Conflict and peace Lesson: Aziz Abu Sarah helps people break down cultural and historical barriers through tourism.

**1. Introduction** What do you remember about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict? It started so many decades ago that we don’t even remember how it began. Watch this short presentation to refresh your memory.

**2. Listening comprehension exercise: Can you imagine what it must be like to grow up surrounded by this conflict? Listen to Aziz’s story and choose the right ending for the following sentences:**

**1. As a child Aziz threw stones…**

1. at some Israeli cars.
2. at the cars at the end of his street
3. at his neighbours’ cars.

**2. Aziz’s brother died…**

1. from a beating.
2. when he confessed his crime.
3. in prison.

**3. At 18 Aziz decided that…**

1. he needed a job.
2. he wanted to be a Hebrew teacher.
3. he wanted to help unite people.

**4. The guides for Mejdi tours in Jerusalem…**

1. are Jewish friends of Aziz’s.
2. have different points of view.
3. tell stories about archeology.

**5. The experience at the Palestinian refugee camp…**

1. included the best meal in the tour.
2. made everybody sad.
3. brought about long-lasting friendships.

**6. The British Muslim group…**

1. loved their first Jewish food.
2. used to know some Jewish families.
3. had African roots.

**Now think about this:**

MEJDI TOURS is expanding its service to Iran, Turkey, Ireland and other regions suffering from cultural conflict. If more of the world’s 1 billion tourists engaged with real people living real lives, argues Sarah, it would be a powerful force for shattering stereotypes and promoting understanding, friendship and peace.

* Do you agree?
* Would you like to travel to these areas?
* Do you think that travelling is the best way to end conflict?

**3: Article: Let’s go a little deeper into Aziz’s story** Read the text and answer the following questions with a partner or in small groups:

* Aziz’s brother died as a consequence of being beaten by Israeli police, his family had to leave their home, he had to risk his life to go to his school and eventually was obliged to stop going there. Do you think these experiences justify his attitude and political activism until he was 18?
* He hated the fact of having to learn Hebrew; why did he do it in the end? What happened in his Hebrew class?
* How did his transformation begin? How did it continue? How difficult was the process?
* What does travel mean for him?
* What does he mean by “Terror is claiming many lives, but we must not let it claim our souls as well”? Is he a good example of this idea?

How I learned to forgive my brother’s murderers

Feb 24, 2016  *Hanna Barczyk*

**Aziz Abu Sarah explains how he recovered from the murder of his brother and learned how peace and love can be potent tools of activism.**

“You are responsible for the **terror attacks**” said a man after a lecture I gave about religion and **violence** at an interfaith event in New Jersey two years ago. “Your people are trying to kill us.”

He was frustrated and furious. I get these **accusations** often, particularly after attacks like the one in San Bernardino, California, last December. But I know his feelings very well. Pain doesn’t differentiate between ethnicity, color or religion. I am a Palestinian who grew up in Jerusalem, but I now live in America — so any attack here is an attack on my home, too. Over decades, many friends and colleagues in the Middle East and Afghanistan have been **killed or displaced by terrorist attacks and ideology**. So I, too, have felt **fury** — and my own **anger and hatred** fueled eight years of **destructive activism.**

My brother Tayseer was killed when I was 10 years old. He was only 19, and his Israeli **interrogators** had **beaten him** in prison so that he would admit he’d thrown rocks at cars. He **died from internal injuries** soon after. His death enraged me, left me buried in **feelings of loss, emptiness and unanswered questions**, and I spent the remainder of my childhood feeling that **I had no choice** but to **avenge his murder** and **fight back**. For the rest of my youth, the idea of **revenge** consumed and drove me.

Meanwhile, to grow up in Jerusalem as a Palestinian meant living in **constant insecurity**. We had to move from our house because Israel legally declared we were outside the borders of the municipality of Jerusalem. I was told I couldn’t go to my school anymore because it was in the wrong catchment area. For months I had to sneak my way there, running around **checkpoints**, **getting shot at, being beaten** if I got caught. I carried an onion to **counteract the tear gas**. Every day was a fight.

By the time I was 13, I was **very active politically**. I read a lot, I **participated in protests** that sometimes **turned violent**, I threw stones. By the time I was 16, I was already **a leader of the youth movement** for Fatah, one of the biggest Palestinian secular **political groups**. I became an editor of Fatah’s youth magazine in Jerusalem, and I **mobilized huge protests**. Three of my fellow students were killed in these protests. It was **a destructive time**, and the future looked to hold more of the same.

Then, miraculously, I had **a change of heart**. It began with **my first encounter with** Israelis and Jews in a Hebrew class when I was 18 years old. Hebrew was mandatory at my high school, but I had flatly refused to learn it. It was the language of the enemy — no way. But now I needed to learn it or else forfeit the chance of a higher education. So I enrolled in a class designed for Jewish immigrants to Israel — and for the first time in my life found myself face-to-face with Jews who weren’t soldiers or settlers. Talking with them, discovering their mundane normality, our mutual love of coffee, country music, food, slowly, very slowly, **brought down my walls.**

Funny as it might sound, it was painful to make these new friends. **Coming to terms with** my own demonization of Jews was harrowing. I was stunned at how it had allowed me to disregard people’s common humanity. We weren’t so different after all. I knew now I couldn’t let those who murdered Tayseer drown me in **blind hatred and anger**. I could choose whether to **respond with hatred and violence**, or **with grace and love.**

Tentatively, I began choosing to respond with love. I found that it changed things. It might not change others’ minds, but it did change me: **it taught me forgiveness**. I remember waking up every morning and saying to myself, “I forgive, not because the person who killed my brother deserves it, but because I want to forgive.” It was **so redeeming, so transformational**. Suddenly, the next time **a bomb went off** in West Jerusalem, I didn’t think, “Oh they’re my enemy, who cares?” I thought, “Wait, my friends live there.” I started calling **to make sure they were safe**.

My journey to forgiveness began by being willing **to take a first step out of my comfort zone**. I forced myself to stay with this discomfort. I learned about Judaism as a college student by working in an ultra-Orthodox neighborhood, then I attended an evangelical Bible college to learn more about Christianity. Later in life, I’d spend day after day filming with the Israeli army for a National Geographic web series on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These sometimes **painful experiences** forced me **to challenge my assumptions about the “enemy.**” They didn’t always **change** **my opinions and convictions**, but they gave me **a much better understanding of** — and **compassion for** — others.

Since then, I’ve made it my life’s work to **bring down walls between people by promoting education**, advocacy — and interfaith, intercultural tourism, because travel is a vital educational tool, **countering xenophobia and cultural superiority**. I search for ways to expand horizons and connect people with each other — not just Arabs and Jews in Israel, Palestine, Jordan and Turkey, but Catholics and Protestants in Ireland, Bosnians and Serbs, and so on. I believe this is essential for building a peaceful future.

**Terror is claiming many lives**, but we must not let it claim our souls as well. We cannot afford to let continuous news of **escalating violence** turn us back in fear to old narratives of blame, thinking they will keep us safe. Let’s use this opportunity to **tolerate the discomfort,** however small, to try and understand where other people may be coming from. It’s not as expedient as a military strike. But in the long term, it’s the only **moral way to break the cycle of violence**.

I can’t forget my brother. I don’t think what happened to him is OK. But forgiveness is not about **condoning violence or renouncing justice**. It’s **setting yourself free from anger** so that it doesn’t consume you. That energy can then be used to bring people together. Now, whenever I read the paper and see more people being killed, the energy of my rage is transmuted into the question: “What can I do to stop this?” That kind of anger, I think, is okay.

**2. Language development : Complete the following expressions (1-12) that appear in the text with the words in the box.**

1. **Terror \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**
2. **Killed or displaced by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**
3. **Died from \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**
4. **Living in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**
5. **Running around \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**
6. **Counteract \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**
7. **Participated in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**
8. **Had a change of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**
9. **Coming to terms with \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**
10. **A bomb \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**
11. **A first step out of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**
12. **Break the cycle of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

|  |
| --- |
| attacks  checkpoints,  constant insecurity.  heart  internal injuries  my comfort zone  my own demonization of Jews  terrorist attacks and ideology  the tear gas  protests  violence  went off |