

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Danny Tirza is one of the most charming men you'll ever meet. It's almost inconceivable to imagine that he spent most of his life as a military commander.

**Danny Tirza:** Yes, my name is Danny Tirza and I'm retired colonel from the Israeli army.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** I went to talk to him in his home, in the West Bank settlement of Kfar Adumim.

**Danny Tirza:** Kfar Adumim is a very nice community on Judea Desert. It's in the way between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea. This was a real desert before we came here, and you can see how beautiful the place is because the people came here and they started the community from the beginning like the pioneers.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** He is, as they say, a man of the land.

**Danny Tirza:** I know the area very very well. The Judea and Samaria... I know every part of it, every village of it, I talked with the people there. Most of the people, the Palestinians, know me personally, because I did things with negotiating. And negotiating is my second name.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** So yeah, Danny's a seasoned negotiator.

**Danny Tirza:** I took part in all the negotiations with the Palestinians from 1994 till 2007 as the expert of territorial issues and mapping.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** He was a professional advisor during the Oslo Accords, a part of the Israeli delegation to the failed Camp David talks, and in 2002 he was given an unusual, and logistically almost impossible, task.

**Danny Tirza:** To design and build the security fence.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Now, note that Danny calls it the Security Fence. Not the Separation Fence, not the Separation Barrier, and most definitely not the Separation Wall.

**Danny Tirza:** That's right. We don't call it a barrier, we call it the Security Fence because it's built for

security. And this is not a border, it's not separation. It's something that is temporary, for security.

**Uzi Dayan:** He is right, you see.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** That's General Uzi Dayan.

**Uzi Dayan:** Well, I'm Uzi Dayan. I am very Israeli. You'll never tell it by my accent, but I was born here. My parents were born here. I serve for long... thirty-six years including being the Commander of the Central Command, and Deputy Chief of Staff and finally the National Security Advisor of two Prime Ministers, Barak and Sharon.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Like Danny, Uzi - who's now a Member of Knesset for the Likud - thinks that terminology matters.

**Uzi Dayan:** We call it the Security Fence. Don't start with, you know, newspeak about it. It's purely security.

**Danny Tirza:** People in the world call it 'The Wall' because they are pointing to 'The Wall' in Berlin. There are lot of differences between the walls in Berlin and the fence in Israel.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Nevertheless, for the last seventeen years, when people say 'The Wall' and 'Israel' in the same sentence, they're usually referring to something very specific. A four-hundred-and-forty-mile-long barrier, some ninety-five percent of which is a sophisticated multi-layered fence, and some of which - especially in urban areas - is an imposing concrete wall.

It was born out of violence and carnage.

**Danny Tirza:** I was afraid to send my daughter to a school in Jerusalem, after seventeen public buses were blown up by terrorists. Who will be the crazy man to visit the famous Mahane Yehuda Market of Jerusalem after fifteen terror attacks there? Jaffa Street of Jerusalem, about one mile long, and we had a twenty-one terror attacks. The big discoteque in Tel Aviv - one suicide bomber, twenty youngsters who were murdered, and one-hundreds-and-fifty were wounded. All over the country, just name a place, and there was a terror attack there.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Israel tried to fight the terror in every possible way - roadblocks, arrests, trials, covert operations.

**Danny Tirza:** The government sent a lot of soldiers and a lot of policemen to the streets to protect the public from the Palestinian terror. But that made the opposite. Because if you're sitting inside your house, you're watching out your window, and you see soldiers patrolling near your house. You are going out to the street there are soldiers there, you're going to the bus station soldiers there, you are going on the bus soldiers there, you're going to the mall there are soldiers there. Wherever you go, soldiers, policemen, policemen, soldiers. So people became very nervous.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** March 2002 was particularly bloody.

**Danny Tirza:** In one month we lost one-hundred-and-twenty-eight people that were murdered by terror attacks. And people said to the government, "enough is enough. We cannot live with such level of terror. Do something. Build something." People were demonstrating all over the country.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** That's when Prime Minister Arik Sharon approved a plan to create a separation.

And Colonel Danny Tirza was the man for the job.

**Danny Tirza:** So I was the bad guy that walked on the ground. That had to take the hard decisions.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** He was in charge of determining the route of the barrier, and had to balance not only security concerns, but also humanitarian ones, environmental considerations, national parks, wildlife, water, archeology, international law.

**Danny Tirza:** I said to my people, "there is no problem. There are challenges. The practice was to find solutions, not to find problems.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Things had to happen fast, because terror attacks continued to rage. A three billion Shekel program quickly grew and grew.

**Danny Tirza:** In the end it cost us eleven.

**Mishy Harman:** And is the fence completed today?

**Danny Tirza:** No, the fence is not completed yet, because there are some places that we constructed only temporary fences, especially around the Israeli settlements blocks.

**Mishy Harman:** Do you believe that Israel and Israelis are safer as a result of the construction of the security fence?

**Danny Tirza:** Of course. The fence stop the terror.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** It isn't just Danny who makes that claim. Here's Uzi Dayan once again.

**Uzi Dayan:** Once you have a Security Fence it really decrease very very much the number of people who are killed. It's very very effective. And it proved itself. We actually cut down the losses from more than thousand people were murdered in a year and right now it goes down to five, ten, dozen people. It's a dramatic change.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** But of course there is another side to the efficacy. Many people's lives were greatly impacted by the building of this barrier. And, as he selected its exact route, Danny was acutely aware of that.

**Danny Tirza:** So one of our first decisions was not to destroy or to evacuate even one Palestinian house by building the fence. And we have to find a way how to do it. So in some places we just constructed new roads, in other places we put gates in the fence, only for one family. Even one house wasn't evacuated or destroyed. I tried everywhere to do it in a way that it will minimize the damage. You have to do your duty, but find the way to do it.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Hey, I'm Mishy Harman, and this is Israel Story. Israel Story is brought to you by PRX, and is produced together with Tablet Magazine.

So this is the second episode of our Wall miniseries, in which we're telling the tales of some of the country's most important walls. Last episode we were at the Kotel, together with Yehudit Schwartz, a Palestinian woman with an unusual past, who gave birth in the middle of the Six Day War. And today we're looking at *the* wall. Perhaps the most divisive symbol of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But as usual, we'll try to go beyond the politics, to the people. Danny's wall is one with which we're familiar. Seen from our side it represents security, stability, safety. It allows us to sleep at night. Because people really were getting killed here. Often. Daily. It was scary.

But when Danny, and all of us, go to bed, there are other people - really close by - going to bed too. And from their perspective, looking out of their window, the same wall represents something different altogether. Not safety or security, but rather lack of freedom. These are our neighbors. Regular people. And without getting into political arguments about the wall yes or no, it's important to hear their stories too.

So, our episode today, **The Wall - Part II, 'The Other Side.'**

For everything this fence slash barrier slash wall represents to people on both sides, it's easy to forget that it's an actual physical structure. And as our producer Joel Shupack discovered, some people have found surprising ways of using it. **Act One - The Writing on the Wall.** Here's Joel.

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**Joel Shupack (narration):** Daniel Anastas stands outside his home in the Palestinian city of Bethlehem. In his right hand, an old clawhammer. In front of him, the wall.

**Daniel Anastas:** I'm about to chop some pieces off the wall.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** He's in his twenties, thin with large friendly eyes and a patchy red beard.

Bits of concrete crumble off the wall. Daniel collects them in his palm. But he's not some local vandal or a terrorist slowly carving out a tunnel. Daniel has a different plan for the wall.

**Daniel Anastas:** To make art out of it.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** Later he'll arrange and glue the chipped off bits on pieces of wood, spelling out messages like "peace" or "hope." But most people in Bethlehem? They just plain old hate this wall.

**Taxi Driver:** I hope the wall is destroyed.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** I heard something like this from pretty much everyone I talked to there. But that hasn't stopped some of them, the Daniels of the world, from actually *using* the wall itself. And there are a lot of things you can do with a wall. You can point a projector at it and suddenly it's a movie screen. Or you can attach a basketball hoop and you've got a makeshift court. I saw both of these creative uses in Bethlehem. But the main thing I saw?

**Joel Shupack:** I'm wondering if you could just tell me some of the things that you're seeing on the wall?

**German Tourist:** OK, at the moment in front of me, there are some cows.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** Paintings. Graffiti. Murals.

**Scottish Tourist:** There's some children building a sandcastle with a watchtower on top.

**German Tourist:** A boxer.

**German Tourist:** A very young girl with green eyes.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** The wall is covered in art. Portraits of Palestinian heroes, slogans of solidarity and painted fantasies of overcoming this barrier. Like a tall ladder that reaches the top. Or huge painted cracks with blue skies peeking through. All of it overlapping, interacting and shifting on a daily basis.

Artists from all over the world have turned the wall into an oddly democratic art gallery. A vast concrete canvas free-for-all. Here you can find something as mundane as...

**Australian Tourist:** Happy fiftieth birthday, Andy.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** Right next to some of the most famous street art in the world.

**German Tourist:** That's a real Banksy!

**Joel Shupack:** Yeah yeah.

**German Tourist:** OK.

**Joel Shupack:** That's a more recent one.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** Most of the messages are political, like a massive portrait of Donald Trump locking lips with Bibi Netanyahu. Or...

**Joel Shupack:** “I can’t believe what you say, because I see what you do” - James Baldwin.

**Australian Tourist:** Palestine will be free.

**Czech Tourist I:** The revolution won’t be televised, it will be on Netflix.

**Czech Tourist II:** Of course.

**Czech Tourist I:** That’s cool.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** And then there are statements that are much less contentious.

**Joel Shupack:** Life would be boring without blueberries.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** But there’s one message on the wall you simply can’t ignore...

**Japanese Tourist:** Alaa taxi driver Bethlehem.

**Czech Tourist:** Alaa taxi driver Bethlehem.

**German Tourist:** Taxi driver Bethlehem.

**Scottish Tourist:** Alaa taxi driver Bethlehem.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** Alaa taxi driver Bethlehem. It’s *everywhere*.

**Yoshi Fields:** Need a taxi, just call Alaa.  
972-52-273-1610.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** A taxi driver named Alaa has turned a wall of powerful messages into his own personal billboard. The simple ads - in thick handwritten all caps - are scribbled all over the place in black paint. Surrounded, as they are, by inspiring MLK or Nelson Mandela quotes, they’re definitely well... a bit less poetic. But I wondered if there was more to the story.

Alaa Taxi Driver Bethlehem? I wanted to meet this guy.

**Alaa Asakerah:** Hello?

**Joel Shupack (narration):** Alaa is not a hard man to get a hold of. I mean, he did graffiti his phone number all over town. When I called him, he was just a block away.

**Yoshi Fields:** Hello.

**Joel Shupack:** Hi!

**Alaa Asakerah:** Nice to meet you.

**Yoshi Fields:** Nice to meet you.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** Alaa Asakerah is thirty-seven, a big man with a meaty handshake. He looks like he could be your high school wrestling coach. Gelled hair, a manicured goatee and those plastic RayBans everyone seems to have. His are purple.

**Alaa Asakerah:** You can come over here please because of the...

**Yoshi Fields:** Yeah, yeah.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** He invited me into his yellow taxi van to talk. The van was new. A vanilla air freshener dangled off the rear view mirror.

Alaa, and that's Alaa, not to be confused with...

**Alaa Asakerah:** Allah. Allah is mean G-d, with 'H.'

My name's without 'H.' A-L-A-A. Alaa.

**Joel Shupack:** Alaa.

**Alaa Asakerah:** Alaa, aah.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** 'H' or no 'H,' Alaa never really planned to be a taxi driver. His dad was a chef so he wanted to be one too. As a teenager in the '90s, he learned all the secrets of making shawarma and prepared hundreds of kilos of it every day. At the time, just around the signing of the Oslo Accords, Bethlehem was full of tourists and Alaa was happy to feed them.

**Alaa Asakerah:** It was very good life actually here.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** Christian pilgrims had - of course - been coming to Bethlehem for centuries to visit the site of Jesus' birth. Even Israeli Jews used to pop over from Jerusalem for a meal. But when Alaa turned twenty, in the fall of 2000, the Second Intifada broke out.

**News Footage I:** And we are following some breaking news out of Jerusalem. Dozen have been reportedly injured...

**News Footage II:** Hundreds of people have been wounded and several killed as a Palestinian demonstration turned violent.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** And suddenly all those tourists who filled his restaurant... stopped coming.

**Alaa Asakerah:** Most of the people afraid to come here because they think it's not safety.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** Alaa was afraid he'd lose his job.

**Alaa Asakerah:** Of course. We are worry about that. We think like maybe the... our business will be stopped one day.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** And that was a reasonable fear. Unemployment in Bethlehem more than tripled during the Second Intifada. Almost a third of the men in town were out of work. Restaurants closed. Souvenir Shops shuttered.

**Alaa Asakerah:** Not enough people coming here, and it was like... like ghost town.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** And then, in 2003, Israel built the wall. It made it much harder for Palestinians to get in and out of Bethlehem.

And that's when Alaa, started looking for more work, to add to his meager wages from the empty restaurant.

**Joel Shupack:** How did you decide to become a taxi driver?

**Alaa Asakerah:** No other job.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** But this was kind of a strange choice. You see, when he started, Alaa didn't even have a driver's license. And besides, the taxi drivers who were already working, barely had any customers. But foolishly or maybe brilliantly, none of that seemed to deter him. Alaa got behind the wheel anyway. He scraped by like this for years.

**Alaa Asakerah:** Taxi driver during the day, and in the evening I go to prepare shawarma.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** He got married, had kids.

**Alaa Asakerah:** Two girls and two boys.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** And all the while, the wall that had been the backdrop of his life, was slowly being transformed. In 2005, the British street artist known as Banksy showed up to what was still a bare concrete surface and started painting.

Before long, a very different kind of pilgrim was coming to Bethlehem. People from all over the world came to see what Banksy had done and to add their own mark.

A cottage industry of souvenir shops sprang up to cater to them. Think magnets and handbags printed with local Banksy art. Like a dove wearing a bulletproof vest. Or a little girl with pigtails frisking a soldier. And some of these shops got pretty creative. I mean, where else in the world can you buy a classic nativity scene carved out of olive wood, with the separation wall running down the middle of it?

**Japanese Tourist:** OK, ready, set, go.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** Some shops even keep spray paint on hand and charge folks, like these Japanese tourists, to use it.

**Japanese Tourist:** Shake the can.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** They used a stencil to paint a kneeling woman struck by an arrow.

**Japanese Tourist:** Wow. That's pretty.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** Not everyone in Bethlehem, however, is thrilled about all this attention.

**Muhammed:** I think it's good and the same time it's not good.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** This is Muhammed, who works at one of those souvenir shops. On the one hand, he said...

**Muhammed:** It's bring a lot of tourists here.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** But there's another side to it too.

**Muhammed:** Without graffiti we show the real wall. How look like. The real wall.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** He means that the art can prevent people from seeing the wall for what, in his eyes, it actually is - an enormous concrete barrier to freedom. The paintings take something ugly and make it beautiful. They colorwash it, if you will. And this is coming from someone whose job depends on that art.

In 2017, Banksy returned to Bethlehem. This time to open a boutique hotel directly facing the wall. He hoped it would bring even more people to see the wall and the reality of life on this side of it. It worked. Many new tourists showed up.

Alaa saw his opportunity. ‘I’ve got a taxi,’ he thought to himself, ‘I like talking to people.’ So he started offering tours for these hotel guests. A friend of his actually ran a little shop next door where people could learn how to make graffiti stencils, rent ladders and buy spraypaint. It was called, wait for it... the Wall Mart. One day, Alaa was hanging out there.

**Alaa Asakerah:** I came to this shop a lot. I was seeing like people comes here and make stencils.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** For the first time, he thought about writing on the wall himself.

**Alaa Asakerah:** I should do something, why not?

**Joel Shupack (narration):** So he made a stencil. First “TAXI” in big letters, then...

**Alaa Asakerah:** Writing my name, my instagram account, my WhatsApp.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** Alaa Taxi Driver Bethlehem was born. It didn’t take long before someone called.

**Alaa Asakerah:** One week, people start to call me. “Uh, hello this is Alaa with us?” I says “yeah, I’m Alaa. Who are you?” He said like, “yeah, we get your name at the wall. We want to do the tour with you.”

**Joel Shupack (narration):** And then he thought, ‘why spray just one ad when there’s so much wall I could paint on?’

**Alaa Asakerah:** No one can stop me.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** So he got some more black spraypaint and pretty soon “Alaa Taxi Driver Bethlehem” was everywhere. Tourists passing by started to wonder about this mythical figure.

**Alaa Asakerah:** ‘Who’s this guy?’ ‘What he did here?’ ‘Why the people like him so much?’

**Joel Shupack (narration):** And it turned out he was a pretty great tour guide. In just a couple years his tours have become a hit. On TripAdvisor, he has over a hundred-and-fifty rave reviews.

**Alaa Asakerah:** You see here like look, “great day with Alaa the taxi driver.” “Alaa the best taxi driver, you made our day.”

**Joel Shupack (narration):** Well who argues with TripAdvisor? I signed up for one of his tours.

**Alaa Asakerah:** So welcome to Palestine, welcome to Bethlehem...

**Joel Shupack (narration):** He drove us to see some famous Banksy art and a refugee camp.

**Alaa Asakerah:** This wall is eight meters high and two meter electric fence in the top.

**Tourist:** Electric fence?

**Alaa Asakerah:** Yes, electric fence in the top. If you need any question also, I am ready for answer.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** The young Filipino couple on the tour with me, loved it.

**Filipina Tourist:** We found him, he’s so very popular here *[laughter]*.

**Alaa Asakerah:** Even we spent four hours, the deal’s two hours but it’s fine. I need you to be happy.

**Tourist:** Well we enjoyed ourselves.

**Alaa Asakerah:** Don’t worry guys. Have a nice day.

**Filipina Tourist:** Thank you!

**Alaa Asakerah:** Bye bye.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** All the love and praise he receives made me wonder - was everyone *really* on “Team Alaa”?

**Joel Shupack:** Alaa, do you think anyone doesn't like that your name is all over the wall?

**Alaa Asakerah:** Maybe taxi drivers only, that's it. Taxi driver they don’t like it maybe because like they are jealous or something like that.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** So, about those other taxi drivers. When I first crossed the checkpoint into Bethlehem there was a swarm of them waiting for me.

I talked to a few of them. One guy, Tawfiq, said he had been waiting there since 6am.

**Tawfiq:** What's the time now, like two o'clock?

**Joel Shupack:** And you haven't had any customers?

**Tawfiq:** Yes, yeah. Still just waiting.

**Joel Shupack:** Did you ever think you should write your name on the wall?

**Muhammed:** Alaa it's enough. Alaa it's enough.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** This is another driver, Muhammed.

**Muhammed:** Maybe we have like one thousand taxi, everybody he do his name here, it's not OK.

**Tawfik:** It's not normal, you know [*laughs*]. It's not normal to write his name or his number.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** No one would really say much more than that. I got the feeling it was just the kind of thing that wasn't *done*. Sort of a no no in the world of taxi driver etiquette. And even if it worked for Alaa, it probably wouldn't do the same thing for them. It's more than just the graffiti ads. He's an entrepreneur. A guy that now needs Google Calendar to manage all his bookings.

**Alaa Asakerah:** Tomorrow is Clara, she wanna do the tour of Jericho, Dead Sea. There's another guy, his name Max, from Germany.

**Joel Shupack:** Do you feel bad for other taxi drivers that are...

**Alaa Asakerah:** Of course. But you know, I'm not put my money for example in my pocket. I put them for our family, to feed our children. When you have a business, you're not thinking for other people. This is your business.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** As successful as Alaa has become, there's still a constant worry that tourism - and his income - will dry up.

**Alaa Asakerah:** Even next month I have more than ten reservations, like five of them canceled. Because the issue yesterday between Gaza...

**Joel Shupack (narration):** The day before we spoke, a rocket from Gaza destroyed a house north of Tel Aviv and injured several people.

**Alaa Asakerah:** Any small happen like this, they stop business. Next week maybe there is like war in Gaza Strip. If there is war in Gaza Strip, no tourist coming even in West Bank.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** For many in Bethlehem, this kind of uncertainty quickly leads to despair. But not for Alaa.

**Alaa Asakerah:** We hope tomorrow better than today. We hope the day after tomorrow is better than tomorrow. We can not also just sit feet on top of feet. We have to work, we have to fight for work to feed our family.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** Alaa has gone from shawarma maker to the most famous taxi driver in Bethlehem. Still, there's one other way he sees himself.

**Alaa Asakerah:** You know when you're traveling to any country, first people you met are taxi drivers. If you have a good experience, you feel like you know you are happy from this country.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** Alaa is an ambassador.

**Alaa Asakerah:** Exactly.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** And to him, part of that is a responsibility to make sure his guests see the situation here through his eyes.

**Alaa Asakerah:** To show the people true, what's happening here, what's going on. See how no freedom for us. See how the... some family they don't find like bread to eat daily. We cannot change it. But we have to make this wall actually like cinema, to show the people how this wall is bad for us. Everyone come here, what he feel, write it at the wall. What you have in your mind, what image you have, write it in the wall.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** And that's exactly what Alaa did. Even if what he had in his mind was an advertisement. In the afternoon, I tagged along as Alaa dealt with an engine issue.

**Alaa Asakerah:** Fuck to this car.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** We went all over town to find a mechanic.

**Alaa Asakerah:** You know, I would like to go to the other mechanic garage. I don't trust that mechanic. Fuck to him.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** We drove to the edge of Bethlehem where the buildings stopped and rolling hills began.

**Joel Shupack:** Beautiful.

**Alaa Asakerah:** All Palestine is beautiful.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** Still, in the distance, we could see the wall, carving up the landscape.

The art on the wall is in constant flux. New quotes are painted over portraits which were painted over even older murals. But, ironically, Alaa's message is the most enduring of all. There's an understanding that no one covers his name. At the Wall Mart, that shop that sells supplies for tourists to spraypaint the wall...

**Alaa Asakerah:** They tell people "OK, paint anywhere but Alaa Taxi Driver, he feel mad if someone paints his name over actually." Because my name. I don't like someone to remove me from this place.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** On the surface, his message is "need a taxi? Call me!" But after spending a day with Alaa, I understood that it's saying something else too. It's saying "here I am, in the shadow of the wall, making a living, feeding my family, not giving up." And on a wall full of painted doves and peace signs, maybe that message is the most hopeful one of all.

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**Mishy Harman (narration):** Joel Shupack.

Danny Tirza's route has been challenged many times, and - on several occasions - also modified.

**Mishy Harman:** Was it very frustrating to you when the Supreme Court forced you to change your proposed route?

**Danny Tirza:** Yes. You have to understand that we were in time of war, we were working days and nights,

and the Palestinians apply to the Israeli Supreme Court. There is no other country in the world that you are not a citizen of this country and you can apply to the Supreme Court. But in Israel you they open it to the Palestinians and we had one-hundred-and-twenty-four cases at a very short time. And I had to be there to defend the decisions that I took. Well, I am not a lawyer, but from one-hundred-and-twenty-four cases I lost only five. But I learned from these five cases more than all the other.

**Mishy Harman (narration): Act Two - Eight Days A Week.** Here's Arianna Skibell.

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**Arianna Skibell:** Do you want to just introduce yourself?

**Hassan Muamar:** Walla, my name's Hassan Muamar. I am from Battir village. I'm trying to be one of the good residents of this village, so that's what I'm going to explain you about my village later on.

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** I met Hassan outside Damascus Gate in Jerusalem.

**Arianna Skibell:** OK, so we're going go get on a bus!

**Hassan Muamar:** Yes! Let's go.

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** Battir is only about three kilometers from the nearest houses in West Jerusalem. But getting there takes a lot longer than you'd expect.

**Hassan Muamar:** I took two hours this morning to cross the checkpoint.

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** We got off the bus where the road dead-ends at a massive concrete wall.

**Hassan Muamar:** Here we're just getting inside the checkpoint. And this the gates where you have to prove that you have a permission. I am one of the lucky people.

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** We made our way through a series of floor-to-ceiling metal turnstyles.

**Hassan Muamar:** Another gate, and another gate and another gate.

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** We exited the checkpoint into a sea of taxi drivers and pop-up market stalls. We got to Hassan's car...

**Hassan Muamar:** Ahalan U'Sahalan.

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** And started the drive down the winding road that leads to Battir.

**Hassan Muamar:** So here we are officially entering Battir.

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** Battir has a long history. Its origins can be traced back to the Bronze age, and to the town of Beitar - the last Jewish stronghold of the revolt against the Romans in the second century CE. It was here, many believe, that the Jewish rebel leader Shimon Bar Kokhba was killed by the Romans.

It's been settled continuously, *at least* since the seventh century, when Beitar - now Battir - became a predominantly Muslim village.

**Hassan Muamar:** Yalla, let's go.

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** The village is built on a pastoral mountainside that slopes into a lush valley. Down below is the Jaffa-to-Jerusalem railroad, first opened in 1892.

This serene landscape has seen Jews, Romans, Mamluks, Ottomans, Brits, Jordanians, and now, of course, Palestinians. But throughout it all, one feature has remained the same: The agricultural terraces.

**Hassan Muamar:** So these are the famous terraces of Battir.

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** The painstakingly constructed terraces are part of an ancient and sophisticated irrigation system built by the Romans. It's been in use now for over two millennia. This is how it works: Fresh water from seven different springs in the area flows into a large reservoir. From there the water's diverted into a complex matrix of stone canals that surround and then connect each terrace.

And in those terraces, farmers grow eggplants, almonds, lemons and many other herbs and vegetables, just as their ancestors have been doing since antiquity.

**Hassan Muamar:** This place called al-jinan.  
Al-jinan it means the paradise. And this is the place  
were farmers they took care of since thousands of  
years.

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** There are eight extended families, or clans, in Battir. And because water has always been a scarce resource in these parts, they had to figure out a fair system to divide it.

So to this day, the families take *daily* turns accessing the water. But because there are eight families, in this village, the saying goes, a week is eight days long.

As we wandered through the terraces, a farmer was busy harvesting vegetables with his wife and young daughter. The girl reached for a red chilli pepper.

**Abed:** *[In Arabic]* Don't eat that!  
**Girl:** *[In Arabic]* Why?  
**Abed:** *[In Arabic]* It will burn you!

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** "Don't eat that," her father warned. "It will burn."

The farmer's wife shoved fresh sage into our hands. Living off the land has been the way here for generations.

But in 1948, when the war broke out, it seemed this ancient rhythm of life was about to end.

Clashes between Jewish and Arab forces engulfed the region. Nightly raids and counter-raids ended in bloodshed and freshly dug graves.

Many Battiris feared for their lives, and fled. This created a vicious cycle: With every family that left, fewer remained to defend Battir. And the more vulnerable the village became, the more families took off.

Battir was almost empty. And Hassan Mustafa - a local journalist and poet - knew he had to do something.

So he gathered the remaining men in the village, and together they hatched a plan.

**Nadia Mustafa:** They created the appearance that  
there was life inside the village.

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** That's Hassan's daughter, Nadia.

**Nadia Mustafa:** For instance, in the morning they'd hang laundry out to dry. And they'd place mannequins wearing *keffiyehs* in the windows of the homes, so that it would look like there were armed men in the houses.

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** At night, Hassan and his men would light large bonfires and place lamps in the windows of all the empty homes.

**Nadia Mustafa:** All this was done in order to give the impression that Battir wasn't occupied by the army and that all the villagers were still there.

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** It was Hassan's wily way of saying, "we're here, we're armed. Don't mess with us." And amazingly, the Israeli paramilitary forces left the seemingly-bustling village alone.

When the fighting subsided, Hassan Mustafa was hailed as a hero. But his next mission proved to be even harder than saving Battir from war. Now, he would have to save it from peace.

See, in 1949, when Jordanians and Israelis signed the Armistice Agreements, they drew the border, in green pencil, on a map. And that green line? It spliced Battir in two. Most of the village would be in Jordan. But a large chunk of it - farmland, terraces, a school and a number of houses - would be in Israel. And that seemed untenable.

So when Hassan Mustafa heard that a delegation of Israeli and Jordanian officials was on its way to inspect the new border, he decided to take action. Elayak Owayna, also known as Abu Anan, was there that day.

**Elayak Owayna:** I had just finished second grade and I think my memory of those days, as an eight year-old, is better than my memory now as an eighty-year-old.

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** Abu Anan stood with the other villagers. He watched, terrified, as the scene unfolded.

**Elayak Owayna:** There were about a hundred of us present that day. Hassan Mustafa was the symbol of courage. He walked down the hill by himself. We were all sure he was going to get shot. He reached the train

station and waited for the Israeli jeeps to arrive. Then he insisted on speaking to whomever was in charge.

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** And that man was...

**Elayak Owayna:** Musa Dayan.

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** What happened next has long-since entered the realm of local mythology. There are like fifty different versions of this story. But in my favorite one, Hassan marched right up to the one-eyed-general and said “before you shoot me, let’s have a cigarette.”

Dayan must have agreed, and - maybe following a smoke - told his men to pull out a map of the region.

**Elayak Owayna:** Hassan Mustafa told them, “you can keep your map in your pocket. ‘The people of Mecca know Mecca better than anyone else.’” So they all had coffee, and then Hassan said, “follow me.”

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** Hassan walked with Dayan, and showed him the exact borders of Battir’s land. Eventually the two struck a deal: The people of Battir would continue to own and cultivate all their land on the Israeli side, and in exchange, they would protect the railway from any harm.

Hassan Mustafa had saved Battir a second time.

And for many years, that’s how it stayed. Hassan died in 1961. Six years later, following the Six Day War, Battiris would go from living under Jordanian rule to being under Israeli occupation.

But even that didn’t drastically shift day-to-day farming in the village. The spring water continued to flow into the reservoir, and from there into the canals, and from there into the terraces. The farmers continued to work their eight-day-weeks, warn their kids not to eat hot chili peppers, and live their lives.

Then, the start of the second millennium brought with it a Second Intifada.

As violence mounted, the Israeli Government doubled down on a multi-billion Shekel plan to build a barrier near the Green Line. Battir watched with dread as neighboring villages were surrounded, cut off or divided by the wall. They knew they were living on borrowed time.

Like several other Palestinian villages facing the same situation, the Battiris hired a lawyer and filed a petition to the Israeli Supreme Court.

But by this point, Israeli Courts had heard dozens of barrier wall cases. Many on a much larger scale than Battir. Here's Michael Sfard, one of the lawyers on the case.

**Michael Sfard:** A court that is used to deal with thousands of dunams that are being taken, is less sensitive to relatively smaller amounts of land.

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** As you can tell, he wasn't too optimistic about Battir's chances.

**Michael Sfard:** They had a very very weak case.

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** The Battiris, we've already seen, are a resourceful bunch. But this time around, a friendly cigarette and a cup of black coffee weren't going to cut it.

So the people in the village and neighboring friends started to brainstorm ideas. They launched a social media campaign, and teamed up with Israeli activists to organize an awareness concert.

But nothing seemed to be working.

That's when they turned to a strange group of professionals who had been hanging out in the village.

**Giovanni Fontana Antonelli:** Three people going around with their pencils and crayon, making sketches over an aerial photograph and mapping. Counting the number of trees, measuring the distances between the dry stone walls, etc. Really, the village thought they were crazy. These three people, they were mad.

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** This is their leader, Giovanni.

**Giovanni Fontana Antonelli:** My name is Giovanni Fontana Antonelli, I'm an architect and until 2012, I was serving as a program specialist for culture for UNESCO in Ramallah.

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** Among many other things, UNESCO selects 'World Heritage' sites - places like Machu Picchu, Vatican City or even the Statue of Liberty.

Back in 2003, Giovanni had heard about Battir and its ancient irrigation system. He thought it might be a potential heritage site, so he went to investigate.

**Giovanni Fontana Antonelli:** The impression I still keep with me very vivid, is that it is a very rural area, the silence prevail. It's like entering into the nature.

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** It was love at first sight. Giovanni set up a little office in Battir, and began researching the area. He even hired a small staff, which included Hassan Muamar, the guide who took me through the checkpoint.

Hassan grew up in Battir. But his whole life he dreamt of leaving.

**Hassan Muamar:** I just want to go drive a car, two-three hundred kilometers. No one tells me what are you doing. To go away, to have fun, to enjoy. To go to the beach! That was a big dream. So we always used to go to the Dead Sea but come on guys, this is not a sea! This is a floating sea, we need a real sea!

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** After he graduated university in Cairo, he returned to Battir and joined Giovanni's team. As the work progressed, he began to appreciate his hometown in an entirely new way.

**Hassan Muamar:** I start seeing things on the ground that it's always been in front of me but I didn't recognize it before.

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** Hassan's 'epiphany' wasn't exactly shared. Many other Battiris were only marginally interested in Giovanni and his curious project.

But with dwindling legal hope, a Facebook campaign and benefit concert that didn't seem to greatly impact the looming reality of the wall, the locals started to view the UNESCO project in a new light.

Here's Michael Sfar, the lawyer, once again.

**Michael Sfar:** If the place is declared 'World Heritage Site,' and if we can prove that the erection of the barrier would destroy that site, it was clear to me that we will win.

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** You see, becoming a UNESCO 'World Heritage Site' comes with a lot of prestige and funding. But most importantly - at least for Battir - it

comes with the legal protection of international treaties. Treaties that would make building a tall concrete wall in the middle of the village significantly harder.

But getting World Heritage status is wildly difficult. Campaigns can often last years, and besides, some members of the Palestinian delegation to UNESCO were actually promoting *another*, higher profile, site in Palestine - the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem.

Still, Giovanni's team was determined to try. This meant they would need to complete a detailed survey of the land as part of the submission to UNESCO.

**Hassan Muamar:** We made a survey for twelve thousand dunams of Battir, meter by meter. So we know every single thing on the ground.

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** They submitted the survey to UNESCO and held their breath.

Meanwhile, on the legal front with the Supreme Court, matters didn't appear promising. In a country in which security concerns typically trump environmental or historical conservation, the odds were stacked against them.

But all the work they had done for the UNESCO proposal now came in handy. They took the army's map for the proposed wall and overlaid it on their survey.

**Hassan Muamar:** And we saw exactly where it gonna cross. Oh my god, there was a big shock! Before that we will never understand the impact of the wall before it's built. We will realize the impact of the wall after it's built!

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** Because the survey was so detailed, Giovanni, Hassan and their team could show the Supreme Court *exactly* how many terraces, how many ancient canals, even how many individual trees, the planned wall would destroy. It was no longer arguments about freedom of movement or human rights. It was about nature, and preservation. And the damage was undeniable. On the morning of their first court appearance, the people of Battir made their way to Jerusalem.

**Hassan Muamar:** We gathered around eighty person, elderly from the village, and we managed to get them all permits and this. And we took two busses from Battir.

**Michael Sfard:** It's a big hall, the biggest courtroom in the Supreme Court. And it was all packed with villagers from Battir.

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** But it wasn't just the local residents who were in Sfar's corner. A chorus of experts, including the Israeli Nature and Parks Authority, endorsed the survey's findings. They all agreed that building a wall would irreversibly ruin the ancient terraces.

**Michael Sfar:** And there was no counter expert opinion. I mean the army made lot of pledges, did promise, did say that our assessment is inflated, but couldn't bring a real expert opinion that would say "no, no, no." I remember seeing the judges when it dawned on them that this is not an easy case.

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** The wheels of justice, especially in Israel, can turn at a snail's pace. The Battiris anxiously awaited the court's ruling. And there was still no word from UNESCO, even though it had been more than two years since they submitted the proposal.

**Michael Sfar:** So there was a kind of run-off, what will happen first? Will the court make a ruling? Will UNESCO declare it a World Heritage Site?

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** Some Battiris started to give up hope. But then...

**Mr. Rau:** I'll call out the names of the countries in the English alphabetical order.

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** In June 2014, UNESCO voted.

**Mr. Rau:** Algeria, Colombia, Croatia, Finland, Germany.

**Female UNESCO Official:** I now have the results.

We got eleven 'yes' and three 'no.' Palestine - congratulations. *[Sound of applause]*. You have succeeded in inscribing your site.

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** Just as Sfar had predicted, the Israeli Supreme Court was swayed. Shortly after Battir's UNESCO triumph, the judges in Jerusalem issued their own decision, which made it practically impossible to build the wall in Battir any time soon.

**Michael Sfar:** So for us, it was a victory.

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** Hassan felt like he could breathe again.

**Hassan Muamar:** Actually it's a feeling that I never felt before. A feeling of victory. It's the first time maybe I felt this in my life.

**Arianna Skibell (narration):** Ironically, or perhaps poetically, the successful campaign to *preserve* Battir has brought about the biggest change the village has seen in years.

After the double victory - successfully fighting the wall in the court and gaining UNESCO recognition - the sleepy agricultural village gradually blossomed into an ecotourism hot-spot of sorts. Hassan Maumar opened up a restaurant and a guest house. And others have started projects like a women's heritage kitchen and a CSA.

But there's one thing that remains unchanged. Something that is ingrained deep down in Battir's DNA. There's this term in Arabic, *Sumud*. It means to endure. To stand one's ground. To remain firmly planted on one's land, no matter what. Battiris, like the fresh springs that have been watering their terraces since time immemorial, are here to stay. And I wouldn't bet against them. After all, they work eight days a week.

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**Mishy Harman (narration):** Arianna Skibell. Arianna is a freelance journalist and a Dorot Fellow based in Jerusalem and Washington DC.

Battir's court case actually took place after the end of Danny's tenure as the chief planner of the fence. But even now, in his civilian life, he's completely involved in the nitty-gritty details of it all. He leads tours to see the fence and the wall, and talks about it around the world.

Before I left his home, with its gorgeous vistas of the Judean hills and Wadi Qelt, I asked Danny about the future. Walls and fences and borders are, always and everywhere, temporary. One day, they'll change. So what was it like, I wondered, to spend so much time, so much energy, on something that's here today and gone tomorrow?

His answer was hopeful.

**Danny Tirza:** Well, I myself, I want to be the one that will take off the fence. At the day that we will have peace agreement with our neighbors. I really really believe that this day will come, I pray for it three times a day. I myself I believe that this fence will be taken down, and I want to be the one that will do it.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** But till that day comes, the fence slash wall is still with us. And still - as will see in our final story of the episode - attracting a lot of attention.

If Alaa made the wall in Bethlehem into his own private billboard, our next story is also about the world of advertisement, but from a different perspective. Back on our side of the barrier.

What you need to know, to start out, is what any Israeli TV viewer would have known at the time. It's 2009. Cellcom is one of the largest telecommunication companies in Israel - and they're known for their emotional heartwarming ads.

Like the one in which a tired-looking guy is singing softly as he packs up his things at work. It's late, and he's the last one left in the office. He continues singing as he gets into his car, drives home and enters his living room. That's when we see his beautiful girlfriend asleep on the couch, his voice coming through the cell phone lying next to her. He takes off his earpiece, he'd been singing to her the entire time, and rubs her nose. She wakes up with a big smile. Talk for free to those you love, we're told.

In July 2009, Cellcom came out with another ad. But this one was unlike any other before or since. **Act Three - Yoffi Toffi.** Here's Yoshi Fields.

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**Yoshi Fields (narration):** The infamous ad opens with Israeli soldiers in an army jeep driving in an arid landscape alongside the concrete separation wall. Something, we don't quite see what, hits the hood of their jeep. Alarmed, they get out of the vehicle, guns in hand - ready for combat. But - we soon see - it was just a soccer ball. So they kick it back. And, then, a few seconds later, the ball comes flying back over, once again landing on the hood of the jeep. Game on. Soccer volleyball over the wall. The soldiers call up their army friends. Women cheer as the men show off their skills and kick the ball over the wall. "What do we all want?" the voiceover asks "just a little fun."

Shahar Segal was the commercial's director. He's a cynical guy, with a dry sense of humor. He says things like "commercials aren't real art," or "I'm in it for the money."

**Shahar Segal:** You know, you shoot a commercial for two days, you edit it for another three days, they tell you're a genius and you move on.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** But underneath all the cynicism, Shahar's really just a softie. In fact, he's produced some of Israel's most sentimental ads. And - in 2009 - he was working with Cellcom on their new branding campaign.

**Shahar Segal:** The idea was to create a cellular phone company, which says ‘I am the essence of being an Israeli.’

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** And he was proud of the soccer commercial.

**Shahar Segal:** I think it was nicely done.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** The ad had all the ingredients of a winner. The upbeat music. The uplifting message...

**Shahar Segal:** The most banal message in the world, like we are all human beings and let's play football and hope for the best.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** But more than anything, it included something which, Shahar claims, had never before been featured in an Israeli TV ad.

**Shahar Segal:** This huge concrete wall. Endless. It's a very very strong symbol.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Shahar's team actually built a replica of the separation wall *just* for the ad. They hired actors to play the soldiers, filmed aerial shots. The whole thing was a big production. And both Shahar and Cellcom expected it to be a hit. But when it aired...

**Shahar Segal:** All hell broke loose.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** “The TV Commercial that Divided Israel,” one headline read. “Phone Firm's West Bank Wall Gag Fails to Amuse,” declared another. It quickly became the most talked about ad on TV.

Cellcom execs were shocked. You see, they thought the public would embrace what they saw as a lighthearted ad about coexistence. But many people, especially on the left, wanted to see the ad taken off the air.

**Yossi Brauman:** I was pissed. It makes absolutely no sense and it's not entertaining.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** That's Yossi Brauman, one of the many lefties to speak out publicly against the ad. Their biggest objection?

**Yossi Brauman:** It's only showing the Israeli side. Where are the Palestinians in the picture? Why aren't they characters in the commercial?

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** At the time, Yossi was a journalist for the travel and culture publication *'Time Out Tel Aviv.'* And even though he didn't see himself as an activist, he felt he had to do something. So together with his friend Alon Rom, they created a Facebook group called "I Too Got Nauseous Watching the New Cellcom Ad."

Hundreds of enraged viewers quickly joined.

Ahmad Tibi, an Arab member of Knesset, also wrote to Cellcom demanding the ad be taken down. "The barrier separates families and prevents children from reaching schools and clinics," he told Reuters at the time. "Yet the advertisement presents the barrier as though it were just a garden fence in Tel Aviv."

A successful ad has to be memorable, but it also has to bring people together with a united message. This ad was more like a rorschach test. What its creators had seen as a playful and peaceful game, many of the viewers interpreted as a complete denial of reality.

But, there were also those on the left who came to the ad's defense. In fact, Yariv Oppenheimer, then the head of *Peace Now* - one of the largest left-wing advocacy groups in Israel - praised the commercial.

**Yariv Oppenheimer:** It doesn't make fun of the wall, or making fun of the situation. It's a surprising commercial that shows you the other side in a totally different perspective. It's not the enemy. It's your friend. What can be more peacenik than that?

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** The commercial only aired in Israel, but as the buzz surrounding it got louder, more and more Palestinians in the territories started to see it online.

In the West Bank town of Bil'in, Palestinian activists led by Abdallah Abu Rahmah decided to create a counter video, a real-life reenactment of sorts, shot during an actual demonstration. They even used the same playful music from the Cellcom ad as the soundtrack of their video. But of course the protest they filmed didn't follow the script the ad's actors had used.

**Abdallah Abu Rahmah:** In our video, we show the truth. About we are in the other side of the wall and you can see what's the react of the soldiers.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Instead of showing the Israeli side of the wall, Abdallah's video showed the Palestinian one.

**Abdallah Abu Rahmah:** In that action I remember around one hundred fifty person.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** During the protest, Palestinians kicked soccer balls over to the Israeli side, and waited to see whether - just like in the ad - an impromptu soccer game would ensue. It didn't. Rather than having the balls bounce back, they were bombarded with tear gas.

Abdallah and his fellow activists uploaded the video to Youtube. It got more than 180,000 hits.

I went to speak with him where this all took place.

**Abdallah Abu Rahmah:** And we shot the football from this area to the other side...

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Standing amongst the shrubs, we looked up at the concrete wall. I took out my cell phone, and asked Abdallah whether we could watch the original ad together.

Usually patient and even-keeled, I could see the frustration in his eyes.

**Abdallah Abu Rahmah:** I want to... the photo of the other side. Where is the other side? No. This is not a true. What's in the advertising is not true.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Cellcom and McCann Erickson, the advertising company that produced the ad, refused my repeated requests for an interview. But back in 2009, with pressure mounting to remove the ad, Cellcom released the following statement: "Cellcom's core value," it read, "is communication between people regardless of religion, race or gender." It also claimed that the commercial illustrated the possibility for people of diverse opinions to engage in, quote, "mutual entertainment."

But the Israeli public was neither persuaded nor pacified. Two weeks after the ad first aired, *Globes* - an Israeli financial newspaper - conducted a survey about the ad. Sixty-eight percent of the respondents reported having a negative reaction to it. Cutting their losses, Cellcom decided to take the commercial off the air.

Today, ten years later, Cellcom is still one of the largest telecommunications companies in Israel. The wall still stands. And judging by the amount of chatter I heard on the street about the Women's World Cup, everyone still seems to love soccer.

But heated public debates about coexistence, or the portrayal of Palestinians in mainstream Israeli media? That's changed quite a lot.

**Nick John:** Oh, you can't even. Even if its giving them an immaterial existence, its putting Palestinians - kind of - on our TV screens. But I don't think you would do that now.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** That's Nick John, a sociologist who teaches in the Department of Communication and Journalism at the Hebrew University. I asked him if he could imagine an ad like the Cellcom one being made today. To demonstrate how times have changed, he took me back to the Israel of 2009. Back then, he explained, the wall was relatively new and its impact was still very much a topic of discussion. Fast forward ten years. For most Israelis, both the wall and Palestinians are...

**Nick John:** Out of sight, out of mind.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** The wall is now just part of the landscape. And Palestinians...

**Nick John:** We're pretty much unaware of the circumstances of their everyday lives.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** It's all faded into the background.

**Nick John:** If you were to ask people, you know, "what are the most important issues facing Israel now?" Or "what are the most important issues in your life now?" - the occupation isn't one of them. It's just off the agenda. So the idea that then you would use this conflict and even try to frame it in a positive way, as to say - you know, "we like football, they like football, you know, we're all people when it comes down to it" - I think that isn't something that would really fly now. It's almost as if they're not even significant enough to be a character, albeit an invisible character, in an advert anymore.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** In a way exemplifying Nick's point, I was surprised to learn how Yossi, one of the nauseated creators of the Facebook group against the ad, feels about it nowadays. He's made a one-eighty in the past decade, it turns out, and today, he considers himself right-wing when it comes to the conflict. Notably absent from his current response to the ad? Anything about the Palestinian side at all.

**Yossi Brauman:** Now that I watched it, I felt a little bit like, you know, emotional, like almost crying, because to see soldiers enjoying taking a break and

playing is something that is, you know, you're grateful to them for being there for you.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** The Facebook group, which at its height had several hundred members, is still live. But its community has dwindled to a mere seventeen. Of course, this cultural shift in Israel is not necessarily the same for Palestinians on the other side of the wall.

**Abdallah Abu Rahmah:** You wanted to see the situation from here.

**Yoshi Fields:** Sure, yeah.

**Abdallah Abu Rahmah:** It's... it's clear.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Driving with Abdallah on the dirt road next to the wall, we pulled off to the side. We were on top of a hill and could see over the wall. He pointed at a few olive groves and above them, the new settlements on the nearby hilltops.

**Abdallah Abu Rahmah:** They don't allow to the farmers to pass the gate to work in their land. They don't allow to the people. And they're building more and more.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** An ad offers a parallel reality. But the trick is to present a parallel reality that's both aspirational *and* recognizable. In the case of the Cellcom ad, we were invited - for a brief sixty seconds - to enter a reality where everyone gets along. For many Israelis, and certainly for most Palestinians, that reality was simply not one they could imagine, let alone recognize.

Shahar and Cellcom had set out to make an ad about the essence of Israeliness. In so doing, they inadvertently hit a nerve. The nerve of a country still very much struggling to come to terms with its relationship with Palestinians.

Ten years later, whether you think the ad has aged well or poorly, perhaps it points to a shift in the collective consciousness of Israel. Disappearing are the noisy debates that used to erupt regularly, in bars and on TV about what's the best road to a lasting peace. If the last few election cycles are a good indicator, questions about what to do with the territories and the Palestinians who live there, have been overtaken by passionate arguments about political corruption, housing, and the price of cottage cheese.

The latest Cellcom ad, which just came out in June, is chock-full of pop culture references. It spoofs a handful of Netflix shows - like the huge hit 'Money Heist.' We see eight goofy-looking robbers in red jumpsuits and plastic face masks exiting a big city building. Their leader takes off his mask, exasperated. 'Oh my G-d,' he yells at the others, 'how many times have I told you not to eat in these masks? They stink!' It's funny, silly, and utterly apolitical. The conflict, needless to say, is not mentioned.

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**Mishy Harman (narration):** Yoshi Fields. You can see the Cellcom ad on our site, [israelstory.org](http://israelstory.org).

**Danny Tirza:** Israel says that this is not a border. The Palestinians says that it's not a border. So probably when we'll come back to the negotiation table, we'll decide about the future borders. But these days we had to do it, not because we like it. I hate it! We did it just to prevent the Palestinian terror from coming to Israel.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** The West Bank barrier has significantly reduced violence and terror. And that, of course, is very good. But one thing about walls, about fences, about barriers, is that they also hide people who are actually really close by. They make it hard to see them. To hear them. Even to think about them. And that, I hope, is what, in our own little way, we've done in our episode today.

You can hear all our previous episodes on our site, (again, it's [israelstory.org](http://israelstory.org)), or by searching for Israel Story on iTunes, Spotify, Stitcher, or anywhere else you usually get your podcasts.

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Before we end, I want to tell you about a podcast I love, and I think you will too. It's called *Gastropod*, and it's all about the science and history of food. But really it's about the weird and wonderful things you never knew about the stuff we put in our mouths every day. Nicky and Cynthia, the two fabulous hosts, are funny and charming, and in each episode they take us on a deep dive into the most curious topics, like whether New York City bagels are better because of the local water, or what scientists are discovering about the link between diet and Alzheimer's disease. Want to know why American mangos taste so bad, and what that has to do with George W. Bush and Harley Davidsons? They've got that covered, too. Find *Gastropod* and subscribe to it on Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, [gastropod.com](http://gastropod.com) or wherever you get your podcasts.

Thanks to Revital Iyov, Rafi and Dani Schoffman, Yotam Michael Yogev, Matti Friedman, Marom Ginsberg-Fletcher, Claire Anastas, Ahmad Abu Ahmad, Mohammed Obidallah, Joe Rashba, Natasha Westheimer, Elham Nasser ed-Din, Arie Ruttenberg, Alon Rom and Asaf Liberman. And to our dubbers, David Satran and Naomi Chazan, as well as to Josh Brook, Skyley Inman, Maya Enoch, Via Sabra, Congregation Kol Ha’Neshama and Rabbi Zari Weiss from Seattle who let us tag along on Danny Tirza’s tour. Lastly, thanks to Julie Subrin and Sara Ivry for their wise editorial guidance.

The original music in Eight Days A Week was written, arranged and performed by our wonderful Israel Story band - Dotan Moshonov and Ari Wenig, together with Ruth Danon, Eden Djamchid and Ronnie Wagner-Schmidt, and was mixed by our dear Sela Waisblum. Additional scoring by Yochai Maital, Joel Shupack and Blue Dot Sessions.

“The Wall” miniseries is based on our latest live show. Thanks to everyone who made our most recent North America tour possible, including our dear friends at the Harvard Hillel - Rabbi Jonah Steinberg, Lauren Cohen-Fisher, the Brachman Family, the entire Hillel staff and Justin Ziebell. And to Northwestern’s Hillel - Michael Simon, Reut Tzadok, Rachel Hillman and the rest of the staff. Thanks also to Nevo Shinaar and Shaul Notkin.

We’re coming back to North America with “The Wall” in January 2020, so if you’d like us to come perform near you, contact us at [live@israelstory.org](mailto:live@israelstory.org).

Israel Story is brought to you by PRX - the Public Radio Exchange, and is produced in partnership with Tablet Magazine. Our staff is Yochai Maital, Zev Levi, Shai Satran, Roe Gilron, Maya Kosover, Joel Shupack, Yoshi Fields, Judah Kauffman, Hannah Barg, Ari Wenig, Sharon Rapaport and Rotem Zin. Scarlett De Jean, Pola Lem, Yair Farkas, Harry Sultan, Rebecca Carrol, Kayla Levy and Anna Correa have been our wonderful production interns this year.

This episode is dedicated with love to Trotzy, Yochai’s sweet, smart dog, who lived a good life and will be remembered by all us here on the team. So long, Troztk.

I’m Mishy Harman, and we’ll be back very very soon with **The Wall Part III**.

**Charlie Yankos:** And that’s when I saw the gap. And all I can remember was, ‘I’m gonna have a shot at this. Doesn’t matter what happens at the end of the day. I’m gonna go for it!’”

**Mishy Harman (narration):** So till next time, *shalom shalom* and *yalla bye*.

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