



# LET'S TALK equality

## What Is Privilege?

I do not know where exactly I grew up. It is an interesting question that I ask myself all the time. I was born in Tajikistan, where I did not live long. Ever since I was young, my parents wanted me to get educated in other countries. Back then, I thought that education was one of the only reasons they were sending me to these countries. But I never thought that they did this, so I would value what I have even more. One of the hardest things to do is to teach people the value of what they have. If people will value what they have, they will know how privileged they are. Sometimes, as I have learned, it can be one thing that you saw in your life that can make you appreciate things more and understand how privileged you are.

It was the end of the summer, August of 2004 when I made my first trip at the age of nine. I flew to a boarding school in England in order to get my education there, at least that is what I thought. I never really realized how much I had at home before I went to a boarding school. The first day I moved in to my room, I asked one of the "dorm parents" when someone would be coming to do my laundry. All she did was laugh really loud, give me detergent and some coins while pointing at the laundry room. Right there was the first time I realized how privileged I was back home compared to where I am now.

Our school was very diverse. We had people from all over the world from different races, religious beliefs and mentalities. There was no racism or any kind of separation because the school policies were very strict. Most importantly, it is because we were introduced to all of these things at a young age. Some might think that the same thing happens in America. Kids go to middle school and are introduced to a diversified group of people. That is true, but it is completely different when you have to live, eat, do sports and go to school with those people. That is the actual time when people start to understand each other and open their minds to a lot of other things. I am so privileged because I experienced a lot of these things at a young age and realized that education is not the only reason my parents sent me abroad.

Later, I was sent to Dubai, a very diverse city. Over 85 percent of people who live there are foreigners. The school I went to in Dubai had the same concept as all the other schools I attended; British private school, school uniform. Students are separated into what they called "houses." Students received their ties according to what "house" they belonged to. This school was identical to all the ones I was in before but the main difference was that I did not live on campus. Almost all kids at the age of thirteen live in their country with their parents. That was not the case with me. I lived over two thousand miles away from my parents, in a different country with a maid and a driver who were like parents to me.

Every Saturday, our driver had a day off. He told me that he was going to visit his friends that lived on the other side of Dubai, the old town. I decided to go with him, because I have never been to that

part of the city. I was completely speechless when I saw the conditions people lived in. Over eight people lived in a one bedroom apartment. I have never seen that before and at the time I tried to understand, why people who live twenty minutes away from me have to live in these conditions. I still do not have an answer for that.

At the age of sixteen, I was already in the United States, studying in a private preparatory school outside of Boston, Massachusetts. I will never forget the first time I went home to Tajikistan from America. Every year on December 30, we have our family dinner with over fifty people. Towards the end of the night, my father said something, that my cousins and I would keep in our minds. He said, "Do not ever look down on people. Do not think that you are better than someone just because you are more privileged than they are in certain ways. Even a kid from a village can teach you something." I woke up early in the morning the next day and was told to go to the office. My father gave me a list of over a hundred names and addresses and told me to visit at least ten of them. There were multiple trucks outside the office with food and supplies for families who lived in poverty.

When I entered one of the houses, the owners of the house met us at the door. Once the wife saw all the groceries and supplies we brought, she hugged me and started crying out loud. She said, "Tonight is going to be a real New Years Eve." The longer I stayed, the more my heart melted. I was about to leave but the owners of the house wanted me to come inside so they could introduce me to their son. Once I entered the house, I saw will-power, happiness, gratefulness and privilege in his eyes. He was lying on a mattress, his hands, legs and hips disproportional. He was born disabled. When I got closer to him comma he tried to get up and sit on the mattress. I tried to help him out, and he smiled at me and said, "Do not help me, I will do it myself." When I asked him and his parents if they need any help, he smiled at me again and said, "Everything is great!" No matter what I asked him he always responded positively and with a smile on his face. When I got back home, most of my questions were answered. They were not answered to me in words, but they were shown to me by my parents.

As my father said once, "Sunday is always followed by a Monday. Make sure you are always prepared for that Monday." The reason why my parents sent me away from Tajikistan at a young age was because they did not want me to be one of those spoilt kids from a well known family. Sometimes you have to be away from what you have in order to really understand how privileged we all are. The fact that I can write this and you can read this is already a huge privilege. There are people in worse situations than us, therefore there is no reason for us to complain about all the little things that do not really matter. I am very grateful to my parents and the life I have. They taught me how to value everything I have and to know how privileged I am.