avidor. With that image before our eyes, of Asel smiling in front of the vibrant community of peace that he and hundreds of friends built together, we dedicate this edition of THE OLIVE BRANCH to Asel, and to all who refuse to give up hope and continue to stand for peace in their lives.



Asel with (from right to left) Seeds of Peace President and Founder John Wallach, Executive V.P. Bobbie Gottschalk, and V.P. and Camp Director Tim Wilson.

Statement from John Wallach, Founder and President of Seeds of Peace

Asel Asleh is the first Seeds of Peace graduate to have lost his life in the ongoing battle between Israelis and Palestinians. On behalf of Seeds everywhere, we mourn the tragic loss of this sensitive, caring and articulate individual. On behalf of the whole Seeds of Peace family, I extend our deepest condolences to his family and hundreds of Arab and Israeli friends. All of us have a responsibility now to remember Asel for his courageous acts of leadership and for overcoming the legacy of hatred into which he was born.

Asel was actively working for a better future not only for his friends in Seeds of Peace, but for all Arabs and Israelis. At camp, he learned to distinguish between the Israeli Government and their people. He said that while Israel had committed many injustices against him and the Arab people, the young man "playing baseball against me is not my enemy...and that's what is important."

Asel wrote that "Seeds of Peace is the best thing that happened to all of us." Why? Because he said it gave him hope. More important it gave him the chance to change the future so that other Israelis and Palestinians would not have to die. Asel understood that. "When we became Seeds we took in our hands a responsibility," he said. "It is our job now to do it the right way no matter what—a job we all made a commitment to, not because we have to but because we want to."

Asel gave a message to future generations. He had a vision of what peace would be like. "You will be able to live in a place where an ID isn't needed as well as passports or checkpoints," he wrote in THE OLIVE BRANCH. "When your voice becomes a voice of a leader, no one will care for your ID." Asel was already a leader. Our mission is to realize his dreams despite all the obstacles against us. I hope you will join everyone at Seeds of Peace. Together we can make sure that Asel's voice is never silenced.

As the Founder and President of Seeds of Peace, I have written to Israeli Justice Minister Yossi Beilin requesting a full, fair and thorough investigation of the circumstances that led to Asel's death and, if justified, appropriate punishment for those responsible. All of us who knew and loved Asel will be satisfied with nothing less. I have been assured that such an investigation is underway and that Minister Beilin has been and will remain in direct contact with Asel's family. I hope that Asel's loss will be a constant reminder of the need for greater understanding and reconciliation among all Israelis and between Israelis and all of the Palestinians and other Arabs who are part of the Seeds of Peace community.

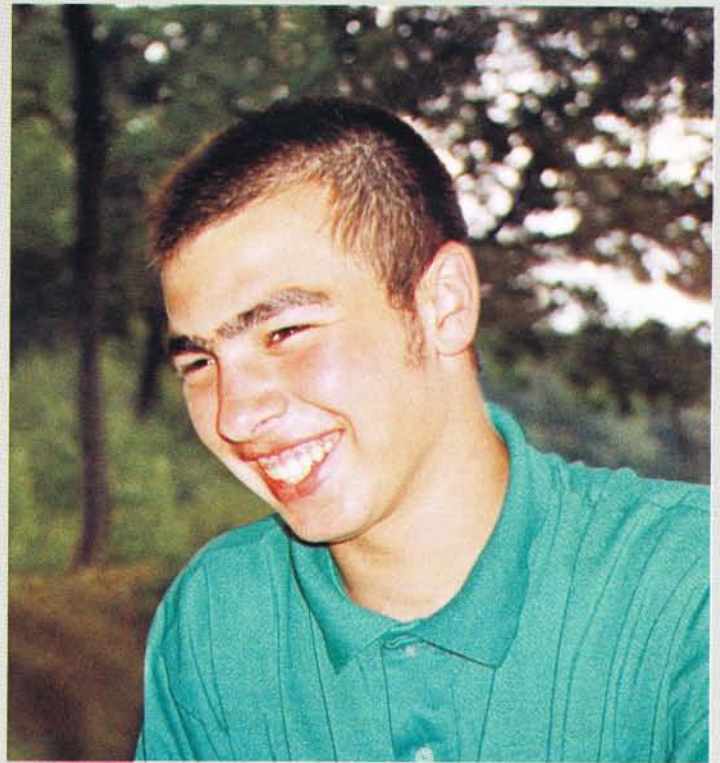


ASEL ASLEH, 1983-2000

Asel Asleh, a 17 year-old Seed of Peace, from the Arab village of Arabeh in the Galilee area of Israel, died of a gunshot wound to the neck on October 2, 2000. He was killed by Israeli security forces less than a mile from his home, at the scene of a demonstration by Arab citizens of Israel. Asel's father, Hassan Asleh, and other eyewitnesses, testify that Asel took no part in any confrontation with police, and was standing alone when three officers attacked and shot him at point blank range. In the dozens of Israeli and foreign press reports on the incident, police sources have no statement as to why or how Asel died, though they claim that the demonstration at the site endangered the police.

Asel became a member of Seeds of Peace in the summer of 1997, and remained an active Seed throughout the rest of his life. In the days after his death, scores of Israeli and Palestinian Seeds from around the country mourned for him at the Seeds of Peace Center for Coexistence in Jerusalem. Many dozens of Israeli and Palestinian Seeds have traveled since to console the Asleh family in Arabeh, and condolences have poured in to the Seeds of Peace website from around the world.

The Israeli government has convened a Governmental Commission of Inquiry into the events in which Asel and 12 other Arab citizens were killed. Asel's family is leading a campaign to protest the killings. In a statement to THE OLIVE BRANCH, Asel's parents Hassan and Wajiha Asleh said: "We welcome all of Asel's friends from Seeds of Peace who have come to mourn with us. Asel spent many of his happiest moments with you, and you are welcome in our home as you were when Asel brought you here. We are not angry at any people or nationality, but at the policy which caused the killing of our son and other innocent people."



Over 100 friends and family contributed to a Seeds of Peace book of memories of Asel, "Tribute to Our Friend." For information on how to receive the tribute, write to: center@seedsofpeace.org



Asel's Activities in Seeds of Peace

- Israeli delegation, summer camp 1997
- Peer Support, summer camp 1998
- Program Leader, third session 1999
- One of 75 Seeds negotiating at the Middle East Youth Summit in Switzerland, May 1998
- Winter Workshop at Kibbutz Yahel, January 1999
- Homestay in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, July 1999
- Emcee of the Jerusalem Center for Coexistence Summer Talent Show, August 2000
- Originator of Seeds of Peace online correspondence which became SeedsNet
- Host and guest of dozens of Israeli, Palestinian, Jordanian Seeds and families

So Close,

The View from Beit Jala

By Nageeb Makhoul

For me the fighting didn't affect me physically, but it affected me mentally. Since the fighting started, everyone in my family is afraid. Since the fighting started, my friends have lost hope in peace. That has hurt me more than a bullet; it killed the hope inside.

Every night, my brother is crying. We always hear the shooting, and he will go and hug someone and never let go. He cries. Whenever my mom screams, he cries more. I see so much fear in him that I cannot possibly explain. My grandparents were affected more than mentally. My grandpa's house got destroyed. Then, after a few days, my mom's family's house was hit also. My family is so angry, because they will not get any compensation. My grandpa is not rich, and cannot fix the house.

My friend's father – who I knew really well – was killed. The night he was killed, I asked my friend to call him, and tell him not to go to the street. But he was stubborn, and he went. He was a doctor, so he went to help his neighbors because their house was hit. But then a helicopter came, and hit him with heavy bullets. I went there after the shooting stopped, and they took the body. It was horrible. He was in many pieces. It is a thing that I hope you never see.

They lost their father forever, and they will never have him back. Who will support them? They were living in a bad situation, but now they are living in a worse situation. After he was killed, I spent a lot of time with the daughter. She asked me if I still believe in peace. I told her, we must hope in peace because I don't want other families to feel what you felt.

I think differently about the situation since I was in Seeds of Peace. Even though there is shooting on me, I understand that there are good people. When I got to meet Israelis and got to know them, I know that not all of them are shooting and are happy for the situation.

When I think about the people in Gilo, different images come into my mind. When there is shooting I think, "Oh my God, are they crazy? They are killing innocent people, small children, damaging houses." But when it's peaceful, I think we can stay together; we can keep living together. There is two choices: either complete war or complete peace. We can't continue like this where Palestinians shoot a bullet or two and Israelis respond with tanks and machine guns and helicopters.

I have a friend in Gilo. Amit and I were really good friends. I was planning on visiting her at her house, and I wanted her to visit me. One time we planned on meeting each other, and we did in Talpiot. We were really good friends.

Now, Israelis are afraid to call me. They think I am angry at them. Nobody calls me. I don't know what that means about our relationships. I don't care about what is happening, as long as they are good friends. I can't call Amit either. If her parents answer the phone, and they know that I am an Arab and I live in Beit Jala, maybe they will make problems for me, or for her. I am afraid to call her. But if I did talk to her, I would just ask her how she's doing and how she feels and how is her health. When I talk to any friend, it's like the same as talking to a friend from Beit Jala. I don't want to talk about the situation; I just want to talk. I'm tired from the situation. I'm really tired.



The View from Gilo

by Amit Caraco

Lately whenever people discover that I live in Gilo, they immediately show their sympathy and support. Who wouldn't? After all, in the past months, this formerly quiet area was transformed into a scary war zone.

The reality of the situation in my neighborhood has become a situation of war, and that is pretty scary. Even scarier is that people have accepted this state of constant conflict as normal. They are already used to seeing concrete bulletproof fences outside their homes. To me, it always will be strange.

A couple of days ago I picked up my little brother from school. When I arrived at the school, I saw all the windows blocked by sandbags. This is what the children see every day. We are always saying that children are the hope of tomorrow. Is this supposed to give them hope today?

I don't think anybody expected this to happen. We always think our home is the safest and most sheltered place, and this has been my home for ten years. I always enjoyed living here, and enjoyed the view of Beit Jala from my window. Even before joining Seeds of Peace, I was struck by how close the two neighborhoods were. At Seeds of Peace in 1999, I met Nageeb and Mera from Beit Jala, and we quickly became friends.

After camp, Nageeb and I kept in touch. Both because we have a lot in common, and because of the short distance between our homes, ours really was a special friendship. We both love music and partying, and we always have a lot of fun together. Nageeb even once said that he would come to my home, the first Palestinian who had ever said that. One of the things I love most about Nageeb is his ability to take tough subjects in a light way. We used to constantly joke that we were neighbors. Today, that is no joke. The first time there was heavy shooting, I immediately thought of Nageeb. I don't know why, but when I heard the shooting, I somehow felt that I was pretty much safe. A couple of minutes later, I called the Center to ask them to call Nageeb. I still do after every shooting.

I don't know why I can't call you Nageeb. I know am not guilty for what is happening, and I don't think you believe I am guilty. Still, I can't bring myself to call you. But I want you to know that I love you a lot and that I worry about you. I can only wish that things will get better very soon—for both of us.



Hadas, Shimon, Lior and Oded join Nageeb atop his roof in Beit Jala in 1999.

SO FAR...

Israelis and Palestinians are far apart politically, but often right next to each other physically. In disputed sections of Jerusalem, where one side's settlement is the other's neighborhood, the eruption of violence confronted Seeds with the contrast between the emotional comfort of friendships and the physical danger of hatred between close communities

by *Lama Mashni (Shu'afat)*

"If I am a Seed, then I am protected. If I am a Seed, then I am safe." All the time I thought this was true. But, in less than one minute, all my protection and safety shattered like a thin shell.

A sharp scream suddenly penetrated the northern windows of my house. We—my sister, brother, father, mother, and I—jumped from our beds towards each other's rooms. Each thought that the scream came from the other room. We all met in less than one square meter in the corridor, gazing in each other's eyes trying to find out what was the matter. Suddenly another scream broke out calling my father's name. We all, in one robot movement, headed to the window looking over my uncle's house.

We saw my uncle leaving his house, we asked him what was happening, and he told us that they were being attacked by a huge number of settlers. They were showering his house with rocks. His words were mixed with loud Hebrew words coming from the other side of his house. "Mavvet la-aravim"—"death to the Arabs."

Death had never before crossed my mind, but that night death was surrounding my house. My father's reaction was to call the police. The shouting reached the ears of young men in my neighborhood. Tens of them hurried to protect us, armed with rocks, iron rods and clubs. The police arrived, fully armed. They stood in between, their faces and guns towards the young Arabs, their backs towards the settlers.

The first thing that came to my mind at that point was that Asel, a late Seed, faced the soldiers and their guns too, and he was killed. He was wearing a Seeds t-shirt, but it didn't protect him. And I thought, was the same thing going to happen to me?

After the soldiers made the settlers leave, we couldn't sleep. I couldn't sleep. I wore my t-shirt that night. I liked to sleep in it. I felt protected and safe. I cried. Hot tears came down from my eyes burning my cheeks. I took off the t-shirt, for I realized at that moment that I'm neither protected nor safe.

by *Michal Szlak (Neve Ya'akov)*

When I came to Seeds, I was surprised that we overcame all of the differences in the Middle East. But then I came back to this sad situation, maybe in its worst time. Until my own house was under attack, I felt that the conflict had nothing to do with me personally. It seemed so far on the TV screen. But that ugly night has changed it all.

At about 11 p.m., when I was preparing to go to bed, we heard horrible screams of a huge Israeli group. They were throwing stones at Arab houses across my street. We called the police, and when they came, the group disappeared for a while. Then after half an hour, we saw an Arab group organizing itself.

We heard someone scream "Allahu Akbar" (Allah is Great) and from the window we saw a group of about 100 Arabs with hatchets, stones and knives. They started throwing stones at Israeli houses; then the Israeli group came back; and then they were throwing stones at each other while two police cars stood between them. My house was in the middle of all of that. That night, and the nights after, I was too afraid to sleep.

I went to the Seeds Center in Jerusalem where I met Lama, and heard that her house was also under attack the same night. We talked a lot about almost everything, and now I know I have learned two things from all of that: 1. still, even in these bad times, we should support each other; and 2. peace will come! But there is a lot of digging deep inside ourselves before it can happen. The past is behind us, and now there is a lot of anger everywhere. The only thing we can do now is understand each other's reasons, and try to stop the violence before it comes too close to us again.

On the night of October 9, rioters took to the streets throughout Jerusalem, attacking their "enemies" next door. An Israeli and a Palestinian Seed, who live five minutes from each other, recount the night that their homes simultaneously became targets



photo: Bobbie Gottschalk

Michal and Lama with BBC WORLD anchor Lyse Doucet

WHEN **BAD** THINGS

Dying for Peace

by Asad Hassouneh (Ramallah)

We had some tough weeks here in the Middle East. I saw stuff that I wish no one will ever see. Stuff that will make each and everyone of us want peace. Stuff that I don't want to ever see again in my life.

September 30. I will remember that date for a really long time. I wished I would just die or vanish into thin air. I was there with my friend Nizar. He was only sixteen, and he never liked violence. He encouraged me to go to Seeds of Peace and see the world in another way. We were standing, watching what was happening, when a small child was shot in his neck just a few meters away from us. Nizar ran to help him, and before reaching him, he was shot in the head. It was so terrible to see. He fell into my arms, smiling, and told me, "This is not real peace that you went to the USA for." He closed his eyes and died peacefully.

I couldn't stand it. I cried and cried. Maybe from hate. Maybe from feeling that I am useless. Maybe... A million thoughts came to my mind. I finally stood up, and put myself on a straight path. Peace isn't something that is easily taken. We can't just throw peace away. We can't just lose hope about peace. No. Peace must be something you believe and trust in. But I couldn't sleep. I kept thinking of his last words. I just couldn't eat, sleep, read, think properly, or even talk. I felt like something was missing.

Four days later, I was finally getting back to my usual, but incomplete, life. Every night, I could hear gunshots from the settlement Psagot until the early hours of the morning. One night, I was sure I heard gunshots in our house. I came into my bedroom and saw three bullet holes in the wall of my bedroom. For my luck, I wasn't there and no one was hurt. But, doesn't the idea of bullets in your bedroom just scare you, and to avoid them you would just do anything?

On October 7, we were able to go back to school. The 46 guys in my class always hang out together. That Saturday, there was something missing. We counted our number: 36. Ten guys weren't there. Four were dead, the others injured. Luckily, the injured guys are coming back. But will we ever forget those four wonderful kids who were full of life? We went to the chairs where they used to sit, and cried. Why? Why aren't they here with us?

Life isn't what it used to be. People are scared of peace. People are afraid we won't get our full rights. Some just don't want peace. But they didn't go to the Seeds of Peace Camp. They didn't see that Israelis are humans. They didn't spend weeks playing with them, sleeping in the same bunk with them, coexisting with them. They don't know that peace is something we must always believe in. If we, the Seeds, don't stand up for peace, then who will? We must be the new generation that will make the difference.

You might think, "How can he go through all of this and still have hope for peace?" My father always told me, "Never give up on what you believe in." I will not give up because of my friend's last words, "This is not real peace." I thought about what he meant, and now I understand. There is another peace, that will assure us our human rights in living in peace. These times are a test to see how strong a person can be. Although he was dying, he told me to keep hope. His words meant that I should stand up for what I believe and what I am doing.

We must trust and believe in peace and do our best for the new generations. We mustn't give up. It's alright to cry. It's alright to be sad. But in order for it not to be like this forever, we must smile even as tears



are coming through, and do our best to accomplish where others have failed. Peace can bring hope, happiness, and love into people's hearts. Peace is a thing that we—the Palestinians and Israelis and the whole world—must trust. Peace is more than just a word. Peace is something we spent three and a half weeks for. The best three and a half weeks. We played, ate, made fun, but at the end, we all knew what we were there for: to give a whole new generation hope for peace.

New Year, Old Story

by Karen Karniol-Tambour (Netanya)

01/01/01: It's somehow easy to ignore what has happened here in the past few months. There is a war going on. Bullets are fired every single day. People are dying every single day. And our lives go on. The news barely reports it anymore. I go to school every day and barely think about it. My parents go to work every day and barely think about it. We simply add it on to our list of everyday worries. A few kilometers from home, there is a different world. What goes on in that world is not reality for us. We all go on with our lives, and hope that someone will cast the magic spell and make it all stop.

But then it comes right to your doorstep. When it's in your city, your home, your life, you can't ignore it anymore. There was a bombing in Netanya, my city. I was horrified when I heard the news. The bombing was right in the center of town, between the central bus station and the beach. I knew my grandmother and two of my best friends were there.

The news reported the street of the bomb, and I knew my grandmother wasn't there. However, I knew my friends were there. I was scared out of my mind. I called my friends frantically, and couldn't reach them. Their cell phones were busy, because everyone wanted to check if they were safe. I imagined the worst. When I finally reached them, they told me they had left just minutes prior to the bombing.

Last night we marked the end of the year 2000. I went to celebrate in a restaurant. I spent the last few moments of 2000 there, calmly sipping coffee and talking. It is now less than 24 hours later. It's the first day of 2001. There is now almost nothing left of that restaurant.

I look at the TV, and my city is like a nightmare. I just saw it last night, full of life, full of people celebrating. Now all you can see is smoke, burnt cars, shattered windows, frightened people, police cars and ambulances. Why does it have to be like this? Why do we have to live in fear? Why should people have to worry about whether or not their friends get blown up? Why should people see their city in such a horrifying state?

The violence goes on in a never-ending cycle. The political negotiations seem hopeless. Violence results in fear and pain. Fear and pain result in anger and hate. I feel so helpless. There is nothing I can do to stop bombs or bullets. I can't stop the situation from deteriorating. Politicians are raising the possibility of a war. No one has any answers. The end is not in sight. Why do we live like this? Why can't we live as two countries, Israel and Palestine, side-by-side, cooperating? I'm scared life will keep on like this. I'm scared that the dream we created at Seeds of Peace will never come to life. I'm scared no one will find a solution, or even want to find a peaceful compromise, they'll prefer to fight until they get everything. I'm scared we are facing years of death, fear, bombs, tears, pain, and gunshots throughout this holy region that we all love so dearly.



HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE

A List of Friends Lost

by Yael Yehezkeili (Jerusalem)

When one life is lost, it takes a piece of all of us with him. In the case of David Biri, it took a big piece from all people he knew, as a son, as a brother and as a friend.

David Biri died in a bombing attack a few months ago at Tsomet Nezarim in the Gaza Strip. He was a brave man who always wanted to go first, too brave for his own good. When the first bomb went off, he was on one of the first teams to respond. He ran to see if anyone was injured, or in need of help. Before anyone could understand what happened, another bomb went off. David was right there. He was killed in that attack, in the midst of trying to help others.

The next day we got the sad news. David was a graduate of my scout tribe. After his death, we went to the scouts. There, all of us who knew him sat together in silence. No one was talking. You could hear only the pain in people's hearts. Everyone was in shock. Although I didn't know him well myself, it hurt to see those close to him in such shock and pain. He was so young. We could only think of the life he had ahead of him. Reminiscing... Thinking... Pictures of him running in our minds. Many of us hadn't lost anyone close to us, in our circle of friends. I couldn't help but think of my friends who will be in the army soon and my brother who is going next year. They are risking their life to protect us. Someday soon I will be in their shoes.

That week, I went to Shiva (traditional Jewish mourning) to visit David's little sister. I had been her counselor in the Scouts the year before. I knew in advance that I would not be able to express my feelings to her. What could I say to a ten year old girl suffering the loss of her big brother? I sat and wrote her a letter, trying to express my pain for what happened to her, and to let her know that I care.

A few weeks later, I was woken up with a call from a friend, telling me, "I have some bad news. Elad Hirshinson killed himself last night." That day I attended the second funeral in my life. Elad was David's best friend. I never before could think that one loss could bring a person to such sadness that his only release was to choose not to think or live anymore. Elad Hirshinson had already lost his brother in a bombing in Beit Lid in 1995. He had never gotten over that loss, and to him, David was the second brother to have lost his life this way. It goes to show that one person can be everything to another.

For me, having David, then Asel, my fellow Seed of Peace, and then Elad die made me realize that people are getting hurt on both sides. Each side only thinks they are the only victims, but actually both sides are. Everyone is hurting everyone. I hear a lot of Palestinians say that they are only throwing stones. But David wasn't killed by a stone.

I only hope that we will reach a time that we don't have to send children



to learn the art of fighting. That we will live in peace, and hopefully not know more young lives lost on a fight for a country as small and precious as this one. Today, we do our best to keep them alive in spirit, and we remember the good things we shared with them. They are still alive in our hearts and in our memories.

Shooting at My Dreams

by Wafaa Takroori (Hebron)

A person always wants back what he has lost or was taken away. And I have lost all my dreams. I used to dream of living in peace. And to have all of the nations live in this peace without war. Without killing. And to have people as friends, and not enemies. To love, and not to hate. I used to dream. No more.

Suddenly, all of my dreams were ruined. I come home early from school because the situation is so bad. In my home, I am scared because all around me I hear Israeli soldiers shooting everywhere. When this happens, I lay down on the floor to avoid the bullets that are shot, and try to stay alive. One time, while this was happening, I held my younger sister on the floor. I saw many bullets shoot through my room. Some glass broke, and so did some of the doors and lights. The bullets made holes in the wall. During all of this, thoughts of death raced through my mind, and I wondered if I would live to see the next day. It was horrible to see these Israeli bullets shoot through the air at the people who hoped they would one day live in peace.

Each bullet shot would kill one of my dreams. And at that moment, if



photo: Jared Fishman

Wafaa Takroori (author of this article, 2nd from left) and her family host Israeli friends (from left) Hagar, Anat and Amalia at her home in Hebron one year ago, during Ramadan 1999.

Each side only thinks they are the only victims, but actually both sides are. Everyone is hurting everyone

I was not careful, it would kill me too. During that one minute—which felt like one hundred years—my sister went unconscious and almost stopped breathing. I was so worried, even after she gained consciousness. What if I died, or one of my family? But we all believe in peace! Also, Asel believed in peace. But he died from the bullet of a nation he wanted to make peace with. Before that day, I believed there would be peace between us. During that minute I was afraid. Now, no more. No more fear, even if they drop a bomb on my head. Or shot a bullet through my heart. Before that minute, I had hope. But now, all my dreams have been shot down. Finally, I have one question: How can I make peace when the army might kill me at any moment without regret or remorse?

BEING A SEED OF IN A

Asking Smart Questions

by Rita Konaev and Maya Vaks (Afula)

Not like many people, we Seeds had the special opportunity to make friends with the enemy. Now that the situation is so hard, and no one really knows if it is going to get better, our friendships are under a test. There is no way to know if we are going to make it. Being in Seeds of Peace has put us in a position in which we have no answers to all of our questions, and our opinions about almost everything seem to contradict each other.

We are in a situation where we have to reevaluate all that used to be so clear to us. In many cases, we find that our opinions as Israeli Jews are in conflict with our opinions as Seeds. It is not rare that in the political discussions with our friends or in school that we find ourselves defending and justifying Palestinian causes. We try to do our best and show to everyone that there are too many people getting killed everyday. In school, when the discussions start, mostly we feel that we are alone and misunderstood, because every time we say something good about the "other side," we immediately become the traitor and the enemy of the state.

Each time that someone says something bad about the other side, we want to just jump back at them and say that their point of view is wrong. But when we think to ourselves, we realize they that they have the right to think that way, because they weren't at Seeds, and they didn't see what we saw. Sometimes it seems like we are all alone, and no one understands that as Seeds we have to stay faithful and loyal to two sides: our country that we love, and our friends that we made in camp.

But in spite of the loneliness, the confusion, and never having all the answers, being in Seeds these days is something special that gives us the opportunity to be unique and different. Maybe we don't have the answers to all of our questions, but at least we have smart questions, and it is better to have smart questions than to have stupid answers.

We Seeds are the hope of a peaceful future. The thought that we can coexist, and even be friends, keeps us believing that we will succeed in overcoming everything and continuing on our way to peace.

In the end, it doesn't matter that sometimes it is hard being a Seed,

because every time we feel hopeless and sad, we look back at the best summer ever, and think about the great friends we made and the memories that we have. It keeps us going. It is all worth it. It is one of the most precious things in our lives.

Hope and Reality

by Hisham Jarrar (Jenin)

I sit alone in my house after participating in the funeral of a kid who was killed by a bullet in front of me, as a response to his stone, which threatened the security of Israel. I had gone to the funeral, because I needed to see for myself what was happening to my people. After this scene, I sit lonely, remembering sounds of ambulances, screaming mothers, and children of victims, and I think of the fear that my little sister has every night when guns and cannons start shelling.

Wandering in the bleak city and looking at futile faces and tired bodies made me think of my reality, and made me think of who I am as a Seed of Peace, and what I should do as a peace and coexistence maker. I thought to myself, "Here my hopes of security and stability are being destroyed in front of my eyes after having built dreams of peace in the U.S.A." In spite of my questions during this horrible period, I still accept being a Seed of Peace. Even though Seeds of Peace is only a dream and a hope, I still offer peace as I live through this reality. I offer peace, even though we are starting again from the beginning.

Wandering in the bleak city, looking at futile faces and tired bodies...made me think of what I should do as a peace and coexistence maker



photo: Jared Fishman

Ramadan at Lana Khaskia's in Tira: From right, Mava, Lana, Ido, Bashar, Rita, and Elad.

I asked myself, "Am I alone in this peace? Where are the voices of my partners, saying they would do anything for peace? Do they not care to declare and expose the situation in order to achieve peace?"

"Maybe they cannot," I said. "They are waiting for the chance to express their feelings of sorrow, but they cannot. How could this be? Do they not live in a democracy, with fairness and human rights? So what is the aim of their silence? Is it possible that they do not know what is happening to their friends a few kilometers far away from them?" Of course they do not know what is happening. The tanks and rockets that guard them cause the blood and damage on our side.

Please, I am begging you my friend. This is an evocation from a human who was once with you together; who loved you, and you loved him. A person in whom you had planted the hope for a better life. Tell me, why, and return to me the hope...

PEACE TIME OF WAR



Peace with Justice

by *Badawi Qawasm* (Ramallah)

I have been an active member of Seeds of Peace, since its start in 1993. I was present on the White House lawn for the historic handshake of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli leader Yitzhak Rabin and the signing of the Oslo Accords that set the "peace process" into motion. I, like my fellow Palestinians, was so hopeful then. It is our strong desire for peace that made us endure the hardships that came along with the process. Were we blinded?

The last weeks I survived, and you witnessed, the violation of basic human rights: seeing my holy sites violated, carrying my friends, their blood staining my clothes after being shot with live ammunition, feeling unsafe even at home. Perhaps this time my neighborhood will be the target of Israeli settler attacks? These would make anyone angry. I've experienced and continue to experience them.

At the time of this publication, over 350 Palestinians have been killed, over 10,000 have been injured among which 400 or more have been paralyzed, 50 have lost the ability of sight, and scores have lost their hands, their legs, their homes. As I wrote, missiles were being dropped in Beit Jala on civilian homes.

These days I am so scared. I keep watching members of my family, my friends and everyone around me. I have nightmares of settlers attacking my father on the way to work, or my little sisters on their way to school. Some people have tried to show that Palestinians are without feelings—that Palestinian mothers don't care about their children. This is a racist comment. Palestinians are the most sentimental nation on earth—we care about our children, all children. We love peace more than anyone because we were never able to live peacefully on our land. I pray that things calm down; that Israel stops its violence against us; that they work for peace rather than just talk about it.

In Seeds of Peace we give our leaders lessons on how to achieve peace. We are able to build a base of mutual respect and an understanding of other people's rights. I am disappointed to see that the Israelis I know through Seeds of Peace are only a minority in their community. It's clear these days that the military mentality is dominant in Israel.

I am a strong believer in peace. However peace starts with justice and a basic acknowledgement of my human rights, my rights to live on my land. I will commit myself to true peace based on UN resolutions. But if Israel disregards the basic rights of my people, I will have no choice but to fight.

My grandfather wished my father to live in liberated Palestine. My father told me the same thing. Twenty-one years have passed and I have yet to live in liberty. I have never felt a real sense of security or genuine happiness. I wish my children to be born in an independent Palestinian State. I hope they will lead a better life, a peaceful life, like that of all children of the world.



Wishing for Normal Life

by *Roy Cohen* (Ashdod)

Every single person in the Middle East is likely to lose someone dear to him due to a violent act at least once in his lifetime. In a constant state of violence between the two peoples, each side claims this piece of land, and uses religious or historical claims as they see fit. This struggle between different histories and different religions, started in the beginning of this century when the Jews started moving back to Israel, their historical land, after being humiliated, terrorized and slaughtered in the Diaspora, brought to its most dreadful extreme by the Holocaust. Ever since the return of the Jews to their land, the two peoples have lived in constant struggle.

It's almost impossible to find someone who hasn't had someone taken away from him before his time—someone who died due to an act of violence. It happened to me at the age of 16, on October 2nd 2000, when I lost a dear friend of mine named Asel Asleh, a Palestinian citizen of Israel who was shot in the demonstrations in the Arab village of Arrabeh.

"Normal Life" has a different definition in the Israeli vocabulary. Here it includes being a soldier, carrying guns, living in military bases for at least two years of your life. It also means living in constant fear that you will lose someone dear and close to you in the craziness revolving around you. Add to that the fact that Israel is one Jewish country, surrounded by Arab countries, and you'll find a very frightened people.

"Normal Life" takes on a whole different meaning when you're in Seeds of Peace. I started hearing many of my own people calling for violent acts after being disappointed by the Palestinians. After seeing them in violent riots, freeing Hamas terrorists, and reluctant to fulfill the truce they committed to in the agreement that was signed in Sharm al-Sheikh, people who are very supportive of peace got such a blow that they're now asking for non-peaceful action.

What do I think? Well, from 1997 to 1999 I spent a month and a half in

Maine every year getting to know more and more people. I still care about these people, be they Palestinians or Egyptians, Jordanians or Israelis. Even in a time of war. I don't want anything to happen to them or the people they love. The other day I spoke to a friend of mine who lives in the West Bank. She's one of my best friends, and I love her dearly. I cried with her, over the phone about the loss of a cousin who died while protesting against Israeli soldiers. Being a Seed, I'm torn between my love for friends I have from the Palestinian people and my consciousness as an Israeli, between my acquaintance with extraordinary Palestinians who seek peace, such as Badawi, and the actions that the PLO is taking, which are weakening my certainty in the coming of peace to our region. But those people I know from Seeds of Peace, those friendships I made on Powhattan Rd. 183, Otisfield, Maine, still give me hope in peace. They can still give all of us hope in the likelihood of peace in the Middle East.



I still care about these people, be they Palestinians or Egyptians, Jordanians or Israelis. Even in a time of war. I don't want anything to happen to them or the people they love