

CASE STUDY 11

Oren

Former fighter

Oren Kalisman, 30, is a physics student at Tel Aviv University, but he used to be an Israeli soldier.

"I grew up in a village close to Galilee. We lived surrounded by Arabs, but we had no connection to them. We didn't hate them, we just ignored them.

"Like my brothers and my parents, I went into the army aged 18. By the start of the Second Intifada I was called to the West Bank, around Nablus, and put in charge of 20 soldiers.

"It wasn't long before I started feeling I didn't want to be there."

Oren remembers his army unit trying to provoke battles with Palestinians.

"Were we encouraging Palestinians to throw stones so that we could kill them?"

In 2002 an armed Palestinian shot dead six Israeli soldiers.

"It was a huge shock to the all-powerful Israeli army... As a result, 24 hours later we received a very unique command – to 'liquidate' all police officers at a series of Palestinian checkpoints in the West Bank. ...The hard part for me was realising that our army was acting out of revenge, and I'm sorry to say that as a result 15 armed Palestinian policemen were killed.

"The official army response was that these policemen were terrorists – but I don't believe any of that... Later I spoke out about this with Breaking the Silence – a group of former soldiers critical of methods used by the army in the occupied territories. ...I no longer believed in what I was doing."

After this, Oren asked his commanders to find a replacement.



"These days the most difficult thing is trying to explain to Israelis how and why my transformation took place. I am seen as a traitor by many... I'm not looking for forgiveness, but for understanding."

"The healing part of the story for me has been starting a new Combatants for Peace group. I went back recently to the city of Nablus, walking freely, speaking Hebrew, no longer afraid. It was an incredible feeling. The last time I'd been there I was a soldier in an army vehicle making arrests."

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