

Summer of Peace 2012™: Youth Entrepreneurs

[0:00:00]

Philip: Hello everyone. This is Philip Hellmich, the Director of Peace with The Shift Network.

It's a delight to be with you on this Friday. We're wrapping up the week of business and economics and their impact on peace. We've had quite an enlightening full week looking at this subject matter.

Today, we're going to be looking at youth entrepreneurs in peace. This session has been several months in the making. I want to acknowledge Phyllis Bles and Joyce and the people at Peace Through Commerce for bringing this session together. They've identified a couple of young people, whom you will meet, who are just doing extraordinary work.

For this session, what we'll be doing is I'll introduce Phyllis again, whom you've met a couple of days ago. Phyllis will be the main host and then, I'll come in a little bit later helping field questions.

Just a reminder, you can always type in your questions into the webcast, if you're on the webcast. Later, we'll be taking live calls on the phone, where you'll be pressing *2.

To remind you who Phyllis is -- I want to just say, on a personal note, it's just been a delight to interact with Phyllis over the last few months, just quite a joyful person, peaceful and deeply committed to peacebuilding, particularly peace through commerce.

Phyllis is the president and co-founder of Peace Through Commerce and on the founding team of its former parent organization, FLOW, founded by the co-founder of Whole Foods Market, John Mackey and Michael Strong, an educational entrepreneur.

Peace Through Commerce is a global nonprofit organization committed to a creating a world in which all people enjoy peace and prosperity. Peace Through Commerce is working with youth entrepreneurs in its Accelerating Women Entrepreneurs program. It has teamed up with a new organization, Youth Trade, to work with the two panelists on the call today.

You can access the websites for the organizations that Phyllis is with through www.peacethroughcommerce.org and then also youthtrade.com.

Phyllis, thank you for being with us again and for helping bring this panel together.

Phyllis:

Thank you, Philip. It's been an equal joy and a pleasure to work with you and the team at The Shift Network and to be part of the Summer of Peace 2012. It feels wonderful to be included also in this Business and Peace Week and the role that business plays in doing some of the heavy lifting of getting dialogue going and cooperation. We're going to hear about how that works on the ground with each of our panelists, whom I'm delighted to introduce.

First, I'll introduce the audience to Priya Samant, who currently resides in Boston, Massachusetts. Priya is a 35-year-old mother of two boys, six and four. She was raised in Mumbai and came to the US in 2000 to work as a consultant in the field of software and technology. Priya then started her business called EarthFrendz in 2009. She has recently launched her products in 22 Whole Foods Market stores in the North Atlantic region.

She also recently received the 2012 Metro Boston GreenBest Award and that is a joint honor from Boston GreenFest, the Boston Metro, and the City of Boston. It's given for special efforts made to alleviate poverty while being sustainable and fashionable. Her website, for the viewers, is www.earthfrendz.com.

We also have the honor of having Rami Zarrouk, who currently resides in Austin, Texas. Rami is a 35-year-old father of three boys, eight, six and four. Rami is Palestinian and born and raised in the Bethlehem area of the West Bank. Rami came to the US to attend school and graduated with an electrical engineering degree. His day job is as a senior application engineer at Marvell Semi in Austin.

Rami went on to co-found the family business, which is called Bethlehem Hands. He did that last year, 2011. The story of that company and the products are at www.peacethroughcommerce.org and the listeners can go to Shop Here. There's a story about Bethlehem Hands and then a story about the products and the group.

[0:05:20]

With that introduction, I'd like to turn back to you, Priya, and invite you to give us an overview of the story behind how you started your company.

Priya: Sure. Thank you, Phyllis. Thank you very much.

Hello everybody. Again, my name is Priya. To start with, I can say that my story is called as blessing in disguise.

I was born and raised in Mumbai, India. My undergraduate degree is in computer science, and I have masters in management. I worked as a consultant for eight years in the US. However, in the year 2008, I had to quit work due to complications in my second pregnancy; I had bed rest for six months.

That six months, I took the time that was available to evaluate my situation and decide what I wanted to do next in my life. Do I want to go back to work or venture on my own? That's when I decided that I'm going to venture on my own and create a mission-driven business.

The reason I wanted to create a mission-driven business is because I wanted to make a difference in other people's lives. I come from a family of doctors in India, and helping poor communities and poor people is what I had always seen growing up. That was the only one thing I knew that I was really good at.

My company, EarthFrendz is a for-profit-sales-funded social enterprise that creates environmentally sustainable products. EarthFrendz is a certified Youth Trade company. Youth Trade is a social movement that aims to open access for mission-driven entrepreneurs who are 35 and under. I take pride in saying that it's because of Youth Trade today I'm getting this opportunity to all of you to tell my story.

Phyllis: Nice. Yes. Thank you. We're going to want to hear a little bit more about how EarthFrendz operates and what your products are about. I think, for the moment, for introduction, we're going to turn to Rami and ask Rami the same question.

Can you give us an overview of the story behind how you started your company, Rami?

Rami: Sure. Hi everyone. My name is Rami Zarrouk.

Again, thank you, Phyllis, for the introduction earlier.

It was actually my mom, Aida Zarrouk, who actually started things up. It wasn't really me that started the whole thing.

Mom was in Bethlehem. She was a member of a group of Palestinian women who actually were meeting with Israeli women as a way of getting to know each other and understand each other's points-of-view about the conflict and issues that they go through on a daily basis, and it's also a way to promote understanding and peace between each other.

The organization that actually promoted this get-together is called Beyond Words. One day, Beyond Words organized a trip for all of these women to come to the US to a place called Esalen in California. My mom initially was hesitant to actually come here because, a month earlier, her brother had just died. She was in mourning, she was sad. She did not think that she wanted to do this. She wanted to continue to be in her shell, in her sadness. But people around her urged her to go as a way to heal herself, as a way to relieve some of that sadness, if you wish.

She was, I guess, at the end, convinced. She came to the US and she went to this trip. In there, it was a really nice experience for her. She met a lot of nice women, including Phyllis, you, and including Nina Jo and including Paula from Peace Through Commerce. It turns out that, all of these women from Peace Through Commerce, they live in Austin, Texas. Luckily, my mom was coming to live with me in Austin after visiting Esalen. She saw that as actually a good sign, a sign from God that maybe this is meant to be, work with these women.

[0:10:13]

She came to Austin. We got to know Peace Through Commerce. Peace Through Commerce suggested why don't you take what your mom is doing right now, which is she was selling some embroidery in Bethlehem and she brought some of that embroidery to Esalen to sell, why don't you put that on the website. They actually helped us create Bethlehem Hands here and mentoring us throughout the whole process. Joyce and Ken Beck, also from Peace Through Commerce, helped us quite a bit in that regard.

We went ahead and we started Bethlehem Hands. My mom, right now, works with as many as ten women in the Bethlehem area, all of them

come from needy families -- some they need to go to college, some they need to provide some food for their kids, some their husbands have died, some their husbands are not working. All of them come from a background that required them to get into this business and provide some means of income. That's what Bethlehem Hands is all about, is helping women in the Bethlehem area in need and improving their economical status.

Bethlehem Hands we create products, like shawls, cushion covers, bracelets, bookmarks, wall hangings, and much more. All of the products that I've just mentioned are on the peacethroughcommerce.org website, just click on Shop Here. All of them are beautiful. They're all unique products, and I promise you, you will not find them in Macy's or Dillard's.

This is really the story.

Phyllis: Right. And then, you got involved, you and your wife got involved in all the startup entrepreneurial steps of opening a new business then, as I understand?

Rami: That's correct. That's part of the mentoring with Peace Through Commerce. We started the site in the US, and that's me and wife here. The story that I just gave was really how my mom started this whole thing and how we work in Bethlehem. I skipped the boring part in the US, how we started the LLC and so forth.

Phyllis: Okay. Thank you for that overview. I feel like I've journeyed into Bethlehem with you and back into Mumbai with you, Priya. I would like to take a moment to get back to Priya.

Priya, say a little bit more about what EarthFrendz does with these women in the areas of Mumbai and I think it's New Delhi as well, but where exactly they are and what they're doing with you.

You might, if you don't mind, give another word about how Youth Trade came in because I think that, for anyone listening who's 35 and under, Youth Trade was designed to see that their products, that they become Youth Trade-certified, get into Macy's and Whole Foods Market. They're trying to really get shelf space set aside just for your generation and you, entrepreneurs, to make sure that you're not the last chosen on the block and it's, I think, in your case, working.

There were two things, two parts to that. I do think, because we now know a little bit about Bethlehem Hands makes unique indigenous embroidered Bethlehem-centered work, which is exquisite, I'd like to also know something about the nature of your work, your product and then let you touch upon how entrepreneurs 35 and under can apply to be a Youth Trade entrepreneur.

Priya:

Sure.

The thing is, as I said earlier, I grew up in Mumbai, in India so that's an urban city. When I decided to start a mission-driven business, what I wanted to do is I wanted to cater to the needs of urban poor because what I learned growing up that they were a lot of initiatives to work with rural poverty, but I wasn't sure or I had never heard about issues or organizations that work or cater to the needs of the urban poor.

[0:15:24]

Growing up in Mumbai, most people might know that Dharavi is the biggest slum in the world. It became very famous because of the movie, Slum Dog Millionaire. There are other pockets of the city as well where the slums, the people that live in the slums are miserable. All these people have come from rural areas of the country to find better opportunities. They are artisans; they have that artistic stuff in their blood. That's the community that they come in from the interior and rural parts of India.

What I wanted to do is I wanted to target those kind of people and work with them and what knowledge I had was of designing, give to them so they could sow it for me.

When I created this business, I just did not want to focus on the social responsibility part of it. I also wanted to give major attention, in the form of products, to environmental sustainability because the way global warming is happening and the way things are around environmental sustainability. I wanted to cater that piece in making fashionable accessories.

The products that EarthFrendz makes are everyday accessories, like bags, wallets, headbands, wristlets. We are also foraging into T-shirts and jewelry now. They are all upcycled accessories.

When I say "upcycled," what we do is we collect the scraps of fabric available in the secondhand market in India and we actually sew them in

a collage format and we put jute -- many of them know it as jute, most people call them burlap -- jute in the raw form, we put it inside as a padding so it becomes very durable and sustainable. That's the kind of upcycled accessories we sell.

Many people, if there are callers who have logged in from US, everybody might have heard about this brand, Vera Bradley. When I was doing research about working with fashion accessories, like bags, I was seeing people, especially women in this country, are so fond of Vera Bradley. I was like, "What is so unique about this brand that people are so loyal customers of this brand?"

When I started, I'm going to work on my designing, but sustainability is going to be a big part of it, I decided that my products can be better than hers because they have a story to tell -- it's helping somebody. But, at the same time, they're sustainable, they're durable, and they're functional. They're very functional. The reason is I designed them, and I'm an engineer by profession so I know how to design functional stuff. That all helped me to come up with a product line that's being offered in the store.

The products got into the stores, on the shelf of Whole Foods, because of Youth Trade. If there are entrepreneurs who are logged in in this call, who are 35 and under and have a mission-driven business, I would sincerely tell them to look into Youth Trade because there are a lot of certifications that are available on the market today to mean fair trade -- you have Green America, you have B Corp -- they're all very good. But I personally will vouch for Youth Trade, the reason is they connect you. They open access to the market, which is very much needed today. Otherwise, to get your products in front of retailers or the right buyers, it is actually a business image sell. It's very, very difficult if you're a starter business and, as you know, capital is a major issue.

I was very lucky enough that I came to know about Youth Trade. I applied for the certification. I got selected. That's how I pitched to Whole Foods and that's how I made my products made in the stores.

I would sincerely recommend people just to go to their website, to look about it, and entrepreneurs who are 35 and under to sincerely apply for it. That's on my side for this.

Phyllis: Thank you very much.

[0:20:02]

Rami, I'm going to shift back over to you and ask if you could speak about the impact that your business, your family business is having on the lives of people in Bethlehem and here, in either area that you want to speak to and if could include some mention of what the challenges have been that you've experienced in creating the business.

Rami:

Okay.

There are really many impacts on people working the business. The simplest really is bringing much-needed income to the families of the women who actually make the embroideries. The business improves on their self-esteem, on their independence. The women feel like they're making a difference in their family and they feel like they can support themselves financially and support their families sometimes. Some of these women, they support their kids, their husbands don't work or they can't find work or they've died, so they need this income.

My mom, frankly, also benefits from all of this. She feels happiness inside. As I mentioned, when her brother died, she took this on. It actually made her feel good. It made her feel like she has a purpose in life to help these needy families, including her brother's family, and help herself. My dad was really happy that she got into this because he could see a difference in her. When she would do something to help these families, he would see that she is happy.

We also believe that when we lift the economical situation of families, it makes these families more stable and more peaceful. When you have a stable family, you're not thinking "Okay, what am I supposed to do now? I need to do something," and you go and you might end up doing something bad. If you're busy doing something, we believe that you will continue to do that thing because you will feel that you're secure, you have enough to help your family and so forth. If you don't have a good economic situation and if you're poor, then you might end up blaming someone else for this and attacking someone just to change something.

We feel that by helping these families, it helps them become stable and indirectly, it helps bring peace.

Phyllis:

That really is true everywhere.

What I'm wondering is what uniquely does it add in the situation by being where they are now in the West Bank. What are some of the challenges that you've experienced in making that come true in that particular locale in the world and maybe some of the rewards that you might be experiencing as it relates to doing this in the middle of the conflict?

Rami:

Sure.

Life in Bethlehem is hard. To give you kind of an understanding, I could maybe give you a little story of when I was growing up in Bethlehem.

In the '80s, my dad would fire up the car and we could go anywhere we want to. We can go to Tel-Aviv, we can go to Tiberias, we can go to Jerusalem. Anywhere we wanted to. No need to apply for a permit. No need to do anything. Just get in the car. Let's go have some fun. Let's go dip in the Sea of Galilee and have some fun and come back. We did that almost every summer in the '80s.

My mom and dad would take us to Tiberias with two other families that were close friends. We'd go. We'd have fun. We come back.

Nowadays, you cannot take your own car to go to Jerusalem. You can't go to anywhere in Israel. Not only can you not take your car, but you have to apply for a permit if you want to go to Jerusalem.

I actually happened to go visit Bethlehem this summer. I took my kids. My wife and I went to Bethlehem. We really wanted to take our kids and show them Jerusalem. We were so close. Jerusalem is just a couple of miles away from Bethlehem, like two miles north of Bethlehem.

[0:25:13]

We took one day to try to figure out how to apply for a permit. We figured out how to apply for a permit. We went to the church to get our papers stamped. We went to the place where you're supposed to apply. We had to wait an hour just to get the employee to come to work, give him the papers. By the end of the day or by next day, I think, you go and you're supposed to know whether you are approved or not.

We went there. I was denied. I could not get a permit to go visit Jerusalem. So here I am, I spent like \$8,000 in tickets just to go, me and my family, to the Holy Land and I could not visit Jerusalem.

This is just one example of the lack of freedom of travel in Palestine/Israel. People in Bethlehem have a hard time moving around. Your freedom of travel, your freedom of movement is restricted.

You don't have the same things you have here where if you want to go to Houston any time you want to, you go in the car, go. No one is going to stop you. No one is going to point a machine gun at you. No one is going to do that for you.

Over there, when I learned that I didn't have a permit, for example, I told my mother, "You know what? We're going to the civil authority, the Israeli Civil Authority. We're going to go drive there and talk to them." We went there. We were greeted by the guard over there with his machine gun and the only thing he would say, "Get the hell out of here."

It's like, "I want to talk to someone. I want to go visit Jerusalem. I came here from the US. I want to go visit." "Get out of here. Get out of here." We couldn't even talk to someone. They kicked us out.

There's hardship over there from lack of travel. Lack of travel is just one thing.

One week after we got there, my dad ran out of water. Water comes once every two weeks. Once every two weeks you get water. The water is in the pipes 5% to 10% of the time, so you can run out of water very quickly. If you don't have a well, you're going to run out of water.

Palestinians also don't have control over the air, so no airport. You cannot build an airport in Palestine.

I cannot also go to Tel-Aviv. I'm forbidden from going there as a Palestinian. I'd have to go through Jordan. Going through Jordan means an extra day that I have to spend in Jordan so I can come to Palestine. So going from the US to Bethlehem means a two-day journey and then coming back, a two-day journey. So if I'm taking a month's vacation from work here in the US to go and vacation with my family, four days are gone just getting there and coming back, as opposed to two days, which is the normal thing.

You can't have control over the air. You can't have control over water. You don't have control over water. You don't have control over freedom of travel. And, you have no control over the borders.

Every time you go into Palestine, you're going through Jordan, then you go through Israel, and then you go to Palestine. You don't have all of the rules for getting something into the land as commerce, for example, you have to go through Israel, of course.

As a Palestinian, you have so many things that are restricting you from having a viable business. There are a lot of hassles. Another story I --

Phyllis:

I really want to thank you, Rami, for bringing this down to the ground and giving us a firsthand view of the challenges that you face when you then begin to build a business that necessarily involves Israeli and Jewish business workers and colleagues. Women on both sides of the conflict could get involved in this enterprise. Just the realities of day-to-day seem so daunting. I'm wondering if there are some rewards that you see coming out of this activity.

And Priya, I'm going to ask you the same thing, related question of peace and on-the-ground conditions to your being an entrepreneur and trying to create something, both of worth but also of value. I just want you to be thinking about that.

[0:30:14]

Rami, do you see a light at the end of this tunnel any time soon? Do you see a light coming in through the work of Bethlehem Hands, which is a brand new endeavor in this environment you're talking about now in 2012? Is there hope?

Rami:

Absolutely, there is hope. There will always be hope even when people are depressed, frustrated. You must always keep hope. You must always keep the faith. The only way to go about is to keep hope and hope that peace, eventually, will come. There's no doubt in my mind that, going forward, the best way to go about it is to have peace. All these issues will melt away.

You've asked about rewards. There's always rewards. Gratification is what comes to my mind. When you know that you're helping people, when you know that the people that need the most, that need financial support, that need even some love, even some words of encouragement, you're helping them, you feel so good inside. This is like human nature. When you help someone in need, it's always a good thing. You feel good inside. You feel warm inside. Gratification is most of what I can come up with.

I've also learned so much from interacting with Peace Through Commerce. I learned how to start a business personally. I met new and exciting people. I met you, Phyllis. I'm so happy I met you. I met Joyce. I met Ken. I met so many interesting people through Peace Through Commerce and other places that I probably wouldn't have the chance to meet them if I had just gone to work as a technologist from eight to five. It wouldn't be possible. I would've missed meeting such good people who really want to make a difference in this world.

Phyllis: You make it very easy. To have your generation taking on the work of recreating your life as an adult and as a father and all of that, that's an eight-to-five job, but that you and Priya are asking for help and stepping up to the plate and saying, "Start with me. Today, I will create a business that's going to solve these problems."

You're so young and you're so enthusiastic -- and these problems are monumental -- it's heartwarming. And talk about gratitude, to see you stepping up to the plate, we know you're there, you're integrating it, and you're role modeling it for every other person in this 35-and-under group, you're role modeling that yes, you can do it. It's incredibly heartwarming. I'm really grateful that you could share your story today, when we get the questions coming in, with others. Thank you so much.

Priya, you have a different area. Let's move the map. Move over into India. I remember when you and Rami were preparing, you said the conditions are different, but it's like warfare in the streets. It's like warfare in the slums. You identified with Rami with a little different makeup of conditions but no difference in the poverty and no difference in the pain and no difference in your life as a mom of two youngsters. Talk to us a little bit about your challenges, your rewards, and what this meant in the lives and impact on those that you've been in touch with.

Priya: Sure.

With the challenges of creating this business, I would tell that being a mom of two little boys, personal time took a back seat for a couple of years while I was building this business because what I did is I started this company in 2009, so my kids were still young, they hadn't started their actual school. I spent a lot of time, like about four to five months of my time in India.

[0:35:02]

I used to go to the slums. I used to travel between New Delhi and Mumbai, go to the slums, work with the people in the slums and teach them how to do things, what does it require to bring the products to the global audience, how to work.

Let me tell you, we had, at that point, very minimal resources in terms -- we had those old machines which are flat and which work with the grease. These people, because they are electric people, they live in slums where there's no electricity, there's no proper sanitation, there is no good drinking water. The workshop in which we work has electricity and that's where we work. We were hopeful. We had dreams in our eyes.

I told other people that you need to learn to question other people. Even if I'm going to give you opportunities, you need to learn to question me. That is what is needed, that you know why I'm doing this, what I am doing this, how am I going to do. That is the strategic part of creating something new, which can -- who knows? -- can become very big down the line.

On the operation side of the business, there were various challenges after I started showing the products in the US. My company is not just creating fashionable accessories. It has a socioeconomic piece attached to it. What I wanted to do is I want to develop strategic partnerships with nonprofits, global organizations and for-profit organizations so I can expand.

The biggest challenge was how do I go to these organizations. I have a story. I have a proposal. How do I propose it to them? It's very difficult being a fresh youth entrepreneur to get the attention of the right audience.

The second challenge that I faced was marketing. I have this excellent idea. I have a product which I know is going to have a huge demand in the market. How do I market it to the right audience and buyers? I will say that Youth Trade was very instrumental in making that connection.

The last and the most important element is the capital. Once I launched my products in Whole Foods, there is a demand for the products. Now what route do I take to secure the capital?

I'm pretty sure that is the common question that every startup, especially a young startup business, is how to secure the capital. Do I go to the bank? Do I go to a venture capitalist or do I take angel funding?

If you go to a venture capitalist there were -- a lot of my friends and my colleagues from my past job as a consultant, they said you should approach a venture capitalist. But I had hesitant like, "What if I had approached a venture capitalist, it's a mission-driven business, just to get those numbers? What happens if your mission gets sidelined?" I don't want that to happen because tomorrow, if this business doesn't turn the way I want it to go, then I still have a way to go and find a new job.

The people that I work with, I have this relationship where we are so loyal and we are so honest to each other that I don't want them to go back to their poverty. I told them we are going to go slow and steady and we are to going to build this up piece by piece very slowly.

To do that, this year, actually, in February, I gave them no-interest-free loan, which I call the revolving loan, so that we got really high-end sophisticated machines so that we could start looking at the mass production side of it because the embroidery and everything that we were doing is really handmade. But if you really want to compete as a brand, then there should be some part of it where we should be able to do batches of production.

Those are the challenges. In a nutshell, I will say that every day starts with a new challenge which can be met and a dream for a better tomorrow, which can be achieved through hard work and perseverance.

On the rewards side, I said earlier that every day I feel that I'm making a difference in the life of these people I'm working with. One day, I believe that, with their help, I will make a change, a change that will improve their lives and uplift them from their current economic situation. One day, I hope that these people will at least have minimum basic necessities, like electricity, proper sanitation, and clean drinking water.

[0:40:06]

In Mumbai, especially in the monsoon, if you read the paper, you will see there's drainage, there is dirt, there is -- it's so bad. These people don't even have proper sanitation. That's basic stuff that they need because, that way, diseases can be avoided, healthcare costs can be reduced

because they are people too. That's what I see. This is a really rewarding and fulfilling job that I'm doing.

Philip: Phyllis?

Phyllis: Yes, Philip?

Philip: Hi there. Pardon me, I just wanted to, first of all, just say I'm just so impressed with this conversation. I also want to invite people who are listening on the phone to please press *2 if you have a question. If you're on the webcast, if you can go ahead and type it in, we'll read it.

Phyllis, I'll be back in a minute with a question or two, so please continue.

Phyllis: Thank you for that. I think they're ready.

Philip: Are you?

Phyllis: I think they're ready for the questions, if we have some. I did want to touch upon the gender issue with Priya and Rami because there is -- Accelerating Women Entrepreneurs was created to bring women more into the marketplace and get balance, not to displace the male energy and the men, but to actually bring balance back in. There is a little bit of that around that issue that I think Priya might be able to talk to and Rami. But we can work that around the question, Philip, if we have one to start with.

Philip: No, please, I would like to hear that, about the gender also.

Phyllis: All right.

Rami, you're actually in there helping the women, which you're role modeling. Men are absolutely essential to the gender question. You have a unique role here that you're facilitating an entirely women-based business. I wonder if you have any comments about that or have you any takeaway that you've been reflecting on about that?

And then, shift it to you, Priya, because I know you've given this some deep thought and even have offered a manifesto to pull together your aspirations and your hopes for the women and information for the rest of us to understand that situation better.

So Rami, I'd like to start with you.

Rami: Okay. It's kind of hard from my perspective, talking about this question, but I'll give it my best.

In Bethlehem, for the most part, the society is still male-dominated. Women do not have as much freedom as women in the US do. That's not the case for everyone; but that seems to be mostly the case with the women that my mom is working with. Women who come from poor families, they tend to do a little worse than women who come from well-to-do families. My mom is mostly working with women who come from poor families.

I would imagine, if I were in mom's shoes and working with all of these women in Bethlehem, it would be really hard because the women over there that my mom is dealing with really feel more comfortable dealing with another woman as opposed to dealing with a man. Their families might also have some pressure on them, why are you dealing with this man and so forth.

It's been a good thing that my mom is actually the one female running the business in Bethlehem. But frankly, on a side note, I feel like in Palestine overall, women power is essentially -- I feel like it's rising. It's almost like a silent revolution. In my mind, I feel like women have really, for the most part, improved. I'm talking about, in general, the whole population.

[0:45:01]

We have a friend, Maysoun and I, who came to college with us. I met my wife when I was in college in Birzeit for one year. We have a friend who actually left her town, came to study by herself in Ramallah and ended up staying in Ramallah and working by herself. She's not married. She's just there, working. This sort of thing would be almost unheard of 20, 30 years ago.

We do see changes. We do see women longing and getting some independence and some freedom. These tend to be more women who are more well-to-do or not necessarily well-to-do, but they really want to make a difference.

It did make a difference that my mom is running this as a woman in Bethlehem.

Here in the US, I don't see really any difference whether my wife is running it, my mom or whoever, or me running it. I could see them doing it as good as me or anyone.

Phyllis: Thank you. Thank you for that.

Priya, I know you have something to share on this. I'd love to hear, if that's okay, Philip. Do we have time? Just before we get started, did we have a question we need to take first?

Philip: No. Please answer this and then I've got questions.

Phyllis: Okay. Go ahead, Priya.

Priya: Sure.

In the US and even in India, I'm very comfortable running this company as woman-owned business because the one good part about India is it's a very open society. But in the slums that I work, it is still male-dominated. I want to be a role model for the women artisans who work for me. They have immense potential but extreme family pressures.

I'm going to read a manifesto, which I wrote. It's a very poetic manifesto. It's called "She's a Woman, Just like You." This is a manifesto I wrote based on the plight of one woman artisan working for me.

She's just 35 years old. She's a second wife of her husband. She has four kids. She was and is still abused and tortured by her husband and their extended family because she's trying to be independent and make ends meet for her family while her husband is not working. She sold the product for me. I'm sure, as even Rami said, this might be happening to many women around the world.

I'm going to read this poetic manifesto. It's called "She's a Woman, Just like You." It starts this way:

"She's a woman, just like you. She cares the way you do. She thinks the way you do. She has a voice, just like you.

"But, she cannot speak -- speak against the injustice done to her; speak against her own people shattering her dreams; speak against opportunity taken away from her. But she is a woman, just like you.

"Eating dinner in candlelight is considered a romantic experience for you. Eating dinner in candlelight is a way of life for her because there's no electricity in her house. But she's a woman, just like you.

"You pay money to get bottled water. She does too. You pay for a reason when tap water flows in your house. But she pays it for a reason too, as there is no tap in her house. But she is a woman, just like you.

"You are surrounded by children. She's surrounded by them too. Her children act the way your children do. The only difference is your children are more nourished and her children are malnourished. But she's a woman, just like you.

"For you night is considered pleasant as you dream for a new tomorrow. But for her, night can be a wake up to no tomorrow.

"She's tortured and abused in front of her kids.

"A sister, like her, some days succumbs to acid attack. A daughter, like her, is slaughtered in front of her own community.

"In hopes and eyes, she still feels she's a woman, just like you.

"She sees hell on earth every day in her life. But, she is hopeful for a better tomorrow. Her today is bad. Her tomorrow can be good because she's positive. She's a woman, just like you.

"We are all children of this beautiful world. Educate our men. Educate our community. Give them opportunities which will give them sanity.

"She needs your support, not your sympathy because she's a woman, just like you.

"She wants to explore. She wants to excel. She wants to learn. She wants to live.

"She has the will. Show her the way because she's a woman, just like me, she's a woman, just like you. "

Thank you.

[0:50:03]

Philip: Beautiful.

Priya: Thank you.

Philip: Phyllis, there's a question -- yeah, that is just...

Phyllis: Yeah, there's a lot there.

Philip: Beautiful.

Phyllis: Bless your heart, Priya.

Philip: Thank you so much, Priya.

Phyllis: Thank you for being the voice of that woman, just like you.

Priya: Thank you.

Philip: Phyllis, I've got a couple of questions here.

I first want to acknowledge the heart, the commitment and the passion of both Priya and Rami. Thank you so much for who you are and what you're doing. Also, thank you, Phyllis and Joyce, for collaborating together with Rami and Priya.

The first question from [Participant] in Colorado is, "How do I purchase your products?" It's for both Rami and Priya.

Priya: I'll start. Okay, go ahead, Rami.

Rami: Okay. For me, for Bethlehem Hands, it's really on peacethroughcommerce.org and just click on Shop Here and you will get to the products that we're selling at this point.

Priya: For me, my products, actually, I have an online store. We are currently revamping it. They will be available before holidays online on earthfrendz.com around November 1. If you're based in the United States, especially in the New England area, in the State of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut or Maine, you can purchase it at Whole Foods Market.

Philip: Wonderful, thank you.

Next question is, "How are you two benefiting through Youth Trade by learning from one another and other young entrepreneurs?"

Priya: My company, EarthFrendz is a Youth Trade-certified company and it has opened so many opportunities. The living example is I'm speaking today at this summit. It is because of Youth Trade Phyllis was able to see my work and that's how she connected with me.

Through Youth Trade actually, I got an opportunity to go to the United Nations' ISAP conference. Now I'm going to go back there in October.

Youth Trade has not only helped me to get my foot in the stores of big retailers, like national chains, but on a strategic level because, as I said, my company has a socioeconomic aspect to it. It's helping me to make that strategic relationship as well.

Philip: And Rami?

Rami: I believe the question was, "How do you work together to benefit from Youth Trade?" Priya and I and Phyllis and Joyce actually, we spoke a couple of times about Youth Trade and what Youth Trade means for people 35 years and younger and what opportunities they bring and how they can help us.

Bethlehem Hands just actually started working with Youth Trade just recently. And thanks to help from Priya, we seem to be on track.

Philip: Okay, great.

Next question here is for Rami. Actually, Rami, this one's from me, if you don't mind. Earlier in the Summer of Peace, we interviewed Rami Elhanan and Bassam Aramin who are with Combatants For Peace and The Parents' Peace Circle. And then, on Sunday, we're interviewing two people from Jerusalem, a rabbi and also a Sufi teacher. I'm wondering if you've connected with many groups that are bridging Israel and Palestine and if so, if that's been helpful; and if not, are you interested in any connections there.

Rami: We haven't really, mainly because with Bethlehem Hands and for me, here specifically, my full-time job is taking so much of my time and my family; the three kids have been really taking some of my time. We've been steadily improving, but the issue of time is hindering some of that.

[0:55:05]

I would always love to make contact with people who do similar things, so, I would surely like to get contacts from you. I guess maybe Phyllis can provide you or you probably have my email and phone number. If you email me those, I would love to interact with them.

Philip: Sure, I'd be happy to. I was just thinking because these people were so passionate about helping to have a peaceful resolution there.

Phyllis, we're almost running out of time here, so I'll pass it back to you for closing comments.

Phyllis: I do want to add on that last question that that really is what Rami's mother has been involved with for over a year is the beyondwords.org.il organization that brings Palestinian and Jewish women together in practices that encourage understanding and dialogue which helps to address the pain that they jointly experience. As Richard Rohr says, "Pain which is not transformed is transmitted."

The work that they're doing and now that the work that Peace Through Commerce is doing in the AWE Program, we're starting an institute next year. We have an Indiegogo campaign on the website now for Israeli-Palestinian workshops in leadership and peacebuilding; and really, Rami and Aida will probably be participating in that. We would love your connection too to invite the other groups, Philip, who are involved to know about the institute that bring the Palestinian and Jewish women together in the institute for peacebuilding through commerce. I want to mention that.

I'd like to ask Rami and Priya for, crisply, one or two things that the listeners can do to make it real for them to either assist youth entrepreneurs in building peace through commerce or themselves take part in that activity.

Priya, if you could, if you have one or two suggestions for making it real. And Rami, you too. That would be awesome.

Rami: Priya, you want to go first?

Priya: You can go first, if you want. I'll go after you.

Rami: Okay.

I'd say more than support through financial support and buying products, I'd say people need to keep the faith. Faith is very important. I'm not talking about be religious, I'm talking about belief that something is going to happen.

Pray with belief that something is going to happen. Have conviction and really have a belief that this will happen and it will happen.

If you go to a bar looking for trouble, you will find trouble. If you go to the bar looking for pleasure, you will find pleasure. Whatever you're looking for, you will find it. Same thing with this: look for it and you will find it.

Belief is very, very important.

I encourage people to talk about it, but believe that this is going to happen and reignite the peace process.

It feels like to a lot of people in Palestine that almost the peace process is abandoned. No one is talking about it. We're talking about it here, but they don't know about it. A lot of people don't know that other people around the world are talking about peace. I think keep talking about is what I would suggest.

Phyllis: Thank you. Thank you so much.

Priya?

Priya: Yeah, sure.

What I would say is that every one of us makes a difference in our community. If we come together, we can make the change. I believe that prosperity is directly related to peace. So, in your own communities, in your own areas, if can empower and encourage people who come from different walks of life, then they can have a sustainable livelihood in their communities. This will bring prosperity in their lives, which, in turn, will bring peace.

[1:00:14]

Apart from that, I can only say that hard work, perseverance is what helps.

For a woman entrepreneur, like me, I would just say that support my business, support Youth Trade, support Peace Through Commerce and other organizations around the world who are doing a phenomenal job. Also, help us make the right connections because I think everything is connected to a network.

Those are, I think, giveaways or takeaways for my side.

Phyllis: Thank you. And thank The Shift Network because you said the golden word. The "shift" is that network that's shifting us to that new level of connection that will make it happen. So thank you, Philip.

Philip: You're welcome. Again, Phyllis, thank you. And Rami and Priya, thank you so much.

Priya: Thank you.

Rami: Philip.

Philip: Phyllis, just so people know, they can go to The Shift Network website, to the resources section. We now have on there Peace Through Commerce, Youth Trade, as well as how to purchase Bethlehem Hands products, we have EarthFrendz. You can go there and find those resources.

Also, I want to invite our friends who are listening to join us Sunday for a call from Jerusalem, Sunday morning at nine o'clock, Pacific time, 12:00 a.m. East Coast time.

Then, we'll be having Mark Naseck, together with Ibrahim Jaffe and Rabbi Yoel Glick with us, leading a meditation with people joining around the world. This is a buildup to global meditations which are taking place on September 21 where there are literally hundreds of groups and hundreds of cities around the world that are going to participate in what could be the world's largest meditation for peace simultaneously in history. The email that goes out tomorrow will have more information about that.

Again, a big thanks again to Phyllis, Peace Through Commerce, again to our special guests, Priya and Rami.

To all the listeners, wherever you are around the world, whether it's morning, afternoon, evening or night, thank you for joining us and have a peaceful rest of your time.

All right, thank you. Bye-bye.

[1:02:56]

End of Audio