

By Avi Zer-Aviv

Near "Stage" Nightclub, Tel Aviv

Last night at about 11pm I was watching TV, relaxing from my studies, when the news started coming in. My grandfather already heard a blast from his bedroom window, and knew something was up. Just so you know, we live about a 20 minute bus ride, or 1 hour walk, from the blast site. A familiar routine for Israelis, I was amazed at how desensitized my grandparents were, and how they quickly went to sleep. I, on the other hand, watched the images later into the night. The constant sound of ambulance sirens continued from our window.

We woke up to a beautiful, sunny, warm day in Tel Aviv this morning. I walked down to the beach, and was amazed at the life and crowds of people packing the boardwalk. I lounged by the water, and felt removed from the intensity of what just happened only hours ago.

As I walked to the blast site, I knew I was getting near as people's faces changed from joyful to sad. The wreckage was everywhere. Shattered glass, apartment windows and balconies broken (as high as 3 or 4 floors up), and significant structural damage to the buildings and restaurants around. More than 12 hours later, and the site was still being cleaned up from the wreckage.

The one thought that spins in my head is, "How do you explain this to a child?" No matter the sophistication or simplicity of the answer, what does that child internalize from this experience? This act is one of terror, and it is meant to scare enough people so that more children go to sleep scared and traumatized. It is meant to continue an old narrative that is outdated, and serves nobody.

I feel great sadness, yet cannot help realize that all is "normal" around me. A few metres from the site, the boardwalk is host to thousands of strollers and sun worshippers, a street performer plays with a boa constrictor and exotic parrot, and local cafes are streaming with locals. Suddenly, a sense of déjà vu occurs. This is exactly the sort of thing I witnessed in The West Bank only a few years ago, where Palestinian life would return to "normal" after a heavy

Israeli incursion, bombing, or collective punishment. Strange to my Canadian mind, but a test of courage and strength to the people here.

This is the first suicide bombing in Israel in about four months, surely meant to drive fear into the hearts of people, and keep Israelis and Palestinians stuck in a cycle of violence. Now comes the test. Does Israel retaliate, and play to the extremists by collectively punishing all Palestinians in the Territories for the acts of a few cowards, or does Israel cooperate with the Palestinian Authority to find the planners of this attack and arrest them? This question will determine the fate of further attacks in the region, and be a critical factor in future negotiations.