

مقاتلون من أجل السلام  
לוחמים לשלום  
Combatants for Peace



Only by joining forces,  
will we be able to end  
the cycle of violence

NOBEL PEACE PRIZE NOMINEE, 2017 & 2018

### Combatants for Peace Seder Insert

**Reader:** In our Pesach Seder, we retell the story of leaving Egypt, (“Mitzrayim”) and ask questions. Mizrayim in Hebrew means a constricted and narrow place. For decades the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been our narrow place with fear of the other, prejudice, hatred and a never-ending cycle of violence keeping us trapped and preventing us from finding a peaceful solution.

When will there be peace and justice? When will the violence end? Can we listen to stories from the “enemy” to understand what divides us? What will unite us? How can we work together, Israelis and Palestinians, Jews and Arabs, for peace, equality and human rights?

On this Pesach eve, stories of hope can help us in our quest.

Since 2005 Combatants for Peace (CfP) has demonstrated how former fighters from both sides of the conflict, Israelis and Palestinians can break the cycle of mistrust, fear, prejudice, and violence, by listening and recognizing the mutual humanity in the “other.” Former Israeli soldiers and Palestinian fighters have put down their arms and, through non-violent action, have shown how we can work together to end the occupation, stop injustice and build peace.

Members of CfP have visited with peacemakers in Northern Ireland and South Africa. They share their stories together in private homes all over the world, conduct “Learning Peace” public lecture series, and run tours of the West Bank in order to help people understand the conditions of people living in the occupied territories. They present guerilla street-theater performances to promote the concept of non-violence. They rebuild schools and build playgrounds for children, provide emergency supplies to those whose homes have been demolished by the IDF and assist those whose communities are being threatened by settlements. Every year, on eve of Israeli Memorial Day, Combatants for Peace holds a joint alternative Israeli-Palestinian Memorial Ceremony, honoring the memory of victims of both Israelis and Palestinians killed in this conflict. The Ceremony reaches tens of thousands of people.

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**Reader:**

We are ready to bless our second cup of wine. Wine, in Kabbalah, is a symbol for “gevurah”, the strength to see what is right and to act to bring justice into the world.

**Additional Stories:**

**Participants take turns reading:** The story of Noga Harpaz.

In my childhood, my grandparents (whose parents immigrated to Israel in the Third and Fourth Aliyah, 1919-1931), told me stories about their Palmach service and the establishment of the State of Israel. I grew up hearing about how they planted the first orchards and raised the first generation of Hebrew-speaking children. The feeling I got from both my grandparents and parents was that our family was an integral part of our country.

As a child in the 1990's, the air we breathed was full of hope. At home and at school, there was the sense that peace was just around the corner. I did not always understand what the excitement was about, but I knew it was something profound. I remember one day, in the 4th grade, when Israel and Jordan signed a peace agreement, and my mother stood in front of the TV with a kitchen towel in her hands, weeping.

Then the cycle of violence resumed again: I came of age during the second intifada. It was a time when buses, restaurants and shopping malls were frequently bombed. This violence reached into my personal life when I was sixteen years old. I stayed late at school that day, and so I missed the 2:15pm bus I would usually take home... but two of my classmates left early, and were on that bus. A suicide bomber blew up our bus and killed both my friends, along with the 19 other people on the bus. I remember seeing their faces looking up at me from the newspaper the next morning, and for the first time I felt the deep void that would never quite go away.

I did the mandatory two years service in the intelligence unit of the IDF, so I'm not allowed to provide many details about my service. I didn't enter the army entirely without hesitation, I had a close friend who refused to serve, but at the time I believed her to be very radical. “Every country deserves to have an army” I told myself, “and especially Israel.”

Nonetheless, I left my parents' home with the optimistic and naïve belief that our leaders will be the ones to create lasting peace agreements with our neighbors and gradually change the reality of hatred into one of harmony.

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Throughout my twenties, the reality in Israel became increasingly grim. I did not approve of or agree with what the Israeli army or government was doing, but more and more, whenever I expressed my opinions I was told that I do not belong in Israel. I often felt marginalized in my own community.

I believe in peace, in taking responsibility and in hope – and I was told by the media, by my classmates, and even by my friends that there is no room in Israel for criticism of the government or the army, because “we have no choice but to control the Palestinians.” I refuse to believe the lies, or to feed into the fear that is used to control both the Palestinians and the Israelis.

Two events led me to be active in the struggle to end the occupation, and both of them took place in the past three years. The main event was Operation Protective Edge and the death and mass destruction it caused. The fact that the IDF Spokesperson and the Israeli media openly reported the bombardment of residential buildings, on the tenuous moral pretext that the residents were given a few minutes to evacuate, shocked me. Where were the civilians in Gaza supposed to go? The other buildings in their neighborhoods were also being bombarded. There was no safe place. Anxiety and shame gripped me that summer, I could not live with what my people were doing, and I spent much of the summer at demonstrations against the operation.

A year later was the first time I came to the joint Israeli-Palestinian Memorial Ceremony. It was an eye-opening experience for me. It was strange at first, to try and identify with the pain of the Palestinian families. I kept looking over to the Palestinians in the audience to see how they were reacting. At one point I saw an older woman with a hijab start to cry when an Israeli mother was speaking about her loss. I realized if this Palestinian woman could identify with our pain, then it was my duty to identify with hers as well.

The ceremony's hosts kept repeating the phrase; ‘War is not a decree of fate, but a man's act.’ All of a sudden, I had an epiphany. I realized how much the Israeli Remembrance Day ceremonies are politically charged events, in which commemoration of the fallen is interwoven with the claim that our hands remain stretched out in peace, but our enemies want to destroy us, so we have no choice.

Suddenly I realized there was a choice.

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**Participants take turns reading:** The story of Jamel Qassas.

My family is originally from the village of Al-Qubeiba, which was forcibly evicted in 1948. My story and the suffering of my family starts from that year. My family used to live in one of the most beautiful Palestinian villages, but as a consequence of the war, all of the inhabitants of the village ran away except for my grandfather. He refused to run. As a result, he was killed in his own home.

After that, my family moved to the Palestinian City of Hebron because it was the closest city to Al Qubeiba, all the time hoping that one day they would return to their village. But it did not happen, over the following years our suffering only worsened.

In 1967 my family was evicted for the second time. This time they ran to Jordan and tried to establish a new life there. In 1971, I was born and opened my eyes for the first time in a country that was not my own. Soon after, two of my uncles joined the Palestinian Liberation Forces (PLO) in Lebanon and my mother decided to go back to Palestine. We moved to a refugee camp near Bethlehem.

In 1982 the Israeli Army invaded Lebanon and one of my uncles was killed. My other uncle watched him die and was forever traumatized. We were in mourning for three days when we heard about the massacre of Shabra and Shatila, which are two Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. 3000 Palestinians were killed in 24 hours. Demonstrations and stone throwing against the Israeli soldiers and settlers escalated in our camp. Growing up, there were more than 10 violent demonstrations daily in front of our house.

Every time when stones were thrown at the soldiers, the soldiers entered our house and checked everything, including us: my mother, my siblings and me. They beat us on an almost daily basis and terrified us. They would call my mother all sorts of terrible names. I asked her: "Why are these soldiers here? Why do we not have an army to protect us? Why can't we go back to our home village?" I used to have many questions, but my mother gave me only one answer: "The Israeli army is occupying and controlling the Palestinian people."

The years passed, and in 1987 the first intifada started. I participated in the intifada by throwing stones and helping with street blockades. I wanted to take revenge on those soldiers who humiliated my mother and me. This was my way of expressing my anger.

I become one of the most active protestors in the refugee camp and soon became a leader in the demonstrations. More than once as a young teen I was shot by live bullets. Eventually I was caught by the army and put into administrative detention

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for six months. After my release, I was surprised to find that the refugee camp had changed. The army built a fence nine meters high around the street and ordered a curfew from 5pm until 5am.

Shortly after my release, my brother, who was 14 years old, just 2 years younger than me, went out of our house to visit our uncle. He lived barely 50 meters from our home, but it was evening, after curfew. On the way, several soldiers who were stationed in the alleyway surprised my brother. He became very afraid and ran. The soldiers ran after him and shot him. It was a "Dumdum" bullet, which explodes inside the body into small parts, destroying the body from within. My brother was transferred to a hospital in Jerusalem. I entered the emergency room to see my younger brother lying in a pool of his own blood. He was dead. I didn't know what to do. I felt that the sky was falling on my head. How could I tell my mother?

I brought my brother's body from the hospital back to our camp in Bethlehem. On that day, I lost not only my brother, but I also forever lost my mother's smile.

The years passed and the second Intifada started with the bombings in Israel. One day I came home to see my mother and brothers crowded around the television. There had been a bombing attack on a bus and many people died. Even children were killed. My mother was crying. I asked her: "Why are you crying, Mama? Those are Israelis who were killed, not us." She looked at me and said, "Those kids who were killed have mothers. And those mothers will have the same feelings and the same pain that we went through. The tears of a Palestinian mother are not different from the tears of an Israeli mother. Blood has only one color. There is no red blood and black blood."

When I heard her reaction I realized that my suffering is only a drop in the sea compared to her suffering.

I first met Combatants for Peace during the Israeli-Palestinian joint Memorial Ceremony. I was amazed to see and hear what they were doing. I soon joined the movement and became an activist. Today I continue to fight for the freedom of my people, but I do so peacefully. In Combatants for Peace we work together, Palestinians and Israelis, for justice, peace and equality.

**Reader:** We dedicate our second cup of wine to these courageous visionaries who are resolved to end the Israeli occupation and all forms of violence in order to build a peaceful future for both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. We pray that we may

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have the strength and courage to listen to the stories of others and to work toward peace and justice. "Kayn y'he ratzon." May it be so.

(Another option: We ask the Source of Life (or God or whatever you use) to help us have the strength and courage to listen to the stories of others and to work toward peace and justice. "Kayn y'he ratzon, May it be so.})