

1. *Excerpt from a letter of Galit Fink (Israeli girl) to Mervet Akram Sha'ban (Palestinian). 20 September 1989. In If You Could Be My Friend. New York: Orchard Books, 1992. pp. 60-63.*

Mervet,

You have probably wondered why it has taken me so long to answer you. I will tell you the truth. It's because I was angry. Against all the Arabs and therefore against you too. When I heard about the 405 bus [suicide attack], I didn't want to write anymore. I thought that the terrorist who turned the steering wheel and who killed sixteen people in the ravine could be someone in your family. Can you explain what these people did that was so terrible that they deserved to die so horribly? I prefer to tell you my anger against those who have done this. It is the first time that I have had a chance to express it.

Today coming back from Haifa with my parents, we drove on this road again. Each time that I go that way I am overwhelmed with anger and I want to cry. Now when I take the bus I am afraid of a terrorist attack. Before I get on, I look carefully to be sure there are no Arabs inside. If there are, I wait for the next bus. I hope you will understand my anger, especially since I don't hold you responsible anymore. I have thought about it. After all, I don't have to be afraid of you. You wouldn't hurt me. You are just like me.....

You know, when I hear that someone has died, whether they are Arab or Jew, I am angry and I say to myself: "Why doesn't the world care."

Will they ever decide to make peace? Every week I cling to that hope.

I agree that Arabs should live in their own country. If I were prime minister, I would give a piece of the land to the Arabs....Arabs and Jews living separately without bumping against each other. Maybe that way there would be peace. What do you think?

2. *Excerpt from an account by Talia, a 16-year-old Israeli girl, in Deborah Ellis, Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak. Toronto: Groundwood Books, 2004. pp. 31-33.*

The neighborhood I live in is full of memorials to people who have been killed by the Palestinians. There are little parks and benches dedicated to this person or that person who was killed. It's very weird when I think about it. You know these things happen, but you never think they'll happen close to you.

It's complicated, about the Palestinians. No one seems to have the right answer. It's hard for both sides to come together. It will be even harder soon, because of the wall that's being built around the West Bank. The wall is going to keep the Palestinians out of Israel so they can't bomb us.

It's normal for me to see a lot of soldiers in the streets. My sister's husband comes from the United States, and he said it was hard for him to see so many people walking around with guns. That's a funny thing for him to say, since we learned in school that many more people are killed by guns in the United States than here, and there's a war going on here. He says we should never become used to seeing guns, but I'm used to it already. It would seem strange for me not to see them.

Besides, the soldiers do an important job. Recently a guard stopped a restaurant from being bombed.

As soon as I finish school, I will go into the army. It's very important to do this, even for girls. It's part of my duty of being an Israeli....

It's not possible for someone like me, or my friends, to go into Palestinian-controlled areas. It's too dangerous. If I won't go to my own downtown, I certainly won't go into the West Bank!

I don't know any Palestinian or Arab kids. I don't know if Palestinian kids are like me or not. I don't know anything about them, even how they are living, although I know their living conditions are not good.

I know that I am an Israeli citizen, with equal rights to other Israeli citizens. The Palestinians aren't. They have their own government, but Israel is over everything. The Palestinians aren't allowed to do the things I'm allowed to do, like move around the country.

We have gates around our school that are locked so no one can get in who isn't supposed to be there. There can't be any cars parked around the school. Often when I walk past parked cars along the street, I wonder if one will blow up beside me.

I know a lot of people who have been killed in the war.

A girl from my dance school was killed when a bomb blew up on the bus she was riding on. We took a folk dancing class together. I saw her a lot. After the bombing, we did a dance recital in a theater in Jerusalem and dedicated it to her....

You never know when a bomb will explode. You could be in a bad mood or a good mood, in trouble or doing what you're supposed to do. It doesn't help to lead a good life. Well, it's important to lead a good life, but being good doesn't protect you from the bombs....

We used to go to Sinai for holidays. That was our relaxation. We'd go with our family and friends, but we don't go anymore. It's not safe. There's nowhere to go now that's safe.

Everyone carries a cell phone here. I call Mom a lot, just to say I'm okay, I'm here. If she doesn't hear from me in awhile, she worries that something bad has happened to me. When a big terror attack happens, the phone system breaks down because everyone is trying to call everyone, to make sure they're okay.

3. Excerpt from an account by Asif, a 15-year-old Israeli boy, in Deborah Ellis, Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak. Toronto: Groundwood Books, 2004. pp. 96—98.

To be Jewish in Israel means growing up faster than kids in some other countries. We have to face reality sooner, and be prepared to deal with it.

I lived in Palo Alto, California, for two years, and I noticed a big difference in the kids I knew there, and the kids I know here. There, they can live in ignorance about the world. We can't. It's not a choice we make. It's our reality. The war has made me more involved in the world.

I used to take an art class with Palestinian children. I was eleven years old. It was no big deal. They were just kids doing art, same as me....

The bombings don't make me afraid. I keep doing what I did before. Some people stay at home and hide, but that just makes them more afraid. Hiding doesn't make them safer. I'm not stupid. I keep my eyes open, but I'm not going to stop my life.

Besides, there are police and soldiers everywhere. They stop me on the street sometimes and check through my bags. It's not just me they stop. They stop a lot of people. Most buildings have guards, too. Even to get a cup of coffee, we have to be searched and go through a metal detector. We cannot forget, even for a day, where we live and what happens here.

When I'm eighteen, I'll go into the army. It's the law, for three years. Some people who don't like what Israel is doing refuse to go into the army. I won't refuse, even though I don't agree with everything they do....

If I'm given an order I don't like, an order to do something I think is wrong, I will refuse to do it. It's important to protect people, protect the Palestinians, I mean. I want to be a moral voice in the army, to keep other soldiers from abusing the Palestinians. That is what my role will be.

If I were to refuse to go into the army, a military discipline board would meet to discuss my case. Almost certainly, they would put me in jail. I'd only get out of joining the army if they think I'm psychotic, but if they decide I'm psychotic, I'll never get a job. And if I do time in jail for refusing to go into the army, no one will hire me, either. But none of this matters, because I won't refuse to join....

It's easier for girls who don't want to serve in the military. They can do community work for their National Service.

Some people use God as an easy way to explain things. They say, "This is what God wants us to do," like "God wants us to fight this war," "God wants us to kill these people," and "God is on our side." It's an easy way to say, "I'm not responsible for what I do." If you decide to do something, you have to live with the consequences, not God.

I hate the Israeli settlers even more than I hate the terrorists. The settlers think they are worth more as human beings than the Palestinians. They think they can push people off their land and take it over, just because they want to. They are awful people, and they make everything worse.

I don't think we'll ever get out of this situation unless we give the Palestinians their own state. It's the only way to make peace. Everyone will have to give up a little of what they want in order to get some of what they want. We're both here. Neither of us is going to go away.

I understand the suicide bombers. They do what they do because of the Israeli occupation of their land. It isn't hard to understand. We Jews did violence against the British when they controlled Israel. We killed people and blew things up in our fight for freedom. Our soldiers kill and terrorize the Palestinians, and things keep getting worse, not better. It's hard to say, "Let's make peace," to your enemy. It's easier for them to kill themselves and take some Israelis with them.

4. *Excerpt from an account by Yibaneh, an 18-year-old Israeli settler girl, in Deborah Ellis, Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak. Toronto: Groundwood Books, 2004. pp. 86—89.*

I was born in Israel. I live in a settlement north of Jerusalem called Shilo. Jews have lived there for over three thousand years. It's talked about in the Bible, in the Book of Judges and in other places. It is the place where the prophet Samuel heard the word of God. The ancient ruins of the old city are still there.

The modern settlement is much newer, of course. It has a large swimming pool, a library, shops, all the normal things. A lot of writers live there, and artists, along with carpenters and many other professions. We are a small community, so we depend on each other a lot....

There's lots of shooting now on the roads. When we drive through Palestinian villages, we know that someone could shoot at us any time. I'm used to it. I don't feel much of anything about it. When we pass a place where there has been a shooting, we'll look around, just to look, but I don't feel anything.

Several years ago there was an attempt to get a sports league going between us and the Palestinians in the next village, but then the Intifada started, and it never happened. The Palestinians told us, "We couldn't do this now even if we wanted to. We'd be called traitors and killed by our own people."

Back then, I would have liked to play sports with the Palestinian kids. I like playing sports with anybody, so it would have been fun. I have no interest in that now. There is nothing for me to gain by trying to get to know somebody who hates me. It will only make me look weak....

I'll be going into the army soon. It's very important. The army protects our families, our friends, and our country. The training will be difficult, and the things I'll have to do when I'm on duty will also be hard, but I don't think I'll mind that. At least I'll have a purpose every day....

There is no fence around my settlement. I don't think it would make a difference. We should go to war, no more peace talks. When a terrorist comes out of a village, we should go and hurt the whole village. The army tears down the houses of the suicide bombers, but that's not enough. It hasn't stopped them from killing us.

Two of my friends were killed by Palestinians. One was shot. One was killed by a bomb. Neither were in the army. They were just kids, seventeen years old. They weren't hurting anybody. They should not have died. I grew up with them. We were together all through school. Our settlement is small, only two hundred families. Everybody knows everybody. We used to do all kinds of things together. We went hiking, played sports, watched movies. They were killed just a couple of weeks ago, very close to each other. I feel sad all the time.

Their deaths made me think more about the meaning of life in general, and the meaning of life in Israel in particular. Why am I in Israel? Is this the place for me? Is there another place? No, there isn't. This is the place where I am supposed to be. But it's not easy to see why.

God has become unclear. He's heading somewhere, but it's hard to see how this will all come to a good end.