

**A Thousand Days in Solitary Confinement**

Marwan Barghouti

## Dedication

To the guardian of my dreams, my life companion, and my beloved wife—the lawyer, activist, and exemplary Palestinian and Arab woman, Fadwa Barghouti.

To my beloved children, Qassam, Ruba, Sharaf, and Arab.

To the great people of Palestine.

To the Arab and Islamic nations.

To all who struggle against occupation, colonialism, oppression, and injustice.

To my fellow prisoners in chains and confinement.

Marwan Barghouti



## The Promise of the Free... and Freedom

By Zahi Wehbe

There is a promise that binds me with Marwan Barghouti—a special promise that adds to our shared dreams and aspirations. It's a promise of inevitable freedom and an anticipated appearance on my show, Stay Home. I once had this same wish for Souha Bechara, Anwar Yassin, Nabih Awada, Abdul Karim Obeid, Samir Kuntar, and dozens of other prisoners. That wish came true.

Yes, the dream was realized. Those fighters were freed from the confines of their long imprisonment, liberated from the grip of the oppressive Israeli occupation. They embraced the freedom they had earned, having sacrificed the best years of their lives and the beauty of their dreams for it. They became exceptional guests on a program that carried their voices and cause throughout the days. Wishes, however, don't come true by mere magic or fate—they are the certainty of hope.

No jailer, regardless of their power to oppress, can break the will of a free fighter. No prison, however strong its iron bars, can eclipse the bright sun of freedom that is destined to rise for Marwan Barghouti and his fellow prisoners. Thousands are thrown into Israeli prisons, as the occupying state tries in vain to imprison the Palestinian dream of freedom and independence.

Of course, wishes alone do not create freedom, nor does the hope we cling to spare us the hardships of struggle. Freedom requires sacrifices, written in blood, tears, ink, and all forms of resistance against an occupier who understands no other language and yields only to strength. Fighters and leaders like Marwan Barghouti are the true source and makers of this strength, making them a prime target for a fierce and arrogant enemy who is, inevitably, defeated in the end.

Ink cannot match the power of blood or tears, nor is it expected to. But it can, at the very least, help counter the erasure and forgetting. As Ghassan Kanafani's characters realized in *Men in the Sun*, we must “knock on the walls of the tank” so that we don't suffer their fate and give no excuse to those who later ask, “Why didn't you knock?” We must raise our voices in defense of the just and noble cause of the Palestinian people in their ongoing struggle for freedom and independence.

Within this cause lies the essential issue of the thousands of prisoners held in Israeli jails—an issue often neglected in literary and media circles. If we have grown disillusioned with official Arab support, why do writers, artists, and journalists not give this noble cause the attention it deserves? Or is there a collective resignation from all matters of conscience? The tank Kanafani's characters did not knock on becomes, in this context, a symbol of our complicit silence toward a deeply moral and cultural cause: that of the prisoners. This issue, almost forgotten, risks turning us into prisoners of our own apathy and indifference.

I began this introduction by mentioning the promise to host Marwan Barghouti on Stay Home, as this program was my initial link to him—not only through hosting his dedicated, activist lawyer wife, Fadwa Barghouti, and the family relationship that formed between our families, but also through the show's commitment to the cause of prisoners, repeatedly highlighting it since the show began more than fifteen years ago.

Having personally experienced Israeli detention during the 1982 invasion in “Atlit” (Occupied Palestine) and “Ansar” (South Lebanon), I became more aware of the importance of prisoners' issues in the media and the positive impact it has on their morale. This is especially meaningful when prisoners can watch television, as happens in some Israeli prisons—not due to any supposed democracy, but because of the long, grueling struggle of the prisoners' movement over decades. Through their resistance, they have achieved some rights, though at a high cost, including many martyrs and wounded.

In this book, which I reviewed without making major changes to its structure or the opinions it conveys—since those belong to its author—I allowed it to flow in the language of lived experience and spontaneous narration. The speaker here is a political and field leader, not a writer or poet. Despite Marwan's high level of culture and broad knowledge, the language and style in this book reflect his unique experience as a leader behind bars. He brings us his account of solitary confinement between 2002 and 2005, offering a testimony of an extraordinary fighter who spent most of his life in the field. He didn't limit his struggle to theory or instigation but actively resisted, living through daily struggles against occupation, enduring arrest, interrogation, and exile. The testimony is written with the ink of patience and resilience, just as it is written with the ink of awareness, knowledge, and the culture of great experiences, shared with his indomitable people. The reader will sense Marwan Barghouti's profound understanding of his environment, and will discover the multifaceted dimensions of his exceptional personality: as a leader, a fighter, a politician, a scholar, a husband, a father—qualities all preceded by the noblest and most important attribute: that of being a human being, which Marwan embodies.

In his book, Marwan Barghouti exposes the brutal nature of Israeli practices, revealing the “Nazi-like” conditions in Israeli detention camps and the barbaric methods of torture employed by Israeli officers and soldiers against prisoners and detainees. As a political leader and elected member of parliament, Barghouti himself endured such violence. One can only imagine the fate of other prisoners and detainees, many of whom never had the chance for media or political attention—or even a proper trial, which Barghouti describes as invalid due to the illegitimacy of the occupation itself. This is emphasized in his defense, not before a court, but before history.

No account of Marwan Barghouti is complete without mentioning, albeit inadequately, his wife, the activist Fadwa Barghouti, whom he refers to as “the guardian of the dream” in his book. Her continuous struggle ensures that the cause of her husband and his fellow prisoners remains alive in the conscience and hearts of people. Fadwa, who has traveled to over forty countries (and whom I had the honor of hosting three times on

(*Stay Home*), represents a living example of the Palestinian woman: a lover, wife, and mother who resists on every front. Marwan, too, is a living model—not only of a fighter but also of a husband and father, as seen in his letters to his wife and children (including his letter to Qassam on page 174, who, like his father, endured the experience of imprisonment).

I write these words filled with the strength of hope, which convinces me that the day will come when Marwan Barghouti will break free from his prison. This will occur, just as surely as the day of declaring a free, independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. As Marwan wrote to me in one of his letters, our meeting will be in a liberated Jerusalem, where we will sit on its ancient walls, savoring a cup of coffee in the Old City, surrounded by the sounds of the Al-Aqsa Mosque's call to prayer and the bells of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. From there, I will host a program titled *Stay in Jerusalem...*

I am confident that this will happen, not merely out of enthusiasm or to lift spirits, nor just through metaphor and linguistic flourish, but because I have a deeply rooted, steadfast faith that the sacrifices of the Palestinian people will one day bloom in the flags of victory and the banners of freedom, as dark as the faces of the children of the earth who salted the ground with their bodies and expanded the sky with their free, soaring spirits despite the chains of their captors and the schemes of the occupiers.

Tomorrow,  
There will remain of the wall only the trace of the wall.  
There will remain of the siege only the stories of the siege.  
There will remain of the fire only the remnants of the fire.

Tomorrow,  
The ravens of steel will collapse.  
Their armored vehicles will become scrap metal.  
And on the star of resentment, a child from Palestine will step.

This excerpt reflects deep optimism for the future, envisioning the triumph of the Palestinian struggle and the eventual fall of the oppressive structures, symbolized through the imagery of crumbling walls and fire. The child stepping on the "star of resentment" serves as a powerful metaphor for the resilience and hope for a liberated Palestine.

From now until then, a salute to Marwan Barghouti and his family (Fadwa, Rabi, Qassam, Sharaf, Arab) and to his people, who, with their patience and steadfastness, make us, as Israeli occupation grows more brutal and vicious, more certain that this occupation is destined to end, and that the dawn is near, no matter how long the night. Our reliance is not just on the inevitability of history but also on the inevitability of liberation. This is what we sense with sweetness and ease from this book—despite the harshness of the experience—which teaches us a lesson in patience and resilience in the face of the vile torture methods used by the Israeli jailer, as well as the suffering of

imprisonment and the steadfastness of the fighter, as embodied by Marwan Barghouti. It serves as an important document in the revolutionary memory of the Palestinian people, a memory for the future that carries with it, inevitably, the shining freedom in the faces of Abu Qassam and his comrades.

## **Chapter One**

### **The Confrontation**

"If the price of my people's freedom is the loss of my own, then I will pay that price."

This quote expresses the selfless commitment of a leader willing to sacrifice everything for the cause of his people's liberation, embodying the spirit of resistance against oppression.



## The Confrontation

### In the Slaughterhouse:

It was around 4:00 PM on Monday, April 15, 2002, when I found myself inside the interrogation room at the Moskobiya Detention Center in occupied Jerusalem, one of the most notorious and dangerous interrogation centers controlled by the Israeli Shin Bet (General Security Service). Prisoners refer to the Moskobiya facility as the "slaughterhouse" because of the severe torture, repression, and arbitrary violations inflicted on detainees. Many prisoners have died in this facility during intense interrogations, which are internationally deemed illegal.

Notably, the Moskobiya is a building that once belonged to the Russian church and was seized by force. It contains numerous rooms and sections for detention and interrogation, as well as a specialized investigation wing.

Until 1994, the year the Palestinian National Authority was established, the occupying state maintained interrogation centers in various Palestinian cities, including Jerusalem, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Hebron, Nablus, Jenin, Tulkarm, and Gaza. Other centers included Moskobiya, Saffron, Petah Tikva, Jalama, and some secret locations.

After the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority, Al-Maskobiya, Beit Hatikva, Jalama, Ashkelon, Ofer, in addition to the secret interrogation center number 1391 and other unknown centers, became some of the most important interrogation and detention centers operated by the Israeli intelligence agency, the "Shabak", for interrogations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The celebratory scene was evident on the officers and men of the "Shabak" during my arrest... It was a moment in which they felt successful and superior, and it increased their sense of arrogance and pride, especially since it came after several failed attempts to assassinate me using all possible methods and forms.

They mistakenly thought that by arresting me, they had arrested the Intifada... This was evident on their faces, as if the great Intifada would stop, not realizing that it is a popular resistance movement that does not cease with the arrest of one individual or even with the arrest of hundreds and thousands...

A large number of intelligence leaders and officers entered the interrogation room during the early hours to verify for themselves that the person before them was Marwan Barghouti. There were yellow, hateful glares and racist animosity emanating from their expressions, words, and frantic movements, which were not without an element of display.

Among these intelligence leaders and officers was the head of the interrogation department in the "Shabak," who introduced himself as "Abu Sharif." He was in his fifth decade of life, speaking with extreme insolence and arrogance. He had practiced the

profession of interrogating thousands of fighters for many years, unleashing much of his Zionist hatred and contempt for Palestinians and Arabs.

"You are supposed to be dead."

Two hours after my arrival in the interrogation room at Al-Maskobiya, a senior official entered, and the others present showed him special respect. He asked me directly if I knew him or remembered him, but I could not. When he said, "Do you remember the interrogation in 1978 in the Ramallah cells?" then I remembered. I examined his face carefully and said, "Yes, you are the one called 'Ghazzal.'" He informed me that he was now the deputy head of the "Shabak," and his name was Ofer (his full name was later published after his resignation in 2005 as Ofer Dekel). He said that when he worked as a coordinator with Palestinian security officials in the Authority, he sent me severe warnings, and I did not show any signs of retreat. He added that I was supposed to be dead. Ofer further stated that I had wasted my life and my future, and he didn't think I would have any future. "This is the end," he said, "and I will spend whatever remains of my life behind prison walls and bars."

I stared into his eyes, remembering him as a young man named "Ghazzal," when he participated in the interrogation with me in 1978, a quarter of a century ago. Now, here we were meeting again, and the battle was not over yet...

It is the battle between a fighter for the freedom of his people and country, and a killer, occupier, jailer, and torturer who commits crimes. We meet, and I am still holding in my hand the banner of freedom and resistance.

I expected that the interrogator "Ghazzal" would feel failure and shame, because the high school student he met a quarter of a century ago did not calm down, nor was he deterred. Instead, he continued his journey with more resilience and defiance, so the path of freedom and struggle continues, as long as "Ghazzal," who represents the occupation and the arrogance of the occupiers, remains on Palestinian land...

I said to him: "You grew up with power and oppression, but I grew up with pride and strength, the pride and dignity of my people. Power will inevitably fade, but the people and their will remain."

In the presence of the interrogation expert and the torturer of detainees, "Ghazzal," I remembered that brutal interrogation I underwent at that time. It involved three interrogators, the most horrific, cruel, and savage of whom was an officer named "Sami." At their hands, stained with the pain of my people, I was subjected to physical and psychological torture, including "shabah" (a form of shackling), beatings, humiliation, degradation, and threats. They were insistent on accusing me of being a member of a Fatah militant cell, for which several of its members were later sentenced to life imprisonment, and they remain in Israeli prisons to this day. Among them are Fakhri Barghouti (Abu Shadi) and Nael Barghouti (Abu Noor). Most of the detainees at that time endured the harshest forms of brutal torture, and I do not believe I underwent

the harshest of them, but perhaps a more moderate form. Among the worst methods was the "shabah," which involves standing with hands and feet shackled to a wall for long hours. Additionally, a large, foul-smelling sack was placed over my head, covering my face and obstructing my breathing, and it was impossible to move it during the long duration of the "shabah," making life and the world seem dark, gloomy, and terrifying, with frightening shadows.

The presence of "Ghazzal" before me now made me unconsciously feel my body and recall all my pains, especially when the interrogator Sami insisted that I strip completely and forced me to stand completely naked. This was difficult and traumatic at the time for a schoolboy who had never been exposed except as a child. That interrogator insisted that I spread my legs so he could deliver a powerful blow to my genitals, which was extremely painful, causing me to lose consciousness completely. When I regained consciousness, I found myself lying on the ground, blood flowing from my head where it had struck the rough wall, leaving a permanent wound on my forehead. I woke up after the interrogators poured water on my head, while Sami's voice echoed in my ear, mocking me: "Now, I believe you will never be able to have children. You will be deprived of having children for life, because people like you will only give birth to terrorists and killers."

Now, in this moment, I wished to see the interrogator Sami to tell him: My son Qassam has grown into a man, carrying the banner and the idea, just like thousands of other young fighters. The idea did not die, and Palestine is not barren as you had imagined.

Everything I went through was a simple example of what tens of thousands of fighters endured, who challenged the torturers and the occupying jailers.

I prefer death over living as a slave under your occupation.

I remembered this man, Ofer Dekel – Ghazzal – sitting across from me, now a general in the "Shabak" and the deputy head of the agency. I recalled everything that happened to me a quarter of a century ago, as I continue, with my people and alongside the fighters and militants, the journey for freedom and the struggle for return and independence.

Despite being a prisoner in the hands of the one who kidnapped me from the midst of my people, I spoke to him with pride, dignity, and national arrogance, even with pride in my lifelong struggle. I found myself greater than all his military ranks and positions, and he appeared small in front of me when he said, "This is the mistake of your life." I replied to him, "There is no mistake. A people who seeks freedom never errs... And just as I overcame the interrogation and detention a quarter of a century ago in our first encounter and confrontation, you will see that I will overcome it this time as well. You should expect that we will meet more than once, as long as you are a jailer and an occupier, and as long as I am a seeker of justice and freedom."

Before he could open his mouth to respond, I said to him: "I prefer death over living as a slave under your occupation and boots... I take pride in the great Intifada, which will only stop when the flags of victory are raised in the city of Jerusalem, the capital of Palestine."

The general and his colleagues heard my words and left without returning. A few minutes later, a team of interrogators entered, and one of them asked me to sit on a chair fixed with iron in the corner of the room. He tied my feet to the chair, and my hands were placed behind the chair, behind my back, and were also restrained. I was forced to sit in this strange position, and the journey of torment began in the interrogation, lasting for more than a hundred days of continuous questioning.

The chair I sat on was fixed to the ground with a small knot of thick, rigid plastic, held in place by iron stakes. It had a protruding backrest that was uncomfortable, with restraints at the back, causing the person's back to curve. This method of torture is called "breaking the back."

The seat of the chair had four protrusions that caused pain, making sitting on it for long periods a difficult, even bloody, task at times.

From the first day, the interrogator placed a black blindfold over my eyes, which was so dark that I couldn't see anything through it or around me.

A number of interrogators entered the room, introducing themselves mostly with Arabic names, except for a few of them. There was a fixed team of interrogators consisting of eight officers, and I still remember all their names to this day, such as "Gabi," "Emilio," and "Adam." Additionally, they would rely on another team of about twenty officers or more, bringing the total number of those who participated in the interrogation to around thirty officers.

These torturers, the interrogators, took turns during the rounds of questioning over the course of twenty-four hours. They used the method of sleep deprivation, even preventing me from closing my eyes. Whenever I tried to sleep, the officer on duty would strike the table loudly to wake me up.

The deprivation of sleep was one of the harshest moments and days I ever lived through. I never expected that the lack of sleep would be such a bitter and cruel form of torture. Although I am not someone who loves to sleep and am accustomed to staying up late into the night for consecutive days, this time was different. I was forced to sit on a chair, my hands and feet bound, my eyes blindfolded, in a difficult and exhausting physical condition.

My deprivation of sleep lasted for weeks, and I was only placed in the cell three times, for less than three hours each time. It is impossible to describe the condition a person goes through when continuous lighting is aimed at them around the clock, while being bound to a chair, with the accompanying headaches and physical exhaustion.

Whenever I tried to steal a little sleep or a moment of drowsiness, I would hear a loud bang that startled my eyes, accompanied by the interrogator's shouting and screaming.

The interrogators did not only use sleep deprivation as a method of torture, but they also employed a policy of severe starvation, which led to significant weight loss, as the amount of food provided was very limited, just enough to keep the detainee alive.

The breakfast provided by the interrogators consists of four small pieces of bread, along with half a tomato or a cucumber. The lunch and dinner may vary in type, but the quantity remains very limited and doesn't satisfy hunger. There are no liquids provided except for water. Occasionally, depending on the situation, the interrogator might offer a cup of tea or coffee, and cigarettes for those who smoke. These are considered privileges granted at the interrogator's discretion, depending on how they measure the detainee's responsiveness in the interrogation. Sometimes, they are offered as a signal that the progress of the interrogation is unrelated, especially since the interrogators play two roles: the "good cop" and the "bad cop," cruel and mean. I noticed this clearly during my interrogation, as some treated me with respect and did not exert any real pressure, while others used torture, insults, humiliation, and contempt, expressing their deep-seated hatred and animosity toward Palestinians and Arabs.

This does not mean that the other team of "good cop" interrogators is less hateful. The vast majority of interrogators used all forms of insult, humiliation, vulgar insults, and hatred. Rather, they are part of the interrogation methodology, along with psychological pressure.

My experience in this interrogation differs from the previous one. It took place amidst the ongoing blessed Intifada, amidst the bloody confrontations, and in the context of the Israeli aggression moving into a stage of comprehensive attack aimed at undermining the Palestinian Authority and targeting and eliminating the leaders of the Palestinian resistance through killing, arrest, and destruction. This was part of what the rulers of Tel Aviv called "Operation Defensive Shield," which resulted in the siege of the Muqata'a and the late President Yasser Arafat's headquarters, as well as horrific massacres against civilians in the Jenin refugee camp, the Old City of Nablus, and the siege of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. This was also within the context of the heroic resistance and fedayeen operations in all the cities and towns of our Palestinian homeland.

My arrest took place at a time when prisons and interrogation cells were crowded with hundreds of fighters due to the large-scale, collective arrest campaigns carried out by the occupying army in the occupied territories. This led dozens of retired interrogation officers to return to work after being summoned. The main team that conducted my interrogation consisted of officers who had spent their lives torturing thousands of fighters and had completed their work in intelligence after serving for over twenty years. This means they had extensive experience in all forms and methods of torture.

## **You are zero**

According to my analysis, and through the nearly four months I spent in the interrogation cells, the interrogation strategy was based on the following methods:

### **First: Breaking the Back:**

This was done by sitting, with hands and feet bound, on a small metal or rigid plastic chair, which was very uncomfortable and exhausting. The seat had sharp protrusions that made sitting on it a difficult task and an additional form of torture, aside from the handcuffs. The arms were kept behind the chair around the clock—hours, days, weeks, and months—which caused extreme physical exhaustion. This occurred at a time when I was suffering from a herniated disc and severe inflammation in my back and neck, which caused constant and intense pain on the right side of my body. After about a month, blood and pus spots appeared due to prolonged sitting without interruption, which exacerbated the inflammation of the hemorrhoids, causing continuous bleeding. Along with sitting on that chair, the black blindfold was kept on my eyes at all times.

### **Second: Complete Deprivation of Sleep**

The intelligence services have intensively used this method with detainees in recent years. The reader might think that this is not as painful or exhausting, but the truth is that it is intense and painful suffering, and it closely resembles a slow death. The fact that it is slow does not negate that it is still death.

Deprivation of sleep for hours and weeks leads a person to a state of unconsciousness, causing collapse, exhaustion, and excruciating headaches, accompanied by sharp pains that feel like knife stabs.

The interrogation team would prevent me from sleeping around the clock. If I managed to doze off for a moment or a brief period, the interrogator would strike the table with his fist, shouting at the top of his lungs to wake me up in terror. The drowsiness would vanish in the frenzy of this brutal, terrorist-like shouting.

How harsh and difficult this was during the first fifty days of interrogation. I tried to take advantage of the times I was moved to another cell, sometimes to eat or relieve myself, hoping to delay for half an hour to rest my eyes and get some sleep. But it was impossible to achieve that. I found no defense but endurance, and I prayed to Allah to bless me with patience, determination, and strength, so that I could maintain my resolve and composure in this relentless and hellish, impossible war.

### **Third: Insults, Cursing, and Humiliation**

Most of the interrogation officers rely on insulting in various ways, methods, and techniques. Some of them even felt proud of interrogating Marwan Barghouti. The goal of the cursing was to humiliate and degrade, using phrases that attack a person's

dignity and humanity, often targeting the mother, sister, wife, and daughter. At its core, this reflects the moral degradation and impotence of the Israeli jailers in their attempt to degrade and dehumanize the fighter.

I felt a high degree of anger and boiling frustration in my chest and head due to the obscene curses I was subjected to, which are difficult for a person to utter or even record in these lines.

Someone might say: Let him curse, why care? He kills, destroys, assassins, arrests, demolishes, and besieges. But the impact of these words is harsh and painful, because the goal behind them is to make you feel worthless, that you mean nothing in front of his power and arrogance, and that he can do whatever he wants to you.

In my case, the insults and humiliation were not only directed at me personally, but also at what Marwan Barghout symbolizes to his people: a national struggle that represents the meanings and moral values of the Palestinian intifada and resistance against the occupier.

Among the despicable sadistic methods used by the investigators, for example, was for the investigator to put his foot between my legs on the chair, or to put his leg between my legs and get very close to my face to the point that it almost touches my face and mouth, and he begins to hurl insults and repeat obscene words such as: "You vile, cowardly, lowlife... you are nothing... you are zero, you son of a... you brother of a... you... you..."

In the face of this, you come to understand the true nature of Zionist thought, mentality, and behavior, as well as the nature of the Israeli character. You discover the extent of the moral degradation and deterioration within the Israeli security establishment, and how they treat Palestinians as if they are not human beings, not part of humanity.

#### **Fourth: Demoralization**

During the interrogation, the interrogators utter arrogant and condescending phrases in order to demoralize you. They do this by emphasizing that Israel is like a wall—anyone who strikes their head against it will have their head explode, bleed, and die. They also repeat that Israel possesses tanks, planes, artillery, and weapons, and that the Arabs failed to defeat it in 1948 and 1967. They remind you that Israel defeated Nasser, and that Egypt surrendered in 1978 at Camp David, agreeing to Israel's conditions for peace as the strongest Arab state. "So, what can you do, while Egypt couldn't achieve that?"

The investigators also used to say: "The Arabs are not on your side and they are busy with their own concerns and hate you, and they killed thousands of you in various battles, and many Arab countries do not want a Palestinian state, and the Palestinian leaderships are stupid, and failed to establish a state, and rejected partition, and Hajj Amin al-Husseini is responsible for the loss of the Palestinian people, and Yasser Arafat

is no different from Hajj Amin al-Husseini, and he wasted the opportunity to establish a state in the last Camp David summit?"

Another method of demoralization used by the interrogators was to say: "The Authority is corrupt, and its officials have become rich traders and millionaires. Many of the Authority's leaders do not want to see Marwan Barghouti free ever again; they wish he would die in prison."

They also said: "Some of the leaders of the Authority have conspired against you, and provided information about you, and they have now gotten rid of you, and you will die in prison. Your future has been lost forever, and Palestine is gone... The Palestinian leaders are cowards who send the sons of the poor and needy to death, while they and their sons flee."

They added sarcastically: "You should learn from the leaders of Israel. So-and-so in the Authority"—they mentioned a name—"has become a millionaire even though he had nothing before. The thieves are the ones leading Palestine, and Arafat's Authority must end; it is a regime of terrorism and corruption. Yasser Arafat does not believe in peace; he has deceived Israel, and the day will come when he will be finished."

I noticed that the interrogators launched a vile, sneaky, and cunning attack, focusing on politically demoralizing phrases to convey their message that sacrifice is pointless, and that all this suffering has been in vain... that a person has become alone, lost, and must seek his individual salvation.

### **Fifth: Relying on Confiscated Documents and Papers**

In the beginning, the interrogators were careful not to show any documents, even though they had been in their possession since they raided the Muqata'a, the security apparatuses, ministries, and the offices of the Fatah movement in various governorates, including the headquarters of the High Movement Committee in the West Bank, located in Ramallah, where my permanent office is.

However, after several days, the interrogators began placing some papers and documents on the table in front of me, which contained nothing of any importance. It so happened that I had never written or signed any paper that could serve as "security evidence" in the hands of Israeli intelligence. I felt that the offices and papers were not safe, despite the presence of the Palestinian Authority, and that they could raid and collect files at any time, especially after the outbreak of the intifada.

Most of the papers they found were related to my daily and routine work as a political and organizational figure. They tried to use them as a means of pressure, attempting to make me believe that they had dangerous secrets. However, their illusion quickly dissipated, and they collected the papers they had and left, in the face of my mockery of their naive minds.

## Sixth: Confessions from the Fighters

At first, the interrogators spoke about a series of confessions made by several fighters against me, mentioning some names I recognized. Later, they brought some of the confessions and read from them. At a later stage, they opened them for me to read, but I refused.

The interrogators emphasized through this method that they had dozens of testimonies from dozens of fighters. They considered these confessions to be their most important card, and believed they were sufficient to convict me according to their logic and the laws of their unjust courts.

The detainees, and it should be noted that before my arrest, they were interrogating dozens of people affiliated with the Fatah movement, and sometimes with members and activists from other factions, regarding their relationship with me. Here, the interrogators tried to focus on the concept that a leader is someone who takes responsibility upon themselves, and does not hide behind the small fighters or their soldiers. They mentioned that when Menachem Begin was arrested by the British, he declared that he was responsible and the leader of the Zionist Irgun (Etzel) organization, and took full responsibility for everything.

In this deceitful and misleading context, the interrogators claimed that the martyr Sheikh Ahmed Yassin told them: "Do not interrogate anyone, do not beat anyone; I bear full responsibility." They asserted that he had not hesitated to confess to everything. This emphasis was repeated throughout most of the interrogation with me.

On the sixth day of the interrogation, I was in a state of extreme exhaustion due to lack of sleep. They took me into the cell for the first time, and after less than half an hour, the door of Cell No. 15 at Al-Moskobiya was opened, and a person was pushed inside by a policeman. As soon as the policeman removed the black blindfold from his eyes, he immediately extended his hand, and before I could see him clearly, he greeted me warmly, introducing himself as a member of the cell that carried out the *Malon Park* operation in Netanya, in which about five Israelis were killed. He said that he had recruited the martyr who carried out the operation, and that his arrest took place in the Old City of Nablus. He also mentioned that he was from the village of Talouza and from the Al-Faris family.

This person then went on to say that he had worked as an agricultural engineer in the city of Tabuk, Saudi Arabia, and was married to two women. He confirmed that he had been arrested several times and had spent several years in Ashkelon prison. He also mentioned that he was part of Hamas's cadre. After less than ten minutes, he said that he had not been able to perform the Dhuhr (midday) prayer and began to pray, prolonging it considerably. He then started talking to me about his own interrogation, explaining that he was going through a difficult phase of it. Before I could speak to this person, the officer came and took me for another round of interrogation, so I wouldn't feel at ease. I had hoped to sleep, even if only for half an hour, but this "spy" man didn't

leave me any room to rest and kept talking until the officer arrived and escorted me to the interrogation.

When I returned to the cell the next day, I found "the person" still there, and I was in a state of extreme drowsiness and exhaustion.

He immediately asked me about my opinion on the Netanya operation, and I answered briefly. I then tried to sleep, even for just a few minutes, but he kept talking. I said to him, "Please be quiet, I want to sleep, even just a little." At that point, he actually fell silent.

I did not see this man again until the court, where he appeared disguised with a long beard, a fez, and black glasses, but I recognized him well. He testified that one of the recordings was of my voice, and that he had played the role of the interviewer speaking with me. However, there was nothing of value in that cassette recorded by the spy, except for discussions about resistance and the intifada, and the insistence on continuing and escalating the resistance—basically, what I was saying every morning and evening on every platform, in every square, demonstration, and march.

In another round, after fifteen days, I was placed in a very small cell. The interrogators brought in a young man, no older than twenty-two, who claimed he had been arrested in Ramallah, that he was from Jordan, and that he worked in the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades. This young man asked me if I knew someone by name (whom he mentioned) from the al-Qassam Brigades, insisting that this person might be suspicious and linked to Israeli intelligence. However, I did not comment on the matter and asked him to be quiet, as I was in desperate need of sleep, even if just for an hour, before being returned to the continuous "shabah" (stress position). He did not say anything after that.

In another case, when I was transferred to the Beit Tikva interrogation center and placed in Cell No. 1, which was the worst in that center, I found a person who introduced himself as being from the town of Attil near Tulkarm, the brother of one of the former key aides to President Yasser Arafat, and a member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

This person claimed that he was injured and that they were taking him for treatment, and that the interrogators had promised to transfer him to the hospital. He resembled one of President Arafat's aides very much. He introduced himself to me, but he was surprised to learn that I knew the town of Attil very well, that I had visited it several times, and that I knew its people and activists. I had even stayed there in the 1980s when I was being pursued by the occupying forces, before I was exiled abroad. I spoke to him about the intifada, the importance of steadfastness during interrogation, and the general political situation, while he was trying to find out if there was any military cooperation between me and the Popular Front, though in an indirect manner. The next day, the lawyer came to visit me, and after he left, I told the "person" that I had spoken about him to the lawyer, and that the lawyer would contact his family, asking them not to worry. The following day, this "spy" disappeared, and I only saw him again disguised like

the first one, in the courtroom. In court, he confirmed that he knew me and that he was one of the people tasked with monitoring me in Ramallah.

The truth is, these three agents who were brought in by the interrogators (against me) and placed in the cell with me, whom I saw one by one, were the only ones I saw during the four months of interrogation I spent in solitary confinement in the cells and during the interrogations.

### **Wanted: Yasser Arafat**

The interrogation with me focused on key issues and topics that the interrogators considered essential, and among the most prominent of these were:

#### **First: The Relationship with President Yasser Arafat**

The first major focus of the interrogation was the topic of my relationship with President Yasser Arafat. The interrogators' questions centered around my connection with Abu Ammar, particularly regarding funding, the decision-making process for armed resistance operations, whether he had granted me any authority or instructions to carry out such operations, and the nature of our relationship.

The interrogators would mention examples of various operations, highlighting a vast amount of papers, documents, and materials that they had stolen during the Israeli armed official terrorist raid, which the Israelis refer to as *Operation Defensive Shield*.

Several senior interrogators pointed out that clearly providing information that would incriminate President Arafat was the core of the interrogation, and that it would help me end this case, the predicament, and the arrest, which would be no less than a life sentence. They claimed that Arafat and the leadership of the Authority were not concerned with me at all, that they were not asking for my release, and that Israel was serving their interests by keeping me imprisoned.

#### **Second: The Organization and Al-Aqsa Brigades**

The second major focus of the interrogation was the accusation that I was the head of the organization, an armed group that is part of the Fatah movement. I was accused of leading the intifada and armed operations, as well as being the founder and leader of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades.

#### **Third: Arming, Funding, and Claiming Responsibility for Operations**

The interrogators charged me with allegations that I had provided dozens of weapons to various groups within the organization and the brigades, as well as funding to different armed groups. I was also accused of overseeing the execution of dozens of armed operations that led to the death of more than 104 Israelis and the injury of hundreds

more. They claimed that I had taken responsibility for these operations in the name of the brigades.

#### **Fourth: Sources of Funding**

The interrogators showed an astonishing insistence on knowing the sources of funding, whether it came from abroad or from Yasser Arafat. They wanted to know where these sources were from, why, and how the funds had arrived...?

#### **Fifth: The Relationship with the Military Wings of Palestinian Resistance Factions**

The interrogators insisted that I had extensive relationships and joint operations with the armed factions, that there was coordination between the factions in various areas, and that I had provided assistance to some of the groups affiliated with these factions.

#### **Sixth: Focusing on the Relationship with Prominent Operations**

The interrogators focused on some prominent military operations, insisting that I had prior knowledge of them and that I had overseen them. Among the most notable was the Ayn Arik operation, carried out by the two heroes, Shadi Sa'ida and Dawood Hajj from the Al-Aqsa Brigades, along with members of the security and protection unit of the National Security Forces, against an Israeli military checkpoint. In this operation, six Israeli soldiers were killed and stripped of their weapons.

The interrogators also focused on the Hadera operation, the Tel Aviv operation (at the Sea Food restaurant), and several other operations that took place on the roads, which are estimated to be twenty-six armed operations that resulted in deaths and injuries. They also emphasized the relationship with many leaders of the brigades and military operations, particularly those led by Raed Al-Karmi, Muhannad Abu Halaweh, and Ahmad Al-Birghouthi (the French).

The previous lines of interrogation, which were filled with many false accusations, were imposed upon me during the long interrogation period in a manic and hysterical manner, using the dirtiest, lowest, and most horrific methods of torture and pressure. This took place in an atmosphere of violent interrogation, where I was completely deprived of sleep and was subjected to being shackled to a chair for long periods, along with starvation, severe psychological pressure, intimidation, threats, insults, humiliation, and degradation. They also relied on documents and testimonies, in addition to transferring me for interrogation to three different centers: Al-Maskobiya, Beit Tikva, and the secret interrogation center with the number 1391.

I noticed that the interrogators made an exhausting effort in using psychological warfare to break my morale and demoralize me. They enlisted the help of veteran interrogators with extensive experience for this purpose.

One of the investigators followed a policy of continuous, uninterrupted talk for long hours without stopping, and one of them spoke for seven continuous hours. His talk was disgusting, repulsive, and insulting, aiming to diminish the importance and value of the person sitting in front of him. His speech focused on the failure of the Palestinian people, that they have no right to this country, that they are an artificial people, and that their leadership has failed generation after generation.

The investigators' talk also addressed the Arab situation, which they described as defeated, and that the Arabs are nothing more than zeros in this universe, and that they suffer from mental retardation.

On one of those long nights and days when it is difficult to know whether it is day or night, as there are no windows or shutters and the doors are closed, as if I were inside a tightly sealed box around the clock, a senior investigator with more than three decades of experience in the intelligence service came and began reading a book written by the American writer of Lebanese origin Fouad Ajami in which he strongly criticizes the Arabs, calling them the ugliest names. That book was translated into Hebrew.

He also brought some writings by Arab authors discussing the futility of fighting Israel, the harm caused by the intifada and resistance, and how some of them blamed Marwan Barghouti for what they referred to as the disaster of the intifada.

The hateful racist spirit, arrogance and superiority were full of all meanings of hatred in every word and phrase uttered by these investigators, to the point that one of them said to me: My dream is to put my head into the mind of the Arabs for an hour in order to understand this mind that has no connection to humanity, and that it is part of the animal mind.

Arrogance, insolence, and a militaristic and racist religious mindset were evident in the interrogators' speech throughout the investigation. This was reflected in some of their questions to me: "Why do you fight Israel? What is the point of the intifada and the operations? Israel is an invincible wall that nothing in the world can defeat. This land is for the Jews, and God has dedicated it to them. How can you fight against the will of God?"

The interrogators also tried, through a distorted cultural war, to heavily focus on the Arab situation, emphasizing the consecutive defeats Arabs had suffered, their abandonment of the Palestinians, and their role in the slaughter and killing of many of them.

They also focused on the corruption of the Authority, accusing President Arafat and senior officials of having bank accounts in European countries. They claimed that President Arafat had used Marwan Barghouti as a scapegoat, and that the Authority would not inquire about you, that no one had asked about you.

Faced with the failure of all these psychological pressure tactics and intensive methods over the course of several months of interrogation, the interrogators began to personally threaten me, with one of them saying: "You will remain in this condition until you lose your mind or die."

The head of the Shabak interrogation department, known as "Abu Sharif," came to me again and said: "Your fate will be no different from that of Ibrahim Al-Ra'i, who allegedly reached the point of suicide during interrogation." One of the lead interrogators told me: "We have over eighteen thousand pieces of information on our computer that require investigation with you, but this would take years, not months, and we don't have that kind of time. So, you will either die or talk and confess to the issues mentioned. Right now, you are in the kingdom of the unknown. You are within these walls, and you know nothing of what is happening in the world. No one in the world cares about the fate of a terrorist and a killer. You are responsible, not only for the Israeli dead and wounded in this intifada, but also for the Palestinians who have been killed, injured, and whose homes have been destroyed."

This investigator also said: "We heard this talk from a large number of Palestinian officials, some of whom contacted us and thanked us for arresting you, and they wished you dead, and we feel sorry that you are alive, people like you should have died... You are a killer of children and women, and you should be tried as "Iman" was tried.

Perhaps the escalating wave of psychological attacks that the interrogators launched against me in this desolate isolation in the depths of interrogation aimed, according to their calculations and delusions, to lead me to search for my personal salvation. For this reason, the interrogators focused heavily on instilling fear and terror within me, saying: "You will spend your life in prison, and you will die there. You will remain until you rot because you will live in solitary confinement or with some prisoners, enduring a life of humiliation and disgrace." One of them also said: "The Legislative Council is over, and you are no longer a member of Parliament."

And no one is responsible for Fatah, because Arafat has appointed someone to replace you, and he is so-and-so... You will no longer see the pleasure of traveling by plane, first class, or five-star hotels... You will not drive a car, nor will you live in a beautiful house... You will not see your children or your wife, and your family will die while you are in prison... As for your son Qassam, we will kill him soon with a missile because he threatens to carry out a martyrdom operation, and perhaps if we do not kill him soon we will arrest him, and he will live in prison forever.....

The investigators used the method of belittling and humiliating, and pretending that they knew many, many details, even about the personal and life aspects of a person, as if they wanted to test with me their forty years of intelligence experience, with me, as one of them used to say to me: "You hold a master's degree in international relations, as you claim... You study in primitive, backward universities like Birzeit, which are not suitable for a kindergarten... We learned that you were threatening the professors in order to pass the exams, and we have information about this matter..."

An example of what they said was: "Why did you name your son Qassam? Was it because you admire the Hamas Al-Qassam Brigades, which are rivals to Fatah? How could you name him after them? Or is it after Izz ad-Din al-Qassam? Why do you respect such a man, who was a terrorist and a criminal? He used to steal, rape, and rob, and came to this country to escape justice because he was a criminal..."

One of the investigators said: "Hamas is much better than Fatah, and they are better than you because they do not lie... they tell the truth and do not evade responsibility, and they do not claim that they want peace... As for you and Arafat, you are lying and you are murderers and terrorists, and you claim that you are for peace... Unfortunately, the world believes that you are for peace... The Oslo Accords were the biggest mistake that Israel made, and the time has come to eliminate it and the Authority... We will not leave the Palestinian cities, and our control over the West Bank will remain..."

It seems clear that these frustrating and psychological methods, accompanied by a tendency towards racism, arrogance, and distortion of facts and history, were aimed at my recognition of Yasser Arafat, the wanted man, and my admission of the failure and futility of the uprising and resistance....

By destroying the symbols and values of struggle, heroism and combat of our great Palestinian people, the investigators wanted to spread frustration, despair and a feeling of helplessness, and then surrender.

Therefore, after a continuous up-and-down and rotation of a large number of investigators, who are only skilled at insults, deception, psychological and nervous tricks, they returned to Yasser Arafat saying: "We have information that Arafat gave you his orders to carry out terrorist or martyrdom operations, as you call them, and gave you money and weapons... and that you have been preparing for the uprising for years. Why do you buy and smuggle weapons, and why have you established dozens of training camps...? You are terrorists who do not like peace, and Arafat is a terrorist, and he bears responsibility, and you are the one charged with implementing his policy..."

They also said: "We want to know what Arafat told you... What were the orders, And how much money did he pay you? Confession against Yasser Arafat is very important... And if what you say is convincing, we will consider Arafat responsible, and you may not bear responsibility..."

At that time, the criminal Sharon government was focused on finding justifications and evidence to bolster the credibility of its military campaign, the reoccupation of Palestinian Authority areas, the destruction of security headquarters and institutions, the siege of President Arafat, and its declaration that there was no partner, no status for him, and that he did not want peace...

They believed that Marwan Barghouti was the evidence and witness that would lead them to this goal, and to those objectives based on destroying all the achievements of the Palestinian people, and destroying the entity of the Palestinian Authority...

This is evident from what the investigators said: "Prime Minister Sharon, the head of the Shin Bet, and the Minister of Defense are following the investigation up to date, and they are angry because you refuse to talk and do not provide anything, and you will pay a heavy price for this, and we will make you a doormat and a laughingstock for everyone... We can make you lose control of yourself and your mind... And if you continue to insist on remaining silent, we will be forced to send you for military investigation, and there the investigators know how to deal with people like you... Why should we bother with you? The military investigation is allowed to do whatever it wants, because you have dangerous information, and you pose a danger to the security of the state..."



## **Chapter Two**

### **The Kingdom of the Unknown and the Hidden War**

(My decision was to cut off my hand  
It is easier for me than to confess)



## **The Kingdom of the Unknown and the Hidden War**

### **Inside Secret Prison No. 1391**

The investigators were not satisfied with the complete isolation that they imposed on me to live for months in the cells alone, and in the investigation room handcuffed and in a difficult condition... After about forty days had passed without any benefit, a decision was made to transfer me to investigation in a secret camp, which some sources say holds number 1391.

I was taken from the interrogation room in the Moskobiya prison, blindfolded and with my feet shackled and hands tied behind my back. They threw me onto the floor of a military vehicle, and due to the restraints and the blindfold, I was in pain throughout the journey. What made it worse was that the soldiers placed their feet on my body and dropped cigarette ash on my face. However, I heard one of them say, "He shouldn't remain like this... the journey is long, his condition is bad, and we need to put him on a chair." His companions became angry and told him to be quiet... and he fell silent.

I estimated that the journey took between two and a half to three hours. Upon arrival, I was taken to an unknown location and saw nothing. When they removed the blindfold from my eyes, I found myself surrounded by a group of soldiers in the uniform of the occupying army, holding batons in their hands. They stood at attention, their faces angry and stern.

One of them approached and removed my restraints, ordering me to take off all my clothes. He then gave me a special outfit for the place, resembling overalls, like those worn by mechanics. The pants were loose, so I had to tie them in some way. By that time, I had lost almost seven kilograms.

After I put on the special clothes, one of the soldiers returned, restraining me as usual and placing the blindfold back over my eyes. He then led me by my bound hands, this time pulling me forward. We passed through an area filled with disturbing noises and the sounds of beating, which I believe were deliberately made to create an atmosphere of terror, fear, and a sense of isolation from the outside world.

And although you don't know the place, this is the secret behind the intended fear and terror of being brought here, where, as they told me, I would face a military interrogation. This means there are no restraints, no limits, and no oversight on the torture.

The most terrifying part of it all is that you see new faces, angry, grim, and scowling, with an expression of cruelty evident on their faces.

In that prison, you hear sounds like a ball hitting doors, and loud music. After being dragged along a long path, the interrogator tells you, "Lift your foot, step up... step down..." and you often discover that there was no staircase at all.

The truth is, in that place, I was able to see some aspects of the prison due to the looseness of the blindfold and the small hole in it.

The soldiers led me to a cell, instructing me not to remove the blindfold until the cell door was closed. I was told to keep it on, and when the interrogator arrived, I was to wear it so that I wouldn't see the soldiers opening and closing the cell door.

The cells of the secret prison are slightly different from the usual interrogation cells, although they share similar conditions everywhere in terms of their small size and their completely enclosed nature. They have no windows, and the prisoner cannot tell night from day. The dim light remains on 24/7, and the prisoner cannot turn it off. There is also a floor toilet, often filthy and unsanitary, and the cell contains only a few blankets.

What is distinctive about the secret camp, which I believe is located in the north of occupied Palestine, about two to three hours away from Jerusalem, is that the cell has a floor or platform that is sharply slanted. The water tap can only be opened by the soldier from the outside, and water can only be accessed through it. As for the bed in the cell, it is made of concrete and consists of two layers.

### **A prisoner does not belong to any cell or prison.**

It was clear that the atmosphere in that secret prison evoked fear. I noticed when they led me to the interrogation room that it had a very thick door, more than 30 centimeters thick, made of heavy iron with wood on the inside...

The interrogators carry out the same tasks of humiliation, degradation, restraint, and provocation. Some of the interrogators who had worked at the Moskobiya detention center came to this place. The head of the team who arrived here was surprised by my response to a question he asked me: "Do you know where you are?" I said, "No, and it doesn't matter, because the cells in prisons are the same. It doesn't matter to me where I am, whether in this cell or that one, or in this place or that one. A prisoner does not belong to any cell or prison."

His response was, "This place is frightening, and you shouldn't remain here. But you forced us to bring you here because you refused to speak." I said to him, "I feel more comfortable in this place than anywhere else..." I decided with this response to completely shock him and make it clear that this place had no effect on me at all, and that was the truth. On the contrary, I felt a greater sense of pride and strength. Being there only made me more defiant, because this was not my plan for facing the interrogation in this way. But since I was already in this place, it no longer intimidated me in any way, despite the feeling of isolation.

Perhaps my behavior, marked by complete calmness, unaffectedness, and even the absence of any signs of nervousness, only increased the interrogators' frustration, astonishment, and tension. I remember one of the interrogators said to me: "I have read the names of your children, and I realize that you are a man who values principles such

as honor, honesty, and respect... I respect you and understand that you are doing this for your people... But why did you name your son Qassam, and why did you name your daughters Shorouq and Rabi?"

I said to him: "Qassam, because I love Izz al-Din al-Qassam; he is an eternal symbol that should live in our hearts... Qassam was born before the founding of Hamas and the Qassam Brigades. As for Shorouq, it is in memory of a friend of mine who was killed by the occupation forces. He was a student at Birzeit University with me, and his name was Sharaf al-Taybi from Khan Yunis. He was in his fifth year of engineering, and he fell victim to your cowardly bullets... As for Arab, it's because I am Arab, and I take pride in being Arab despite the bitterness of the Arab situation... And Rabi, because I love the land. Rabi is the plural of 'Rabiya,' which means the peaks of hills or anything that rises above the earth."

Or he opened my eyes, and when he approached me, he put his knee between my legs, and showered me with a torrent of vile insults and words dripping with hatred and anger, and despair appeared on his face as he said: You will not survive if you do not speak and confess... Who do you think you are? You are nothing more than zero... You are nothing... You are a killer of children and women... You are a savage and a murderer... We must deal with you like a cockroach. If you were brave, you would have taken responsibility instead of young men taking it on... You are running away from the battle instead of saying that you are the one responsible and the leader, and manfully taking responsibility for your poor soldiers..... At the end of this disgusting investigator's talk, he spat on me and left...

The hours and days passed harshly, bitterly, and painfully, but I felt strength and pride. With each passing day, I recorded a victory over those torturers. The task was not easy at all, and words fail to capture the suffering of those days, weeks, and months, and the cruelty I endured in the unknown, the intense torment that surpassed human endurance.

After several weeks, I was transferred from the secret interrogation camp to the Beit Tikva interrogation center, where the interrogation continued for nearly fifty days.

After my transfer from the secret prison, I was certain that this was their final weapon, and that I was recording a major victory, leaving this place unharmed, without being broken. They took me to an unknown destination once again, and I had no idea where I was going.

After about two hours of travel, where I was lying on the floor of the military vehicle, handcuffed and blindfolded, I heard the police and officers saying, "The new arrival is a heavy artillery piece," and another saying, "Why is he still alive? This killer must die." The conversation was filled with a lot of crude and vulgar language.

After about an hour of waiting for registration and the usual procedures, a number of officers led me to an upper floor. I felt like I was climbing thirteen steps. Then I entered a

wide corridor with a number of rooms on both sides. They took me into one of them, where they sat me on a chair fixed to the floor and tied me with the restraints of the chair that had the same specifications mentioned above. After about two to three hours, they removed the blindfold, and when I opened my eyes, there were three intelligence men sitting in front of me. They introduced themselves with their well-known Arabic nicknames... Then one of the investigators asked me, "Do you know where you are...?" He added before hearing my answer: "You cannot know because you are cut off from the world: Do you see that you do not know where you are for several weeks...? We will continue this process until you understand that no one can confront Israel... You must know that Israel has defeated all the Arabs, and will defeat the Intifada, and these terrorist operations will not benefit you."

That place was the intelligence building in the city of Beit Tikva, an Israeli settlement built on the ruins of the Palestinian city of *Milbes*, near the city of Jaffa. It was the first Zionist settlement in Palestine, established in 1882. The building consisted of two sections: one for the police and the other for intelligence and interrogation. It had two floors: the first for reception, followed by a series of cells, varying in size from one to another. There were approximately thirteen cells, along with a very small bathroom where prisoners were allowed to take a quick, exhausting shower once a day, or sometimes only every few days.

I was thrown into Cell No. (1), which was the smallest of the cells. It seemed to have a listening device, and it was very small and cramped. It contained a small floor toilet with a foul, dirty smell.

That was the third stage in the rounds of interrogation at the Beit Tikva center, after the interrogators had exhausted their efforts and began to circle in a vicious cycle...

The interrogation continued with me at this stage, where I spent most of my time in the interrogation room. However, for the first time, I had a brief period in the cell, unlike the past months. It became clear that the interrogation team at this stage was focused on preparing and finalizing the file to be sent to court, while attempting to formulate the indictment...

It must be noted that during my time in interrogation at those three stages — Moskobiya, the secret prison, and Beit Tikva — many fedayeen operations took place. This only intensified the frustration of the intelligence officers, making them more nervous, oppressive, hateful, and malicious, and it reflected itself in more torture in various forms. As for me, each fedayeen operation gave me more strength, faith, vigor, and pride. It confirmed the correctness of the choice for intifada and resistance and showed their failure to extinguish the blazing spark of our struggle.

### **I would cut off my hand and not write a confession**

The conclusion of my long and arduous experience in the three investigation stations was based on a clear strategy for confronting the investigators, which was based on a

final, decisive, and irrevocable decision not to cooperate in the investigation, not to provide any information whatsoever, and to be determined to endure the torment, including martyrdom.

The first days were extremely harsh and mentally overwhelming. It is not easy to transition from a state of relative freedom, from a life of struggle and vigor, and from playing a leadership role in the intifada and resistance, to now being bound hand and foot, subjected to insults, humiliation, oppression, and curses. However, I quickly adapted to this situation and fully accepted it, especially since I had long experience with imprisonment, jails, cells, and interrogations.

I considered myself on a martyrdom-oriented struggle mission, representing the great Palestinian people, their blessed uprising, and their valiant resistance. I believed that any defeat or retreat in the face of the torturer, the occupier, the killer, and the colonizer would be harsh and devastating.

Yes, the torturer possesses many tools of killing, torture, oppression, and cruelty. I, however, am alone, a prisoner bound, with nothing but the will to resist and absolute faith in the justice of my people's cause—firm in the belief of our right to freedom, return, and independence, and in the inevitability of achieving those noble human aspirations.

That confrontation was part of the ongoing struggle and defiance that I have faced throughout my life against the Zionist occupiers. I began directly confronting the occupier more than thirty-five years ago, never hesitating for a moment to resist. Now, that confrontation continues in a different form, in the interrogation cells, after the occupation's government, intelligence, and army failed to assassinate me multiple times during the intifada.

I knew that I was materially the weaker party in this confrontation, but at the same time, I was confident that I was stronger morally and spiritually. I had no choice but to endure, not only in honor of my personal history, my beliefs, and the principles I have fought for throughout my life, but also in reverence for what I represent in the eyes of my great people and in the eyes of the sons and daughters of the Arab and Islamic nations. I stood firm out of loyalty to the intifada and in honor of the sacrifices of its martyrs, fighters, and prisoners, and I was proud to be one of its loyal soldiers.

There is no doubt that the interrogation was difficult in the kingdom of the unknown. My arrest came at a time when the occupying army began its armed looting operations in the West Bank, along with the siege and aggression on the Gaza Strip, during which it carried out a series of massacres in Jenin, Nablus, and Ramallah, and besieged the Muqata'a, the residence of the late President Yasser Arafat. The interrogators told me clearly that the Prime Minister, the head of the Shin Bet, and the Minister of Defense were monitoring and waiting for this interrogation, and that they had decided to try me, although the Prime Minister preferred that I be under the ground by now.

During the interrogation, the investigators presented headlines and articles from Israeli newspapers that highlighted the arrogance, pride, and insolence of the Israeli authorities, as if by arresting Marwan Barghouti, they had captured the entire intifada.

Among those headlines: "Mofaz: The arrest of the killer Barghouti is the Israeli Defense Forces' gift to the Israeli people on Independence Day..." and another headline: "Sharon: Barghouti will be tried for his crimes..."

Meanwhile, other newspapers discussed a structural map of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, with Marwan Barghouti at its head. The situation even reached the point of leaking false news to Israeli newspapers, aimed at undermining the morale of the Palestinian people, claiming that Barghouti had confessed during the interrogation.

It was a comprehensive attack, not just on me as an individual, but on the meaning and the idea itself. Yes, it was an attack on the will for freedom and on the cry of the Palestinian people: "No to occupation..."

In the early days, I maintained complete silence, which was a difficult task under those circumstances. At that time, my responses to them were as follows: I am an elected member of the Palestinian parliament, and according to international law and the agreements signed with you, you have no right to kidnap or arrest me from areas under Palestinian Authority control, nor do you have the right to interrogate or try me. I also told them: I am the Secretary of the Fatah Movement, and this is no secret, and through this role, I carry out a political function, no more, no less.

I did not cooperate with their desire to read a large number of testimonies and confessions, which they claimed were made by dozens of fighters and supposedly confirmed my responsibility and leadership of the brigades, and my supplying them with weapons and ammunition. I also refused to engage with the documents and files they had seized from the Muqata'a, the security and civil institutions of the Palestinian Authority, and the headquarters of the factions. My position was that these papers were not authentic, nor were the testimonies they presented.

The most prominent aspect of those interrogation rounds was the investigators' insistence on knowing my relationship with President Yasser Arafat, claiming they had information that I was tasked with leading the armed resistance, and that Arafat had provided me with money, weapons, and instructions. This was a central point in the investigation.

The investigators tried to tempt me, suggesting that cooperating on this matter would help significantly and might even close the file.

For me, this point was the most provocative and enraging, as it wounded my national and revolutionary pride. I could feel the fury boiling in my veins whenever it was brought up.

I told them clearly: "I have nothing to say ever, and you will not hear a word from me... Yasser Arafat is the leader and symbol of the Palestinian people, and my relationship with him is a political one, that of a parliament member with the president, and nothing more than that..."

In the end, I told the interrogators: "You have only one option: either Yasser Arafat is arrested and provides information about me, or I provide information about him. Since Yasser Arafat is not arrested and will not be arrested, I will not say a word about my relationship with him. You have no other choice, for my decision is clear, final, and firm."

The investigation into my relationship with Abu Ammar took several weeks during which I endured countless forms of pressure and torture.

In truth, throughout the months of interrogation and until its end, I never spoke a word about my relationship with the late President Yasser Arafat – may he rest in peace. That relationship will remain something personal, belonging to me alone, forever.

In those brutal conditions, where I felt immense fatigue and exhaustion, and moments of weakness, I would pray to Allah: "O Allah, grant us strength and faith in our hearts, enhance wisdom in our minds, and provide us with an honorable way out that You accept and are pleased with, O Lord of the worlds."

During the interrogation, I would often recall the martyrs and the heroic moments of our people, drawing strength, determination, patience, and steadfastness from them.

At times, I would support myself—about to collapse from the torture—by constantly preparing myself for martyrdom rather than enduring humiliation and disgrace.

I endured the fatigue and oppression, fully aware that the occupying government had decided to arrest and try me, thinking that by doing so, they were prosecuting and condemning the intifada and the resistance, and weakening our just and legitimate struggle.

I already knew that enduring this torment would have no effect, and that it would not prevent my sentencing to life imprisonment. They had already declared this in every newspaper and media outlet from the first days of my arrest. My decision was that having my hands cut off would be far easier for me than writing a single letter or recording a single line that would suggest an acknowledgment or submission to the will of the executioner.

### **Victory comes with patience**

Our historical and national right to this land is as certain as the sunrise and sunset, and the rotation of the Earth. Every fighter who is arrested and subjected to interrogation must understand this. They must realize that they are facing a thief, a rapist, a killer, and a criminal who bears responsibility for the expulsion of our people from their homes,

cities, and villages. This criminal is responsible for the suffering of our fathers and grandfathers, and for the massacres he has committed over the past decades... He is responsible for the Nakba and the catastrophe that has befallen our Palestinian people... He is the occupying oppressor.

The detained fighter must feel pride and dignity, and overcome the emotions and feelings caused by being away from his family—his mother, father, wife, children, siblings, friends, and loved ones...

The fighter must overcome, with all his pride, any attempts at humiliation, oppression, and insult. He must understand that the one before him is a murderer of children and women, and he should never feel weak or afraid because of the insults—no matter how much the interrogator spits on him. The struggle for dignity and justice is far greater than any momentary degradation.

The fighter must not fear beating, torture, deprivation of sleep, food, or cigarettes. Instead, he must face all this humiliation with great pride and a sense of national dignity. He must feel that he is the messenger of his people and nation, representing all the honor, dignity, and pride that he carries.

The fighter must understand that he is on a sacred national and revolutionary mission. It is his duty to protect with his soul, blood, and body the information and activities of his brothers, comrades, and fellow fighters. He has no right to provide or disclose any information.

Every fighter should know that every word he speaks could cost him years in prison and suffering. That any word about a brother or fellow fighter will lead to their arrest and imprisonment. His confession of any comrade is a free service to the enemy, for which his fellow fighters will pay the price.

Each fighter must avoid gossip or discussing anything related to the interrogation and the charges against him. It is best to remain completely silent. If he speaks, he must avoid anything related to security matters or the cause for which he was arrested.

Every fighter must resist, with dignity and pride, any temptations related to food, cigarettes, tea, or coffee. He should refrain from asking the interrogator or the prison guard for anything related to these matters and remain calm. Never trust, under any circumstances, the promises or words of the interrogator. The interrogator who appears as the "kind investigator" is simply trying to deceive, to gradually win the trust of the prisoner in order to extract confessions and information.

The "good cop" and "bad cop" routine is a constant game that investigators play during interrogations. This is a method that interrogators always use. One should never believe anything the interrogator says, as they will sometimes tell the truth once, twice, or three times to gain the trust of the detainee. There are also surveillance devices—listening, recording, and cameras—in the interrogation room that are difficult to detect or

distinguish. Moreover, the interrogator records and writes down every word spoken after each session, which is then presented in court and used as a confession document, known as the "investigator's notes." In other words, the interrogator summarizes each session, often recording and writing it down.

Every fighter must be cautious and aware that interrogators may bring in the statement of another detainee to confirm their confession about the other fighter, or they may verbally assert this and threaten to bring the said detainee to testify against them, even though they know this is a lie. If this happens, the fighter must reject the testimony of his comrade if they are brought in and completely deny any of their statements.

The fighter must also be alert to the fact that sometimes the interrogator will pick up the phone so that another detainee can hear what their comrade says about them in an adjacent room.

The best way to counter the sense of despair that may creep into the heart or mind of a detainee is to assume they are on a sacred revolutionary mission and that their conscience will not allow them to betray what they are entrusted with.

The fighter must remember that they have sworn an oath not to disclose the secrets of their movement, organization, or country.

The fighter must arm himself with faith in God, his country, and his great people, who consider the fighters their heroes and symbols of dignity. He must never betray them. In moments of weakness, humiliation, or fear of slipping, every fighter should remember the great martyrs who sacrificed their souls, blood, and lives for their country, people, and nation. He must recall the sacred status that martyrs hold among our people, and it is a great honor to join this noble group.

Remembering the martyrs fills the fighter with boundless strength, granting him immense pride, power, and determination. Turning to God for help and reading the Qur'an during these difficult moments strengthens patience and provides a sense of tranquility, empowering him to confront the challenges ahead. For the fighter knows that he is only facing what God has decreed for him, and he must not fear the enemy, for his soul is in the hands of its Creator, not in the hands of the "Shabak."

The fighter must understand that he is undergoing a difficult and harsh test in the struggle and jihad. Successfully passing this test, whether entirely or partially, will grant him a great sense of self-confidence, courage, and pride—qualities that words can hardly describe.

### **It is a feeling of victory over the enemy in their most dominant strongholds**

We must remember that the danger to life is relatively limited in the interrogation cells, especially in recent years. The important realization is that interrogators can no longer carry out whatever they want, as they did during the past decades, which led to the

martyrdom of dozens under interrogation. This means that one should not take the interrogators' threats seriously, whether they concern the detainee or his family, especially since the interrogator may resort to using certain stories and rumors, which he has learned or discovered about the detainee, believing he can use them to blackmail him into confessing, providing information, or even recruiting him to serve the "Shabak."

For example, the interrogator might say: "We have information about your relationship with such-and-such girl from a family or clan that is in a serious dispute with your own, and we will expose this in your village, camp, or city," or "We know you have a relationship with so-and-so's wife," or "We know you have a forged degree." The interrogators may threaten to spread rumors that the detainee is working with them, or that he committed a robbery, a crime, or participated in some criminal activity, and that they will reveal it. They might even say: "We know you have a sexual deviation, and we know about your relationships..."

There are countless threats the interrogators may use, but the fighter must not fear anything, even if some of these issues are true. He must trust in himself and understand that any propaganda or rumor spread by the enemy will not be believed by his people.

Any minor offense or mistake the fighter made in his life means nothing compared to betraying his people, aligning himself with the enemy to harm and damage his own people. The fighter must treat all such threats with contempt and ridicule; everything can be forgiven, no matter how severe, except dealing with the enemy.

It is important to be aware that agents and spies who appear as detainees and fighters, and are present in the cells, often claim to be under interrogation. These individuals may often belong to fabricated factions, and the officer may have briefed this agent on the detainee's file in advance. Sometimes, the officer may not immediately engage in a direct conversation about the detainee's case to intentionally gain the detainee's trust. Occasionally, the agent might adopt a well-known name from a specific geographic area, claiming to have participated in a widely known operation that everyone has heard of, and by describing it in detail, he implies that he knows everything about it, making it difficult to doubt the information he provides or discusses.

Therefore, the fighter must not provide any information, no matter how insignificant, to anyone he encounters in the cells. He must insist on refusing to discuss the charges against him and limit his conversation to very general matters. If his responses are brief, that is far better. He should use the available time for rest, especially given the long interrogation sessions and deprivation of sleep.

The fighter must refrain from divulging any information. The cells often contain agents who are there to gather intelligence, whether in cells where the detainee is alone with another person or in those that hold multiple people. Fighters must be alert to the possibility that there may be an agent in the cell, whether alone with the detainee or among a group, and it is rare for cells to be free of spies.

Never trust anyone, fellow fighter. No one has the right to ask a detainee for information, as those who do are agents.

The agents are part of the interrogation team and play a crucial and more dangerous role than the intelligence officers in uncovering information and implicating the detainee.

Fighters must be aware of a very dangerous phenomenon, even though it may be limited: during the interrogation of an individual, cell, or group, intelligence agencies may succeed in infiltrating one member of the cell. They strike a deal with him, in which he provides the information he has, and then spies on his comrades, who have no doubt about his loyalty and patriotism. The intelligence agency places him in the same cell as his fellow detainees and records their conversations. It is unlikely or unexpected that the detainee will withhold information about his comrades or a member of his cell, unaware that he has been recruited during the interrogation.

Many cells have been exposed in this way, leading to confessions. Therefore, one must *always* refuse to discuss any charges with anyone during interrogation.

The lesson that every fighter must learn, remember, and preserve is that we are engaged in a war for freedom and independence. In this war, the enemy uses all weapons and tools to dismantle the national movement, destroy the resistance, the intifada, and national struggle.

Intelligence warfare is a central part of this battle. Therefore, resistance factions and their military wings must especially fortify themselves against infiltration and create protective barriers that make the occupation's battle with them more complex and difficult, thus making the work of agents harder and the task of infiltration and intelligence tricks, along with their coercive methods, difficult and nearly impossible...



## **Chapter Three**

### **The Trial**

I hereby declare that I do not recognize Israel's authority to arrest, abduct, interrogate, or try me, and I consider all its actions to be war crimes.



## Trial

### Indictment Against the Uprising

Following the conclusion of an intense and painful investigation that lasted for several months, day and night, as is customary, the Israeli intelligence services, in collaboration with the so-called Ministry of Justice and the Public Prosecution, prepared a file that resulted in an indictment containing more than 52 charges spread across dozens of pages. I learned of this indictment during a court session.

The charges focus on accusing me of founding and leading the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, leading the organization as an armed entity, and being responsible for the operations of the brigades and the organization. The charges also include responsibility for the deaths of 104 Israelis, most of them soldiers and settlers, as well as a number of civilians who were killed as a result of suicide bombings. The indictment also includes providing financial support and weapons to dozens of fighting groups.

The occupying government decided to present me to a civilian court exceptionally, at the Central Court in Tel Aviv, as it did with other fighters whom Israel considered major assistants to me, such as the fighter Nasser Oweis and fighter Nasser Abu Hamid.

They also decided to present the fighter Abbas al-Sayyid, one of the leaders of Hamas and the Al-Qassam Brigades in the West Bank, to that civilian court, and this was also done with the fighter Thabit al-Mardawi, leader of the Al-Quds Brigades affiliated with Islamic Jihad in the West Bank.

The occupying government, with this decision, seeks to condemn the intifada and resistance, labeling them as terrorism. They believe that convicting me in court would also serve to condemn the late President Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian national struggle.

A large team was formed to manage and oversee the course of the trial, including representatives from the office of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, the Ministry of Justice, the Shin Bet (Israeli security agency), the police, the prosecution, the media, the army, intelligence, and representatives from what is called the "Organization of Victims of Palestinian Terrorism."

It is important to note that the vast majority of Palestinian detainees and prisoners over the past decades of Zionist occupation have undergone military trials in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, managed by a full military apparatus that is part of the occupying forces' military rule. These trials were led by a group of military officers and military prosecutors. The trials were held under emergency laws imposed by British colonial authorities and a series of military orders issued by the occupying government, which were applied to Palestinian prisoners and detainees. Based on this, Israeli military courts issued various sentences, including imprisonment and fines, against hundreds of thousands of Palestinians.

The International Red Cross estimates that more than 850,000 Palestinians have been arrested since 1967, which means that about 25% of the population has been detained—roughly one-quarter of the Palestinian people. This may be the highest percentage in the history of colonial movements worldwide, where an entire people is subjected to such high rates of imprisonment. It is rare to find a Palestinian family that has not had at least one of its members arrested.

In this context, it is important to clarify that the occupying government has refused to treat Palestinian and Arab prisoners as prisoners of war or as freedom fighters, in the same way that similar cases around the world have been treated to varying extents. The occupation also refused to apply the Geneva Conventions regarding the treatment of prisoners, turning its back, as usual, on international humanitarian law as a whole and continuing to consider itself above the law.

The occupation state's denial of recognizing prisoners as prisoners of war, who belong to a Palestinian national movement recognized by the overwhelming majority of the world's countries and international institutions, especially the United Nations, has led to the exposure of hundreds of thousands of prisoners to criminal practices, torture by internationally prohibited methods, and violations and suffering that are only comparable to the suffering in Nazi concentration camps.

Returning to the indictment filed against me, any reading of it clearly shows that it is a general political indictment, serving as a hostile propaganda tool against the just struggle of the Palestinian people and their blessed uprising for freedom and independence.

It is clear from the indictment that this is not about an individual committing criminal acts or carrying out security violations against Israel, but rather about Israel's desire to conduct a show trial against the Palestinian people who resist the occupation. In other words, it is a trial of the Al-Aqsa Intifada.

The indictment makes a precedent by prosecuting a person in my position—an elected leader of the Palestinian people, who worked within my role as an elected representative—and attributing to me a supposed responsibility for actions carried out by others during the Intifada.

From reviewing the indictment, it is also clear that it is a political charge, aimed at prosecuting the Palestinian leadership and its methods of struggle before the Israeli judiciary. This is done with the intention of distorting this struggle, labeling it as "terrorism" and "killing innocents," while ignoring the fundamental elements of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, especially the existence of the occupation and its daily escalating crimes against our people. The deliberate choice to present me before a criminal court aims to highlight what is called the "suffering of the Israeli side" while concealing the suffering of the Palestinian side, since this will not be relevant to the

course of the criminal trial. Especially since this court has no authority to try me, and it will not be able to ensure a fair trial for me.

## **The Trial of the Occupation State**

I made a clear and explicit decision to reject the Zionist court entirely, deciding to boycott it. I declared that I do not recognize the right of these courts to try Palestinians, as we are victims of the occupation. The ones who deserve to be tried are the murderous occupiers, not the fighters against the occupation. I decided that I would not allow judges, who are part of the occupation's apparatus, to issue a judgment as if they were neutral, and I would not accept that a representative elected by the Palestinian people, a fighter, and a leader of its struggle, be tried before the occupation's court.

I affirmed that I am a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, and that I was abducted from the areas under the authority of the Palestinian National Authority, which is a violation of the agreements signed between the occupying government and the Palestine Liberation Organization. I decided not to appoint any lawyer or legal team to defend me before the occupation's court, and I refused to engage with the indictment. I threw both the indictment and all the court's files into the trash.

I refused to stand before what is called the judges or the court, and I tried to resist being brought to the courtroom. However, I was unable to do so, as they forcibly dragged me, handcuffed, into the courtroom. The Israeli team in charge of the court mobilized all Israeli and international media to cover the first session, which was held in Tel Aviv on August 14, 2002.

The hostile, inciting atmosphere was clear, as they brought dozens of so-called relatives of Israeli casualties to the courtroom. They began chanting racially charged slogans against me and the intifada, believing that they were achieving media objectives that served their hostile aims and satisfied their audience, who were receiving strikes from the resistance fighters and the intifada.

They allowed extremists and fanatics to enter the courtroom while preventing my family from attending.

From the moment I entered the courtroom, and in front of the large media presence and the hostile Israeli audience, I raised my handcuffed hands and waved a clenched fist with both hands. I declared, in three languages—Arabic, English, and Hebrew—that "the intifada will triumph... the intifada will triumph."

Faced with this scene, which stunned them, the security officers and Shin Bet quickly expelled the media and cameras from the room by force. After this incident, they prohibited the media from recording anything further, and reporters were banned from asking any questions. They were given less than half a minute to take a very brief photograph, after which all media coverage was completely stopped.

Arab and international media outlets, including major networks like Al Jazeera, CNN, BBC, Abu Dhabi, and dozens of others, as well as international and Israeli newspapers, reported the trial with prominent headlines. The most notable among them were: "Barghouti delivered a strong performance, appearing victorious as he raised his fist in a sign of triumph... despite the restraints on his hands and feet."

Hebrew newspapers also reported that Barghouti called on the Palestinian people from the courtroom to continue the path of the intifada. Many Zionists expressed their disappointment with the court, which had turned into a trial of the occupation and a platform for the intifada, rather than a trial to convict Barghouti or Yasser Arafat.

This came in the context of my firm stance of not recognizing the court's authority to try me. I maintained this position over thirty sessions, during which thirty Shin Bet officers testified against me, as well as dozens of police officers who had overseen the documentation of resistance operations.

Additionally, several family members of the killed and wounded testified in court, and several military intelligence officers presented documents and recordings from dozens of press and television interviews. They also announced closed sessions to review secret files that they could not disclose to me...

The court did not hesitate to bring about 41 individuals from the brothers, claiming that they had provided testimonies and confessions regarding their relationship with me, as well as their receipt of instructions, money, and weapons to carry out resistance operations. However, all the brothers refused to testify and refrained from answering the questions posed by the prosecution, despite the fact that there was no defense team on my behalf.

In this context, the court attempted to impose Israeli lawyers on me, selected from the Bar Association and those working for the Public Defender's Organization, as Israeli law does not allow anyone to be tried without a defense lawyer.

Since I declared that no one represents me because I do not recognize the court or its legitimacy, the court insisted on appointing two Israeli female lawyers. I made a significant effort to convince them that I do not accept anyone to represent me, and that their acceptance to do so would be participation in an unlawful act in my trial. After some hesitation and pressure, they agreed, even though there was a decision from the so-called Israeli Supreme Court ordering them to continue attending the trial sessions. However, they refused to make any statements throughout the trial.

The presiding judge declared that I had not confessed to the charges during the investigation, but that there was enough evidence to convict me. In the final session of this court, I spoke about the conflict, its roots, its nature, and the right of the Palestinian people to this land, as well as their right to resist the occupation by all means. I emphasized that the intifada is the movement for the independence of the Palestinian

Arab people and that the occupation is the most brutal form of colonialism known to modern history.

In my speech, I addressed the suffering endured by our Palestinian people, including the hundreds of children, women, elderly, and youth who have been martyred by the bullets and shells of the occupation, the thousands of homes destroyed by the occupation, the siege, starvation, and humiliation imposed on us, as well as the assassinations, arrests, and collective punishments carried out by the occupying forces.

I addressed the judges saying, "You are no different from the Apache helicopter pilots who assassinate the members of my people day and night, killing indiscriminately. You, judges, are nothing more than murderers participating in massacres and crimes, providing the legal and judicial cover for the aggression and occupation that our people and land are enduring."

In this final session of my trial, I sent my greetings and full salute to the Palestinian people, the Arab and Islamic nations, to the free people of the world, and to all the friends who support the struggle of our people and their right to freedom, return, and self-determination.

I emphasized that I do not mind losing my freedom for the freedom of my great people... that the end of the occupation is near, and that the policy of force and destruction will not break our people's resilience, steadfastness, and will.

The venom of racism and fascism surfaced after the verdict was issued, when the prosecutor objected, demanding that the sentence be at least twenty-six years to life. The presiding judge responded, "After you finish your forty-five years, a new session will be held to consider this request and objection, which will take place in about five hundred and forty years."

The decision to settle for a lengthy life sentence was a futile attempt to pretend that the court had some credibility, knowing that there is no difference between a life sentence and a hundred years—both are life sentences.

What was most important for the Israeli government and its security agencies was to issue a life sentence against me, holding me directly responsible for the deaths of several Israelis and indirectly responsible for the deaths of 104 Israelis, as well as holding me responsible for leading the intifada and the resistance.

Just for the record, I had prepared an indictment against the State of Israel on behalf of the Palestinian people, and I sent it to all media outlets the night before my final trial session, fearing that I would not be given the opportunity to speak in that trial.

The indictment included holding the State of Israel criminally responsible for committing mass murder and crimes against humanity, thus violating international laws, treaties, and agreements. It was published as a political statement, which argued that:

"The court convened for my trial is nothing but a facade, using the law to conceal and cover up the crimes of the occupation, which is considered the pinnacle of terrorism. Indeed, occupation is the highest form of terrorism."

In the indictment I prepared against the occupying State of Israel, I also stated: "The practice of resisting occupation is an act of freedom and part of exercising human conscience and emotions. It is a clear and explicit declaration of rejection of the occupation and its crimes."

In my defense speech, I addressed the Israelis, saying: "Why do Jews insist on repeating what they endured throughout history in their dealings with the Palestinian people? Why do they repeat the camps of detention and torture? Why do they commit acts of murder, occupation, and massacres against the peaceful Palestinian people? Why do they follow policies of displacement, starvation, siege, home demolitions, and destruction of our lives? How can a people who suffered from mass massacres and persecution by the Nazi authorities perpetrate all of this against another people—the Palestinian people?"

I called on the court and its judges to take a bold stance and reject spending years of their lives behind bars.

When I initiated the boycott of the occupation courts and refused to recognize their legitimacy or authority to try me, several hundred fighters joined this stance, which disrupted the Zionist judiciary. This led the occupation authorities and the public prosecution to circumvent the boycott by offering some concessions to many detainees who had boycotted the courts, preparing to reduce the sentences of those involved in resistance groups, albeit with only minimal reductions in sentences.

This phenomenon quickly receded, and I was unable to continue this effort due to my prolonged solitary confinement. I noticed that there was concern among the imprisoned brothers, especially those who expected reduced sentences. They feared that the boycott decision would result in harsh sentences against them without lawyers, leaving them vulnerable to the judges' whims and potential retaliation in the form of higher, deterrent sentences.

Perhaps the decision to boycott should begin with those facing the highest sentences, to protect those with lighter sentences, because what matters is sending a clear message that these unjust courts are illegitimate. This could eventually lead to a comprehensive and total boycott.

It is important to note the role of lawyers in this process. Some of them played a negative role in stopping the boycott phenomenon for personal and narrow reasons. Despite this, the rulings issued are determined by the Shin Bet, with recommendations from them, and the influence of lawyers remains limited and partial.

Military judges are the ones who implement the policies of the occupation, and most of them are driven by hatred, extremism, animosity, and a spirit of vengeance against Palestinian prisoners.

Statistics show that military courts issue acquittals in less than 1% of the cases they rule on, out of the tens of thousands of cases they handle annually.

All evidence proves that these courts rely on testimonies and confessions extracted under force, torture, manipulation, blackmail, and threats by interrogators.

In all cases where a detainee retracts their statement, which was obtained under duress, the court refuses to consider the retraction during the trial and labels the detainee as a "hostile witness." The court bases its decisions on the statements and confessions provided by the detainee during interrogation, which were extracted under force, torture, and manipulation. The court rarely accepts a retraction of statements unless under very specific and rare circumstances.

Zionist courts are accustomed to issuing unjust sentences, often multiplying them many times, leading to the imprisonment of a large number of Palestinians and Arabs related to the conflict for extended periods in the occupation's prisons.

If even Israelis accuse their own courts of being racist, undemocratic, and only implementing the policies of occupation, how are we, as Palestinians, supposed to engage with such courts

The well-known Israeli writer Amira Hass wrote in *Haaretz* on August 23, 2006: "It is the occupier who condemns, accuses, and judges, and the law distinguishes between a Jew and a Palestinian, between one prisoner and another."

She also said: "Palestinian detainees are brought before a military court, which is part of the military occupation machine that oppresses civilian populations. This machine considers resisting the occupation, whether through protests, raising flags, or other actions, to be a crime. It is this apparatus that carries out convictions and issues rulings, with judges who are biased and dedicated to protecting the interests of the occupier and the settlers..."

What kind of court decides to give legitimacy to policies of assassination and the commission of legal crimes, such as the Israeli Supreme Court's ruling on December 14, 2006, and many other decisions that permit settlement expansion, aggression, torture, the restriction of movement, and the imposition of blockades? And yet, no Israeli is ever held accountable for their crimes or brought to trial."

Israeli writer Gideon Levy described these courts in *Haaretz* on December 17, 2006, saying: "The occupation has received significant reinforcement to its power through the broad legitimacy granted to it by the Israeli Supreme Court. The victims of the

occupation will not receive compensation, the separation wall will continue to be built according to plan, and the oppression and injustice will be cloaked in judicial legitimacy."

It is necessary to take a national decision at the official level—by the presidency, government, legislative council, national and Islamic factions, and the prisoners' movement—that calls for a boycott of the Zionist courts, a rejection of dealing with them, and a request to lawyers not to represent detainees before them.

This will expose and strip these courts of any legitimacy, and eliminate any attempt to legitimize them or the rulings issued by them.

Let these military and civilian judges decide as they wish, without any defenses. However, this should be accompanied by a wide Palestinian campaign to mobilize public opinion on this stance, as well as an Arab and international campaign to bring the issue of prisoners to global forums, especially the United Nations, the General Assembly, and the International Court of Justice in The Hague. The goal would be to take a decision recognizing Palestinian and Arab prisoners in the prisons and camps of the occupation as "prisoners of war" and "freedom fighters" who belong to a national liberation movement. These prisoners should not be subject to trial, and the rulings against them must be annulled and declared illegitimate and illegal. Efforts should also be made to push for the implementation of the Fourth Geneva Convention on the protection of civilians in wartime, applied to Palestinian lands and its people, in accordance with the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.



## **Chapter Four**

### **Solitary Confinement**

But I learned the times of the sun, and I said: "Welcome to the blue sky, even if it is covered with tin and iron."



## Slow Death

The occupying authorities have employed various methods and tactics to turn the lives of prisoners into a living hell, inflicting pain, suffering, and torment that sometimes exceeds human endurance. The occupation and its intelligence services, as well as the authorities of its prisons, have not been content with arresting and torturing hundreds of thousands of Palestinians and Arabs. They have also established mock military courts and issued unjust and unfair rulings, leading to the imprisonment of hundreds of thousands for years. Some of these prisoners have spent over ten years behind bars, while hundreds have served more than fifteen years, and there are those who are currently spending their thirtieth year in prison.

But the suffering was not limited to imprisonment alone. The authorities have exacerbated the torment, turning prisons into hell through a series of practices, the most prominent and dangerous of which is the policy of solitary confinement, a practice that prisoners refer to as "slow death."

This policy is not new; it has been used by the occupation since its early days and continues to this day in different forms. Hundreds of fighters, prisoners' movement cadres, and leaders have been subjected to solitary confinement, enduring its brutalities and hardships over the years.

The policy of solitary confinement has expanded significantly, affecting more individuals, lasting longer, and becoming harsher and more difficult than before.

The occupation uses this policy through the Shabak (Israeli Security Agency) and the prison authorities, with these two bodies authorized to make decisions regarding solitary confinement or even group confinement for any prisoner.

The decision made by the Shabak targets those it believes could pose a threat to what is called "Israeli security" if they were kept with other prisoners. This includes activists and cadres who continue their resistance activities inside the prison.

The Shabak justifies its decision by claiming that confessions were obtained from certain prisoners, revealing that they organized cells for the military wings of factions, tasked them with specific operations, provided them with weapons, information, and plans to kidnap soldiers in exchange for prisoners, and more.

Some fighters are placed in solitary confinement immediately after their interrogation is completed, transferred from the investigation cells to isolation cells before they even engage in any activity following their arrest—especially those whom the intelligence services claim are "bomb makers" or play a significant role in preparing explosives, recruiting suicide bombers, and similar activities.

At times, the Shabak also makes the decision for solitary confinement as an act of retaliation against certain cadres and fighters, particularly those who did not confess during interrogation.

The other aspect of solitary confinement is decided by the Israeli Prison Service and is specifically aimed at leaders of the prisoners' movement and activists inside the prisons—those who have influence and impact within factions and among prisoners. It also targets those whom the prison authorities believe are behind activities, protests, events, and hunger strikes inside prisons aimed at improving the prisoners' living conditions and demanding their rights. The prison administration refers to these individuals as "those with hot heads."

Often, a number of prisoners are placed in solitary confinement and accused of using violence against certain officers and police. Occasionally, confrontations, even if limited, occur—such as a prisoner striking a guard or stabbing an officer, among other acts. However, no prisoner takes such actions against their captors unless they have endured severe mistreatment by that particular guard or by the prison authorities in general.

According to the laws of the occupying state, a prisoner in solitary confinement is brought before a court to review the extension of their isolation after six months of confinement. Naturally, these courts are mock trials, following the instructions of the Shabak and the prison service. The solitary confinement is often renewed under the pretext that the prisoner poses a threat to what is called the "security of the State of Israel." A large number of prisoners subjected to solitary confinement are accused of baseless charges.

The Shabak and prison authorities not only place prisoners in solitary confinement cells, sometimes for many years, but they also deny them basic rights such as family visits, receiving books or newspapers, taking exams, and other basic entitlements. Many fighters and activists have suffered under different forms of isolation in prison cells, and a significant number have developed serious health, physical, and psychological problems. Some of them have spent over five years in solitary confinement, and some remain in isolation to this day, having been subjected to this harsh treatment for a prolonged period.

The policy of solitary confinement is a policy of slow death for the prisoners, who are buried alive in desolate cells, enduring all forms of physical and psychological abuse, torture, and torment.

### **Cell Number 1 in the Isolation Unit at Ramla Prison**

In early January 2003, the occupying authorities transferred me to solitary confinement in a special section of Ayalon Prison, part of the Ramla prison complex. I was taken, as usual, with my hands and feet shackled, in a police vehicle guarded by military jeeps from the occupation forces. I was not informed where they were taking me at that late hour of the night. I arrived at Ayalon Prison at around 1 a.m. This section was part of an

old building constructed by the British colonial authorities, which was later expanded by the Israeli occupation.

The area known as Ramla Prison is home to a number of prisons, including Ayalon Prison, Nitsan Prison, Givon Prison, and the Neve Tirza women's prison, along with the central transfer corridor for prisoners between prisons, known as "HaMa'abar" in Hebrew. My destination, of course, was the isolation section.

In addition to the aforementioned prisons, there is also the Ramla Prison Hospital, which houses dozens of sick prisoners on a permanent basis.

As is customary upon arrival, my few belongings were carefully searched, along with a personal body search. This process is routine in all prisons, where there is a search each time you enter or leave a facility. The search involves passing through electronic devices similar to those at airports, followed by the use of a handheld electronic device. After that, a full body search is conducted while completely naked, along with a search of my clothes and belongings, piece by piece. The entire process is accompanied by humiliation, oppression, and insult, and I was left waiting, shackled, for many long hours.

A number of police officers led me to the solitary confinement section. I climbed about twelve steps and then entered a small, cramped section with a narrow corridor and a row of eight small cells on one side, and another row of similar cells on the opposite side. They placed me in Cell No. 1, located on the right side of the first row of cells. This cell was distinct because it partially overlapped with an adjacent cell, forming a right angle.

My cell was located in the older part of the section, extremely dark, with a small opening at the top of a very high wall. This opening was covered with bars and wire mesh. The opening, measuring no more than 15 cm in height and width, was inaccessible due to its height from the ground and the fact that it overlooked another building in the prison. Climbing up to it and risking a fall was pointless. A thin beam of light would occasionally filter through this tiny opening just before noon, and at certain times during the night, it was possible to see the moon from somewhere, but it was extremely difficult.

Since the cell was made of sand and dirt, its walls were filled with dozens of cracks and holes. Inside, there was a bed, or a "bresh" as prisoners call it, made of two rusted iron layers. I used the bottom layer as my bed and placed some of my clothes and belongings on the upper layer.

One of the previous inmates, a Jewish criminal, had drawn various skull shapes on the wall that my face often faced. These shapes were painted in frightening colors, creating a terrifying atmosphere.

The length of the cell is relatively decent, measuring about two meters, while its width is no more than 120 cm and its height is approximately three and a half meters. The cell

has a completely closed iron door, with a small opening that is 10 cm in both length and width, containing four small bars. This opening is used by the guard to check the presence of the prisoner, particularly during the daily headcount, which takes place four to five times a day, from morning until evening.

There is another small opening in the center of the door, measuring 20 cm in length and 10 cm in width. This is used to pass the prisoner their daily meals and remains closed at all other times.

The cell has dim and limited light, and if the light is turned off, the cell becomes completely dark, making it impossible to see or even move around. As a result, the light must remain on all the time. Typically, the guard controls the light, turning it on and off, because the switch is located outside the cell.

There is a space, loosely referred to as a bathroom, which is very old and in a deplorable, miserable condition. It is dug into the ground to the point that using it becomes a difficult and exhausting task. The washing water in this open bathroom accumulates and overflows into the cell, sometimes reaching the bed. This necessitates daily cleaning and removal of the water, which must be drained back into the bathroom.

The cell also has a small, worn-out basin called a washbasin, where prisoners can wash their faces and hands and clean some plastic dishes. However, the water leaks from the pipe, making the process of washing and organizing the dishes a tiring task, as it requires drying the water on the floor and the basin again.

I entered this solitary confinement cell without having had any real rest after a journey of interrogation filled with torture, bitterness, humiliation, and psychological abuse that crushed both my human dignity and my struggle. After spending a hundred days in the small, filthy interrogation cells...

True, I am now in a cell without further interrogation, without shackles, sitting on a chair with a shadow of constant surveillance, but still, this cell, decorated with skull drawings, marks the beginning of a new phase of psychological and spiritual torment...

Now, I live alone in a desolate and dark cell. What slightly eases the situation is that this is not the first time I have experienced solitary confinement. I was previously isolated in 1978 in Ramallah Prison. I recalled those days, separated from me by a quarter-century, and now, I find myself back in solitary confinement. Back then, my life experience was limited, mostly confined to my village, the school, and nearby villages, as well as the city of Ramallah. I was unmarried, without the responsibilities of a family or children, and the experience was short, lasting no more than five months.

Now, things are entirely different, and the responsibilities are much greater. In 1978, I was at the beginning of my struggle, at the start of my journey to resist the occupation. I was only fourteen years old. Now, the situation is far more complex, and the responsibility I carry is much heavier.

In 1978, the beginning of my dreams of freedom was somewhat romantic and personal, typical of a young man just starting his journey, still closer to adolescence than to adulthood. Revolutionary idealism and romanticism were at the forefront, and the dream focused more on personal freedom than on reuniting with a beloved mother, father, siblings, my dear sister, family, the village streets, and friends. I didn't have a wife or children whom my heart, mind, and emotions longed for. My mind wasn't burdened with the struggles of the nation or the great people, with all their details and suffering. The guards didn't treat me in any special way—I was just one among thousands of prisoners.

Now, every guard, officer, prison director, and official knows who Marwan Barghouti is. Some of them deliberately mistreat me, making it a point to add such actions to their record and biography, using it to boost their arrogance and pride.

During my solitary confinement in 1978, there was no way of knowing what was happening outside the walls. I didn't see a newspaper, watch television, listen to the radio, or hear any news. The cell was a true grave, the only difference being that the person in the grave was alive—breathing, eating, relieving himself, and thinking.

In this context, I remember that after I was moved from solitary confinement to Tulkarm Prison, where there was a section for group isolation, I was shocked by the external developments that had occurred during my time in isolation. My fellow prisoners informed me of these, including the popular revolution led by Imam Khomeini in Iran, which had overthrown the regime of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who had been an emperor and dictator allied with Israel and the U.S., and had made his country a base for American influence and presence in the Middle East.

I also learned that the Israeli embassy in Tehran had recently been converted into the Palestinian embassy, and that Yasser Arafat was the first leader to be welcomed by the fledgling revolution leading the Islamic Republic of Iran... along with other events related to developments in the Arab, international, and Palestinian arenas.

The point of all this is that solitary confinement separates a person from the world... time comes to a halt, and perhaps they want the mind to stop thinking and reacting to events and the environment. It is a slow death, devoid of the oxygen of life.

In Ramla Prison, there were prisoners in neighboring cells in the same section, but on the other side, so it was impossible to see or speak to them except when passing through to the exercise yard. In Cell No. 6, there were brothers Ahmad Barghouthi ("Al-Faransi") and Mousa Dudin. It is worth noting that "Al-Faransi" worked alongside me as a companion, assistant, comrade, and a loyal and faithful friend. He showed remarkable resilience during interrogation and was sentenced to 13 years in prison after boycotting the Zionist court.

The nickname "Al-Faransi" reflects an entire generation of fighters who were children during the First Intifada, the very generation that created this blessed uprising. This generation set an unparalleled example of steadfastness, sacrifice, and martyrdom in our history. They were the most courageous and daring generation, ready for martyrdom in the face of the occupiers.

"Al-Faransi" is considered one of the prominent leaders and founders of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades in Palestine. He worked alongside me when he was no older than nineteen, until we were both arrested together. I felt a deep sense of weakness seeing him in solitary confinement, where he spent a long period of time due to the Shin Bet's claim that he continued to send suicide bombers under instructions from his prison.

Alongside his fellow fighter, Mousa Dudin, who is one of the leaders of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades and a member of the Hamas leadership inside the Zionist prisons, "Al-Faransi" decided to embark on an open hunger strike twice in protest against solitary confinement. They were in the same cell, and they both continued the strike for more than 35 days. Their health deteriorated, and they were transferred to the hospital in very serious condition. Despite this, they repeated the hunger strike once again. Despite the conditions of oppression and the cell, they found a way to harmonize and cooperate in a remarkable way, moving between the Beer Sheva and Ramla prisons.

In another cell, at the end of the second row of cells, were two brothers from Hamas cadres, Hani Jaber, who had stabbed the director of Nafha Prison in protest of the humiliating searches of the families of prisoners, particularly the women. The other, Mahmoud Issa, is sentenced to life imprisonment and is considered one of the prominent Hamas leaders in the prisons. He has been in solitary confinement for more than four years. The remaining cells housed criminal detainees, both Jewish and Arab. In the small cell next to mine, No. 1, was a Jewish criminal named David Atias, one of the prominent mafia leaders in Israel.

### **A Cry Is Necessary**

After entering Cell No. 1 in Ayalon Prison in January 2003, it is known that this month is one of the harshest in winter in our country, with the highest rainfall typically occurring, accompanied by a bitter cold. Unlike many others, I enjoy winter, as I spent many winters during my childhood and youth in my village. I used to enjoy the sight of trees submerged in rainwater, the springs and ponds overflowing, and the wonderful flooding of the valleys. I still carry these memories and beautiful images of the village in the winter in my cell. I live in my memory the scene of the mountains, hills, streets, trees, and springs, hearing the sound of the winds and smelling the thyme in the spring.

Interestingly, I didn't feel much cold in this cell, as it was completely sealed, and air only entered with great difficulty. The humidity was high, and the smell of mold emanated from every corner, in addition to the ants, insects, and cockroaches. Despite all this, it was less cold than the other cells.

I had nothing in the cell and waited for more than two months to get a television and a radio, which I bought from the prison store, called the "canteen." I also got an electric stove, which I used for cooking and heating. After three months, I managed to acquire these items, so I could prepare food and drinks, especially tea.

By the way, none of these things were available during my previous arrests, which took place roughly between 1976 and 1978. The prisons and cells were almost entirely empty, with nothing but prisoners, a small amount of food, and living conditions that were unbearably harsh and bitter.

The prisoners went on dozens of open hunger strikes, and many martyrs fell in the battle to defend humane living conditions, in which even the bare minimum of the prisoner's dignity could be maintained. Thanks to these immense sacrifices, the prisoners were able to secure televisions, other electrical devices, and many other achievements that are basic rights for Palestinian prisoners.

On my first day in the cell, I entered after 2 a.m., feeling exhausted, and I fell asleep. I didn't wake up until 6:30 a.m. to the sound of the morning headcount, during which the prisoner must stand so the guard can see him and confirm he is still alive. The act of standing is considered part of the policy of humiliating the prisoner.

From the first day in this desolate cell, I began trying to adapt to this grave. My mind was filled with questions: How long will I stay here? What will happen? It became clear to me that each prisoner in solitary confinement is allowed one hour a day to leave the cell and go to what is called the "yard" or "exercise yard." When the guard came and asked if I wanted to go out to the yard, I immediately replied, "Of course, I will go." I never hesitated to take that hour outside and make the most of it during the entire period of my solitary confinement. Many prisoners, however, prefer to stay in their cells, especially during the winter or on very hot days.

The yard for solitary confinement was on the opposite side of the cells. It was a very small area, no more than eight meters long and five meters wide, surrounded by high concrete walls with nothing visible except the towering walls on all four sides.

The yard was covered with four layers of iron bars, half of it fully covered with metal, while the other half had openings that allowed the prisoner to see a part of the sky through the iron mesh and barbed wire. The sun reached the yard at limited times, depending on the prisoner's luck and the time of day they went out. But I learned the sun's schedule and greeted the blue sky, even though it was covered by sheets of metal and iron.

During my entire time in solitary confinement at Ayalon prison, I never missed a chance to go out to the yard, even in heavy rain or when it was difficult to walk because the yard would fill with rainwater, making it resemble a well. Walking in it was challenging, but I preferred getting soaked by the rain rather than staying in the cell. At least outside, I

could embrace a little bit of sunlight and breathe the air that made its way through the walls and the barbed wire in the sky.

When it was time to go to the yard, I would extend my hand through the small window in the door of my cell so the guard could shackle me. Sometimes, they would chain my feet as well, and I would walk this way for about 15 meters. Upon entering the yard, still shackled, and after the door was closed, I would place my hand on the window so the guard could unlock the restraints. Naturally, I was alone in the yard, just as I was in the cell. I would spend the time walking, calling out to the prisoners in the nearby cells, though it was a difficult task. I often felt a sharp pain in my throat from shouting, raising my voice high enough to be heard over the concrete walls. I hoped that I could speak to brothers I couldn't see but could hear. They needed to hear my voice too, and so I had to shout loudly.

Whenever the guards heard shouting or noise, they would rush over, demanding that I stop talking and cease shouting, threatening to return me to my cell. My time in the yard, brief as it was, and the few minutes I could shout, were the only opportunities I had to communicate, to test my voice so I wouldn't forget how to speak. Because walking around that small yard, which felt like a deep well, made you feel as if you were losing part of your humanity. You struggled with suffering, oppression, and deprivation of freedom and a normal life.

There was no choice but to engage in deep reflection and thinking. I had to summon all the qualities of resilience within myself, and there were many, so that the guard would never feel that the well was closed, and that my voice had become an echo...

### **Isolation at Shata Prison**

On the morning of August 14, 2003, a guard came to me and asked me to gather my belongings because I was being transferred from this cell to another location, though he didn't specify where. I gathered my things, preparing to leave, and took one last look at the cell I had been in — a place I had not left except for one hour daily to go to the small yard for a brief time. Other than that, I had remained within these crumbling walls, in the darkness that made the place resemble a grave. More than 250 difficult and harsh days had passed, and isolation meant living within closed walls, as if one had no imagination, no thought, no soul — no dreams or ambitions.

The walls may limit one's view, but they do not prevent thinking. They restrict movement but cannot stop the mind from soaring. Each of us carries within ourselves a homeland we traverse, moving from private moments to public ones, retrieving energy and understanding from our own experiences, reshaping ourselves in the process. During my time in isolation, I sometimes felt closer to my partner, my children, and to my causes. I lived in the present moment, revisiting memories in different ways. The emotions, thoughts, and dreams hadn't been extinguished; rather, the walls had decayed, and in their decay, the image of my family and homeland took on new shapes

that defied the chains, the walls, and the isolation. Now, as I leave, I feel I have overcome this challenge once again. My morale is excellent, and my health is fine.

I benefitted greatly from the time spent reading, studying, reflecting, and thinking. Despite the sense that I was in a deep, dark well where contemplation and thought were difficult, I realized that even the blind man who cannot see can still reflect and think, activating his other senses. Everything around me was dark, but I was filled with light and radiance from within. Even so, I tried, and I succeeded in many ways.

## **Leaving the Cell**

As I was leaving, I passed by the other cells, where the comrade and fighter, Ahmad al-Barghouthi (known as "the French"), said goodbye to me with tears in his eyes. It was a difficult moment for me, but I chose to hide my emotions and replied with words of reassurance, saying that this suffering would one day end. I reminded him that we must persevere and that these chains would eventually break. No one would ever again be able to take us away from our families, our loved ones, or our homeland, even if it meant a grave or a prison. The homeland resides within us, wherever we go, and so do our families. The occupation may imprison, bind, and isolate us, but we live the homeland even in the tightest places. Each time, we build a small image of our homeland in our isolation, and the occupation may try to shatter it, but it cannot erase the memories of those who lived with us, and whom we lived with for long days, becoming part of one family — a family called Palestine, within each of us. We will meet again, without a doubt.

I was also bid farewell by my comrade, Musa Dudin, with deep emotion and remarkable strength. The same came from Mahmoud Issa, Hani Jaber, and others, including both Jewish and Arab criminal prisoners.

Incidentally, one of the Palestinian criminal prisoners in this section insisted on preparing soup for me almost daily, along with some salad. This gesture helped me a great deal, as I had never cooked in my life, had no idea how to do it, and had never tried. This young man worked with me wonderfully and helped a lot, as he had opportunities to move around the section.

After I had prepared myself and gathered my few belongings, the guards led me to the waiting and inspection room. After going through this humiliating and tedious process of having my belongings and body searched, I was placed alone in the "bosta" (the transport van, as it is called by prisoners). The van, accompanied by military vehicles for protection, set off. I was handcuffed and shackled in the van, and after several exhausting hours of travel, I found myself standing in the Shatta prison, located in the Beisan Valley in northern Palestine. I was exhausted from the journey, the restraints, lack of movement, hunger, and the long road. I waited in the van, which felt like a mobile cell, a closed iron box. I was not allowed to attend to my biological needs, despite my constant urging and pressure on the guards, until several hours later.

It is worth noting that one of the major problems faced by prisoners when being transported by the "bosta" (the transport van) from one prison to another, or when being brought to court, is the prolonged period spent inside the iron mobile cell without being able to relieve themselves. This leads to serious health issues, such as urinary retention. Some prisoners have even been forced to urinate in their clothes due to the pressure. I personally endured the harshness and difficulty of this issue during my time in the transport van (the mobile cell), and many attempts to convince the guards to resolve the problem were often unsuccessful. I learned to always plan ahead for any transportation, ensuring that I relieve myself before traveling and avoid drinking fluids if I knew I would be transported—though this information is rarely known in advance, as the occupation authorities and the prison service intentionally carry out transfers suddenly and without prior notice.

After spending long hours traveling from Ramla Prison to Shatta Prison, and even longer waiting in the vehicle, I was taken out, still shackled, with the intention of being moved to the waiting and search room located at the entrance of the prison. It was difficult for me to carry my belongings while shackled, so I asked the officer to unshackle me so I could carry them because they were heavy, or to help me lift them. He refused. It was hard for me to carry them, especially since I was suffering from pain in my back and neck on the right side, which worsened when carrying heavy objects. My attempts to convince the guards to help or unshackle me were unsuccessful, and I was forced to carry my belongings with great difficulty, an effort that I would feel the effects of for many months to come.

The prison staff and management greeted me with mockery, ridicule, and sadism, deliberately demeaning me and disrespecting me with phrases like "The Intifada is ongoing" and "The Intifada will triumph," slogans I had repeated throughout the uprising after my arrest in the Zionist court in Tel Aviv. The guards insisted on conducting a strip search, which I refused and resisted. They used force to perform the body search and strip me of my clothes, including my underwear. It is worth mentioning that such a humiliating and brutal search had not been conducted on me when I was at Ayalon Prison and later at Ohale Kedar Prison in Be'er Sheva.

I waited for several more hours and got into a scuffle with the guards, who took all my belongings and threw me into the cell wearing only my underwear. I had absolutely nothing with me. This situation lasted for several days until they returned most of my belongings.

Shatta Prison's isolation section is considered one of the worst in the Israeli prison system, both in terms of its bitterness and cruelty. The treatment is some of the worst in the prisons. There are only two cells in the isolation section, and the prisoner passes through three to four doors, each two to three meters apart, until reaching the two adjacent cells, separated by a door in the middle of the corridor. There is Cell Number (1) and Cell Number (2). I was placed in Cell Number (1), which is at the far end of the row, as was the case in Ayalon isolation, but this time, there is no section of cells. The cell is completely isolated and far from the guards' observation rooms. My cell is

separated from the others by three to four doors, making it impossible to hear calls for help, and even if one were to knock on the doors, the guards would not hear.

I felt as though I were in a completely isolated world, like being on an island or in a grave within a cemetery filled with silence, solitude, and isolation. There is a significant difference between these graves and the isolation of Ayalon, where you could hear the voices of prisoners from the neighboring cells, offering some form of company. Even though my cell in Ayalon was at the far end of the section, making it difficult to see the other cells or prisoners, the guards could still hear any call for help quickly. But here, in this completely isolated cell, screaming, calling out normally, or knocking on the doors is useless. The feeling of absolute loneliness is a difficult, bitter, and sometimes terrifying one, but a cell is still a cell, and the location or place doesn't matter.

What eased the difficulty somewhat was that I had come from solitary confinement, so I had a prior idea of the harshness of this place, its poor management, and the way the guards and prison staff interacted. However, what I found here was far worse than what I had heard about and much worse than I had imagined, based on all expectations. In the early days, I had no clothing other than my underwear, which was difficult and painful. It was somewhat alleviated by the fact that the weather was summer and the cell was extremely hot.

Shatta Prison's cell was much better than the one in Ayalon. The building here was more modern, and the walls were not cracked or filled with holes, nor was there dirt falling from them as in Ayalon. The lighting inside the cell was slightly better, and, most importantly, the bathroom was relatively acceptable—it was a Western-style toilet, not a floor toilet, which was exhausting. The problem was that the shower pipe was directly above it, forcing me to stand pressed against the wall. The bathroom also had small openings covered with layers of barbed wire and bars.

After several days, and after my belongings were returned, including the television and the fan, the situation became somewhat more bearable. The door here was heavy and permanently closed, and the two windows were reinforced with iron bars and wire. The worst part was that the window was covered from the outside with iron and sheet metal, with only small openings, so the prisoner could see very little, if anything at all. The daily headcount, which takes place five to six times a day, was harsher in this cell than in the other sections, as this was the only place among all the prisons and cells I had been to where the count took place after entering the cell, rather than through the external window.

Additionally, the prisoner is required to wear prison-issued clothing (brown in color) and stand for the count. The cell is also searched by knocking on the walls, floor, and window with a special baton to ensure there are no hidden holes or gaps. This is not a security measure, but rather an act of provocation and humiliation aimed at disturbing the prisoner and creating a sense of instability. As for the daily "break" (or "fura") of one hour, it takes place at a time decided by the on-duty officer, which varies from day to day. In other sections and cells, the time could sometimes be delayed, rescheduled, or negotiated.

The "fura" (daily break) usually took place at 8 a.m. on most days, during which my hands and feet were shackled for the short trip to a yard 15 meters away from the cell. This was the only yard where a guard or officer sat in the same spot on a chair after locking the door, monitoring me for the entire hour. Naturally, I would use this time to walk back and forth, without stopping or resting, as it was the only hour in the 24-hour day I had for some movement. What made this yard special was that it offered a view of some mountains, which was important to a prisoner deprived of seeing nature at all hours. I felt life and hope when I saw those mountains, trees, birds, and flocks of pigeons and sparrows. There were also barbed-wire fences separating the yard from the outer wall, and between the yard wall and the outer fence, there was a small dirt patch with a few trees and flowers planted. Sometimes, I would feel sadness for these trees and flowers, trapped between the barbed wire.

At such moments, while I walked in the yard, I would remember that beautiful morning in Ramallah, where my family, home, wife, children, neighbors, relatives, and friends were. I would recall the flood of schoolchildren filling the city squares, and I would remember how my children—Qassam, Ruba, Sharaf, and Arab—would wake up. I would imagine them and send a thousand kisses to them in my heart. I would picture Sharaf, as usual, being the first to wake up among his siblings without anyone's help, putting on his school clothes, organizing his books and bag, washing his beautiful face, and kissing me even if I was still asleep. Often, I would wake up to his beautiful smile. Then, he would, sometimes alone, wake up the younger Arab, urging him to get up and get ready, even threatening to leave for school alone. Sharaf hated being late, and would often say he was ashamed in front of the school principal, "Miss Samira Nasser," so he rarely missed his homework or the school bell. As for Arab, who was very calm and measured his steps carefully, he was full of affection, often hugging me and refusing to leave me alone, loving to sleep on my shoulder. Despite his quiet nature, he would stick to the routine and leave for school, even if it was a little late. He and Sharaf were soulmates.

I remember those beautiful moments and ask myself, *what drives me to leave my wife and children, whom I love dearly, to carry a rifle when I already know the price of that choice?* I have been doing this for over thirty years. Why do I continue this arduous journey toward freedom, without fatigue or weariness, despite the bitterness, the cruelty of separation, and the immense pain? Then, I find myself believing in and convinced of every step I have taken in my life, in every patriotic act I have done, and in my struggle. In these moments, my sense of national pride grows stronger, and I feel contempt for the guard who shackles my hands and feet, who guards himself from me. I feel that the cell is a trial I must overcome and triumph over. Despite the harshness and difficulty of the feelings one experiences in this dark, desolate place, this is the price we pay for our people and our homeland to be free. Struggling and fighting for freedom is one of the highest expressions of living freely—it is a test of human emotions.

After the "fura" ended, an hour later, my hands and feet were shackled again to return to my cell, which was 15 meters away. I would enter narrow corridors, one door after another, with four doors being locked behind me as I returned to this tomb designated

for the living. I tried to move around this very small yard, walking back and forth despite everything. The food in this cell was poor, and there was no chance of getting food prepared by fellow prisoners, as there was only one neighboring cell, separated by a door and a hallway. There were no facilities for cooking either. Nevertheless, I tried to make do with the food provided by the prison administration, which was limited in quantity and of poor quality.

What gave me strength in these cells was that I am not a food lover, and I never crave any special food, except on rare occasions. I never refuse to eat anything at all. This helped me a lot and reminded me of my wife, who would often complain about how little I ate, and that I never asked for any specific dish or type of food. Many times, she would scold me and ask why, and I would tell her that anything good and acceptable was fine. I don't recall ever arguing with my wife, or previously with my mother, over food. If I couldn't find anything prepared or ready, I would simply settle for some olive oil, a tomato, some yogurt, and a cup of tea. Even when I would come home late, which was often the case, I would never wake anyone up, even if I was starving. Instead, I would prepare that meal myself, though my wife always made sure to prepare dinner for me, and I would often find it waiting for me on the table. The food in this cell was disgusting and terrible, but I forced myself to eat it no matter what.

The morning after my arrival in the solitary confinement cell at Shata prison, I turned my face toward the window and loudly called out to my neighbor in the only other cell in this section, hoping to find a companion to alleviate my loneliness and ease his solitude as well. After several attempts, I heard no response. I sat down and said to myself, "There's no one here but you, so be patient; patience is the key to relief," as my mother always used to say. By the afternoon, I called out again, and this time someone answered, saying: "I'm Hassan Salama." Before I could respond, he asked, "You are Abu al-Qassam, Marwan Barghouti, aren't you?" I replied, "Yes, how did you know?" He said, "I heard the guards talking about your arrival, and I figured they would bring you to this miserable place, to this hell." I didn't need to be introduced to Brother Hassan Salama—his name is known to every fighter and freedom fighter. It would be hard to find a prisoner who doesn't know this name. Hassan was one of the prominent leaders of the Al-Qassam Brigades, sentenced to life imprisonment multiple times, hailing from Khan Yunis in the Gaza Strip. He has spent over seven years in solitary confinement, under orders from the Shin Bet. Brother Hassan remains a symbol of a steadfast fighter with an iron will.

I exchanged many words with him about various matters, while being aware that one of the police officers was sitting between the windows of our cells, recording our conversation as Brother Hassan had informed me. Nevertheless, as is my habit, I didn't care about that. I expressed to him the deep respect and admiration that people have for him, and that his name is on everyone's lips, as people praise him for his resilience and struggle. I said this both out of genuine conviction and for psychological reasons, because any word spoken to a prisoner in solitary confinement has a profound impact on their morale, lifting their spirits and strengthening their resolve.

The truth is that Brother Hassan suffers greatly from the burden of this solitary confinement, which is harsher than death a thousand times over. I wished I could do anything to ease his suffering, and I tried to connect with him whenever I could. Then, as usual, I discovered that he had started a hunger strike, demanding to be transferred to another solitary confinement cell and to be removed from this hell. After a few weeks spent in this cursed tomb, I was transferred, and on the same day, Brother Hassan Salama was also moved. However, we were transported in different vehicles and to separate prisons, though they were adjacent. He was taken to solitary confinement at Eshkol Prison, while I was taken to solitary confinement at Ohali Kedar Prison in Be'er Sheva, in the south of Palestine.

### **Cell No. 5 in the Solitary Confinement of Be'er Sheva Prison**

At the end of August 2003, after a brief stay in the solitary confinement cells at Shata Prison, the guards told me in the morning to prepare my belongings for transfer. No one informed me of my destination, which was typical, as a prisoner often lives in a state of uncertainty, especially during interrogation and solitary confinement. I quickly packed my things, and a guard, along with several police officers, led me for a thorough search, which, this time, was less provocative and brutal than usual.

After several hours of waiting, I was transferred to a "bosta" (a mobile cell), which sped off, though not before passing by several prisons without making many stops. At the Ramla prison, without entering the transfer station where prisoners are gathered to be moved from one facility to another, I was transferred from one vehicle to another and quickly headed towards Be'er Sheva. I didn't know my exact destination, but I could infer it based on my relatively good knowledge of Palestine's geography.

After about two hours, I arrived at Be'er Sheva Prison, which consists of three separate prisons spread over a very large area. The main building was constructed during the British Mandate, and the occupying state has since added several prisons within its vast walls. The largest prison inside this compound is Eshel Prison, which includes several sections, including one for solitary confinement. Over 700 prisoners are held there, and it also contains a section for group isolation. There is also Ohali Kedar Prison, which houses over a thousand prisoners, including a special section for solitary confinement, while the Dekel Prison remains dedicated to criminal detainees.

I entered this prison and, as usual, underwent a thorough and difficult search of my belongings, clothes, and body, passing through electronic devices similar to those used at airports and sensitive locations in many countries. In the evening, a number of guards, with my hands and feet shackled, escorted me down a long corridor covered in metal, approximately one and a half meters wide and over fifty meters long. On one side, there were dozens of cell windows overlooking this corridor, while on the other side, a metal wall separated the corridor from a space where prisoners in solitary confinement could be released. As I walked down this corridor, I noticed a large number of rats—very large in size and in huge quantities—scurrying across the passage. The scene was absolutely desolate. After passing more than half of the corridor, I entered

the designated yard for the "fura" (exercise break), and from there, we entered the isolation section of Ohali Kedar. This time, my designated cell was Cell No. 5, located at the end of the block. It was the only cell that didn't have another one directly across from it, unlike the other cells. Instead, it faced a room designated for the guards' shift change. Next to it, directly across from the cell, was a refrigerator used by the isolation section, which contained ten cells—five of them located in the western part of the section, where my cell was, numbered 10, 9, 8, 7, and 6. On the opposite side, there were cells numbered 1, 2, 3, and 4.

When I entered the cell, I found it to be the smallest one I had been placed in so far, smaller even than those in Ayalon, Shatta, and others. Its length did not exceed two meters and thirty centimeters, while its width was only one meter and thirty centimeters. The cell contained a floor toilet, a shower pipe in the same space (which was very cramped and, naturally, open), and a small, worn-out sink opposite the toilet, next to the window that was heavily barred with metal and wires. The window itself was covered with metal bars and wires both inside and outside, with three layers of bars and wires, through which you could barely pass a single finger.

The door this time was covered in metal bars at the top third of it, made of small square bars layered at least twice. It was somewhat open, not completely shut, as was the case in Ayalon, Shatta, and other prisons, though there were other cells in the same block that were fully sealed. My cell, however, was the smallest one, with some ventilation allowed by the barred window. They had chosen the smallest cell with the barred door to facilitate the severe monitoring by a camera placed in the corridor corner, which kept track of everything and every movement inside.

The cell also had a two-layer bed, with very limited space between them, making it difficult to sit on one or lie down to read without having to bend over. The guards could turn the light on and off from the outside. Inside the cell, there were over 130 holes in the wall, which served as hiding places for various types of cockroaches, some of which I saw for the first time in my life. Although I had grown up in old houses and later lived in a mountainous area among olive trees in a ground-level house with two rooms, where various insects could enter and spread, I had never seen the types of cockroaches I encountered in this cell. These included very large, small, and medium-sized cockroaches, in different colors and shapes.

The cockroaches spread throughout the small cell—among the clothes, the "canteen" items, food, and everywhere. At first, it was extremely disturbing, especially in the first weeks, and perhaps even months. But over time, I became accustomed to living with them and started to coexist. In the beginning, whenever I would wake up and feel a cockroach crawl over my foot or hand, I would feel discomfort, fear, and disgust. But gradually, I no longer cared, except for protecting my face. It felt as though I had made a silent pact with these cockroaches: they could crawl on the rest of my body, but they were never allowed to pass over my face.

After several weeks, I discovered an astonishing spread of ants—of a particular type, with a repulsive odor. I was surprised, as I knew ants and their nests, having encountered them countless times in my village. However, here, I once looked at the wall behind me and saw that most of it was covered with ants, spreading over a large area in such numbers that I could hardly believe it. Though, as I said, I had encountered dozens of ant nests scattered around our village home, this sight was unlike anything I had ever seen before. One day, I noticed a number of large rats in the cell. It was clear that they could not have entered through the door, as I had sealed it tightly with newspaper, nor could they have come through the window due to the triple-layered, tiny barbed wire openings. I realized they must have come from the bathroom or through the floor drain. I chased the rats, and they returned via the toilet's sewage system. The other prisoners there told me that after using the toilet, I should block the hole with a plastic bottle (from a soda or juice bottle), filled with cold water and tied with a string to make it easier to place and remove. I started doing that. However, when I would forget to do this, the rats would emerge right away, and I would find myself chasing them again, forcing them to go back from where they came. The problem worsened when food scraps were thrown down the toilet, and sometimes I could hear them moving around. I would be extra cautious when sitting to use the toilet, as the rats had come out several times during this process. Eventually, using the toilet became a difficult and uncomfortable task, requiring extra care. The toilet was no longer a place of comfort, as it used to be.

In general, I was able to avoid the rat problem for a long time with these measures. However, another disturbing source of rats was behind the window, so to speak. The main gathering point for them was behind my window and the window of my neighbor, "Gabi." He was a Jewish prisoner serving a life sentence for killing his sister. He had not left his adjacent cell for five years, preferring solitary confinement rather than being placed in a regular section with Jewish criminal prisoners. This was because he preferred to be in a solitary cell or, as it's called in prisons, "protected prisoners"—those who need protection from other inmates for fear of harm. There are special sections in many prisons for these prisoners, including some Palestinian detainees who sometimes end up in these sections due to mental illness or because they are suspected by other prisoners of collaborating with the authorities. My neighbor, Gabi, would sometimes act in a near-mad way towards the guards, but he also occasionally called out to me and talked to me. Despite his mental illness, he was highly educated and knowledgeable about the situation and the conflict. He spoke to me about his time living in New York and his experiences there, mentioning how he managed to build up a decent amount of wealth, according to him. He treated me with a great deal of respect and consideration, and when I arrived, he stopped his incessant knocking on the door, except in certain moments when he felt extreme distress. When this happened, he would apologize to me, and at times, he would burn newspapers, blankets, or other things.

Gabi had a habit of feeding the rats from behind his window, which was adjacent to mine. He would whistle a special tune, and within less than two minutes, dozens of rats—ranging from eighty to a hundred large ones—would gather. These rats only appeared this quickly when Gabi called them with his distinctive whistle. On the

occasions when Gabi stopped feeding them or stopped whistling, the rats would climb up to my window. The sight of dozens of rats climbing the bars, attempting to get inside while screeching and squealing, was incredibly disturbing and sometimes even frightening. I would look at them with confusion, anxiety, and annoyance, trying to scare them away. Most days, they would be screeching outside my window. The worst part was the nauseating stench of the rats' filth that accumulated behind the only window. But, it seemed that in these conditions, a person gets used to anything, learns to coexist with it, and overcomes the difficulties no matter how harsh they are.

The problem of the holes that fill the walls and from which an enormous number of cockroaches and ants with a foul odor emerge was something I first discovered — that there is an ant whose smell is incredibly unpleasant. I tried to address it with a large-scale effort that lasted for weeks to close these holes and some of the openings. I had to be careful not to be seen by the police or the guards, as they prohibit any alterations. I used toilet paper and toothpaste, sometimes twisting the paper into a rope-like shape, and stuffed it into the large cracks so that it appeared to be part of the wall. This method proved to be highly successful, although these closures were sometimes breached, but I would notice them immediately and close them again. In fact, I used the toothpaste to seal these openings more often than I used it for myself. By the way, the only sexual act I witnessed since my imprisonment was between the mice behind the window of my cell.

### **From the perspective of those in solitary confinement**

When I arrived at Cell No. 5 in Ohali Kedar in Be'er Sheva, I found a number of brothers in solitary confinement, some of whom have been isolated until this very moment for eight years. At the forefront was Brother Engineer Abdullah al-Barghouthi, one of the prominent leaders of the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades. The Israeli military court had sentenced him to 67 life sentences, each for the killing and injuring of hundreds of Israelis. This sentence is the highest ever issued by the occupation against a Palestinian fighter since 1967. Abdullah al-Barghouthi is a first-class explosives engineer. He supervised the training of dozens of engineers within the al-Qassam Brigades and personally prepared many explosive belts and devices. He was born in Kuwait, completed his primary and secondary education there, and studied engineering in South Korea. He had been living with his family in Amman until he was granted a permit to visit Palestinian territories a few years ago. He spent six months in interrogation cells, and immediately afterward, he was transferred from the interrogation rooms to solitary confinement cells in Ohali Kedar in Be'er Sheva. When I arrived at this section, coming from Shatta prison, he had just arrived a week earlier at Cell No. 4, which was the closest cell to mine.

Abdullah maintained high and excellent morale, and continues to do so despite the long period of isolation and suffering. For several months, he was confined to a cage, which was difficult for him to accept. I repeatedly saw the anger in his eyes, and he was fearless with the guards, unafraid of anything. He spent most of his time reading, studying, memorizing the Quran, and preparing food, especially since he was skilled in

cooking. This was extremely helpful to me, as he made sure to prepare meals and send me a daily portion, despite all the restrictions. He cleverly outwitted the guards: while they prohibited the transfer of food or anything else between cells, he would place the food in the fridge, claiming it was his. When the shift changed and new guards came in, I would ask them to give me the food from the fridge, claiming I had placed it there. In addition, he found other methods and strategies that worked to some extent.

Brother Nizar Ramadan was in the same cell as Brother Abdullah. Nizar is a member of Hamas from the village of Tal, near Nablus. He was placed in solitary confinement after he and a fellow comrade named Mohammed al-Rishq from Qabatia, near Jenin, successfully orchestrated an escape from Ashkelon Prison in late 2002. They managed to flee and roam freely in Ashkelon for a while. However, on the morning of the second day, they were re-arrested. As punishment for the escape attempt, the prison authorities placed them in solitary confinement. Nizar is a young man serving a life sentence. He is well-mannered, and he is passionate about sports, studies, and reading the Quran. After spending over two years in solitary confinement, he was transferred to the regular sections of the prison.

Also, in another neighboring cell to Abdullah and Nizar, Cell No. 2, were Brother Mohamed Hamada from Jerusalem, who spent about a year before being transferred to a regular section of the prison, and Brother Raed Abu Zaher from Ramallah, who stayed for six months before being moved to the collective solitary confinement section in Eshkel Prison. Raed is a graduate of Birzeit University, holding a bachelor's degree in journalism and media. He is a member of Hamas and was sentenced to life imprisonment.

Additionally, seven months after I arrived in this section, Brother Ahmed al-Maghrebi was brought in. He comes from a family of fighters; his father was active in the Palestinian revolution and the Fatah movement since the 1970s and was injured in one of the confrontations with the Israeli occupation in Lebanon. In 1982, Ahmed's family left Lebanon with the Palestinian revolutionary forces when they exited the country, and they lived in Libya and Amman. He later returned with the Palestinian forces to the homeland after the establishment of the Palestinian Authority.

Ahmed al-Maghrebi's family resides in the Dheisheh refugee camp near Bethlehem. Ahmed's brother, Mahmoud al-Maghrebi, was martyred while attempting to plant a bomb at the start of the Intifada. Two of his other brothers, Ali and Mohammad, were also arrested, and multiple life sentences were issued against them. Ahmed himself is a leader of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades and a prominent member of Fatah, known for his deep commitment to the cause of the homeland, freedom, return, and independence. His family home has been bombed twice by the Israeli occupation forces.

For nearly seven years, Ahmed has been in solitary confinement, a decision imposed by the Shin Bet (Israeli security agency) under the pretext that he is organizing armed operations from inside prison. In addition to the freedom fighters, there were also some

mentally ill prisoners in the section, who could not cope with the conditions in the regular prison cells, along with a number of criminal prisoners, both Jewish and Arab.

One of the most disturbing aspects of the section was the constant knocking on the doors at random times, allegedly to remove some prisoners, especially the criminal ones. This could happen during sleep, at 2 or 3 a.m., 6 a.m., or any other time. I tried to convince them to conduct these activities between 10 a.m. and midnight and to avoid disturbing us after midnight until 10 a.m. They responded to this suggestion, although there were still several breaches each week.

Each prisoner in the solitary confinement section is allowed to buy items from the canteen twice a month, with a maximum allowance of 1,000 shekels per month. No one is allowed to transfer anything to another prisoner or buy items for someone else. Therefore, we arranged to help those without canteen access by adding money to their accounts from the outside, as well as purchasing items and sharing them as much as possible. Cooperation among the brothers was complete and exemplary, with no barriers between us.

The reality is that not having money in a solitary confinement prisoner's canteen account is a very difficult issue. The prisoner feels a deep sense of distress, as they cannot manage without the canteen. The Ministry of Prisoners, factions, and families often ensure their loved ones receive the required amounts for the canteen. This situation differs from regular prisons, where the canteen is collective, and the funds sent by the authority to prisoners are distributed equally. Some factions also deposit money into the accounts of their members in each prison, which is then shared equally among them. The money sent by families, however, is strictly for each individual prisoner to buy what they need from the canteen.

Among the notable individuals who experienced solitary confinement, in addition to the aforementioned brothers, were Mohammed Atouna, Zahir Jabarin, Nasser Oweis, Majed al-Masri, Abdel-Nasser Issa, Ahmed Shukri, Yehya Sinwar, Jamal Abu Heija, Moataz Hijazi, Mohammad Jamal al-Natsha, Ahmed Sa'adat (the General Secretary of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine), Ahed Abu Ghalma, Thabet Mardawi, Mazen Melsa, Mohammad Jaber Abda, Hani Jaber, Saleh Dar Mousa, Hisham Sharbaty, Ibrahim Hamad, Atwa al-Amour, Mahaush Naimat, and many others.

### **The "Fora" (Recreation Yard)**

Each prisoner in solitary confinement was given one hour of time to go out to the "fora" or recreation yard. This was the same in all solitary confinement sections. The yard was located less than six meters from the door of the cell, and it was a large area, much bigger than the yards in other prisons like Ayalon or Shatta. The length of the yard was at least 20 meters, and its width was 10 meters. It was covered with several layers of iron, bars, and barbed wire, and the walls were tall enough that it was impossible to see anything beyond them, except for the sky, which was distorted by the bars to the point where one would wish to see the sky as it is, without obstruction.

The positive feature of this yard and section was that the cells opposite the yard had windows overlooking it. This allowed me and any other prisoner who went out to the yard to communicate with the prisoners in any of the cells facing it. This in itself was very important; it broke the isolation of the prisoner, whether in the cell or in the yard. It was an excellent way to exchange conversations, share news, and ensure that our ability to talk remained intact. It was a way to confirm that we hadn't changed because of the suffocating silence of the cell and that we were still in a normal mental and emotional state.

This hour would make me feel—certainly like many other prisoners—that I was breaking the isolation and spending it, or at least part of it, in a normal state, surrounded by the sense and smell of human presence. Although conversations were sometimes boring due to the suffocating routine, the ongoing Palestinian and Arab developments, as well as the new concerns, kept the topics of conversation fresh and evolving daily through television, radio, and newspapers.

At one point, I happened to find the first book in a series of four Hebrew language textbooks for new immigrant settlers in the occupation state. I suggested to the brothers in the cells that I teach them this book so they could follow the news, converse with the guards, and read the newspapers. The brothers eagerly accepted, and over the course of several months, I finished teaching them through the window, relying primarily on listening. They completed the first book with distinction, especially brothers Abdullah al-Barghouthi, Ahmed al-Maghrebi, and Nizar Ramadan. Later, they practiced reading Hebrew newspapers, taking turns reading one piece daily, and I would quiz them on words. They eventually subscribed to the Hebrew newspapers *Yedioth Ahronoth* and *Ma'ariv*.

The truth is that Hebrew is essential for every prisoner, especially in solitary confinement, as it enables communication with the guards, helps protect some of their rights, and allows them to understand these rights. It also lets them read the Hebrew newspapers, which are the only ones allowed into the cells in general. Additionally, with the availability of Israeli TV channels and the need to communicate with Jewish criminal prisoners in the same sections, knowing Hebrew becomes indispensable.

The brothers were very pleased with this experience, even though it was done through the window and with difficulty, relying primarily on hearing. Because I had access to a large number of books, the brothers had the opportunity to read a significant amount. I would send the books to them, and it helped them fight boredom and routine, offering something useful and meaningful to do with their time.

As for myself, I benefited from this time in this cell—where I spent nearly 600 days—by reading more than in the other cells. I felt some stability and adapted to the situation, preparing myself mentally to stay for several years in this small tomb. During my solitary confinement, I read the most I ever had. I dedicated a few months to reading books and novels in English, extracting hundreds of new words, which I would diligently memorize

their meanings and record them in notebooks. I would sometimes use the recreation yard time to review and study them. In addition, I read dozens of other books in both Hebrew and Arabic.

## **Solitary Confinement and the Lawyer**

Despite what I mentioned earlier about the futility of having a lawyer in Israeli courts and the necessity of boycotting these courts, a lawyer takes on particular importance when visiting the prisoner in the prison in general, and in solitary confinement specifically. Although the Palestinian Authority, the Ministry of Prisoners, the Prisoners' Club, and many human rights organizations assign lawyers to defend prisoners and visit them, this number only covers a small fraction of the prisoners. The vast majority of prisoners have not had a lawyer visit them since the sentencing, and some have spent more than fifteen years without seeing a lawyer.

The visit of a lawyer to a prisoner holds special significance, not because the lawyer will free the prisoner from jail, nor because the lawyer provides anything material, but because it carries a deep moral value for the prisoner. It is a message to the prisoner that their movement, their authority, or their organization cares for them and is following up on their affairs. It reassures the prisoner that the years of imprisonment and detention have not made them forgotten. Additionally, many prisoners, who have not had family visits except through their lawyer, find it an opportunity to check on their families, to assure them of their wellbeing, and to feel connected.

There are hundreds of prisoners whose immediate family members have passed away while they were incarcerated, and they no longer have anyone who can visit them. These prisoners spend long years of detention without any visits, which deeply affects their mental and emotional state. Especially when they see their fellow prisoners receiving visits from their families and maintaining contact through those visits, they are left to feel isolated and detached, needing their families but unable to receive the same support. The lawyer's visit, though limited in scope, becomes a small but significant substitute for the absence of family visits.

## **The Lawyer's Visit in Solitary Confinement**

The visit of a lawyer becomes even more urgent and essential for prisoners, especially for Arab prisoners in Israeli prisons who have been denied family visits. These prisoners have grown up in prisons, spending many years without seeing their children, mothers, siblings, or relatives. Some have lost most of their family members while incarcerated. A prominent example is the well-known Lebanese fighter, Samir Quntar, who spent 28 years in prison starting when he was under 17, and never had a visit from his mother or father, who died while he was in prison. For prisoners like him, the visit of a lawyer takes on critical importance, becoming a vital lifeline, a "breath of air" for the prisoner, as well as for their family and friends.

In solitary confinement, where the vast majority of prisoners are denied family visits, the visit of a lawyer to a solitary prisoner takes on even more exceptional and profound significance. First, it allows communication with the family and mutual reassurance between the prisoner and their loved ones. Second, it gives the prisoner the sense that they are not forgotten by their family, organization, people, or authorities. This feeling of being cared for by those outside provides immense emotional support, boosting the prisoner's resilience, confidence, and faith. It alleviates the crushing isolation they experience. Additionally, the lawyer's visit causes the prison administration to be more cautious in their treatment of the prisoner, out of fear that any wrongdoing or mistreatment will be exposed.

Moreover, the visit of a lawyer offers the prisoner a greater sense of security, allowing them to raise their concerns and issues with the outside world, helping to amplify their voices to public opinion.

### **The Importance of the Lawyer's Visit During Solitary Confinement**

During the period of solitary confinement that I experienced, and due to the ban on family visits and other restrictions, the lawyer's visit was of immense importance to me. This applies to every prisoner, as the sense of loneliness and the need for such visits are universal. Moreover, communicating with my lawyer allowed me to stay updated on Palestinian developments in various fields, events, and ongoing issues. It helped me remain connected to my family, friends, movement leaders, faction leaders, authority institutions, the Palestinian and Arab popular campaign, public opinion, and the media.

The lawyer was able to convey much of what was happening, and I was often able to share my views and perspectives on developments, albeit somewhat belatedly. These visits also allowed me to reassure myself about the well-being of my family—my beloved wife, children, mother, brothers, friends, and fellow comrades in the struggle. The lawyers who consistently visited me made great efforts to convey the truth to me and deliver my messages as accurately as possible. Their persistence in visiting me, no matter the circumstances, was truly admirable, and I hold a deep respect for their unwavering dedication, particularly brothers Khadr Shuqayrat and Elias Sabagh.

The lawyer's visit was especially meaningful during holidays, despite the fact that in solitary confinement, the holiday loses its taste, color, and fragrance. It passes like any other day. Even the usual greeting or meeting with fellow prisoners was forbidden on that day, and we weren't allowed to gather, even for half an hour, in the yard. There were no signs of a holiday, except that we stopped fasting after Ramadan and had breakfast during the day, rather than after the Maghrib prayer.

I deeply appreciated the lawyer's visit to me on this day—the holiday. Without a doubt, the holiday was one of the most painful days in solitary confinement. What kind of holiday is it when spent in this small grave, surrounded by rats, mice, ants, and cockroaches, behind a closed door? What kind of holiday is it when I am far from my family, my friends, and my people? What kind of holiday is it when I open my eyes at

dawn and all I see is the guard, the walls, and the bars? What kind of holiday is it when I am alone, praying alone, eating alone, with no one to shake my hand or kiss my cheek?

I remember on holidays how I would wake up early after only a few hours of sleep, wash, perform ablution, and pray. Sometimes I would take my friends from the Al-Qassam Brigades, Sharaf, and Arab, and drive quickly to perform the Eid prayer at the mosque in my village, Kobar, where I would enjoy the joy of reuniting with everyone, exchanging greetings, shaking hands. How much warmth and happiness I felt in these moments. I also remember the scene of hundreds of children filling the streets, alleys, and shops, decorated for the holiday, wearing new or almost-new clothes, laughing, playing, and running, with their hands full of sweets and toys.

I remember how all the people of the village would gather in front of the mosque, and how I would first shake hands with the elderly. After the prayer, I would go to the family gathering, where both young and old would meet for an hour or two. Then, the crowd would disperse, and people would return to their homes for morning meals and the customary rounds of visiting relatives, exchanging greetings, and strengthening family ties. I also remember the holidays when I sometimes went to pray at the Jamal Abdel Nasser Mosque in the city of Al-Bireh, where I would shake hands with hundreds, even thousands, of friends. Afterward, I would visit the Martyrs' Cemetery to recite Al-Fatiha and lay wreaths of flowers on their graves, offering my respects and renewing my pledge, both privately and publicly, to remain faithful to their blood and their pure souls, and to continue the struggle for freedom, return, and independence. I remember shaking hands with the children of martyrs, their wives, fathers, and relatives.

Never in my life did I feel bitterness while shaking hands with anyone, nor did I ever feel pain like the one I felt when shaking hands with a child whose father or mother had been martyred, or when I kissed their foreheads, or when I shook hands with a mother or father whose child had been martyred. That pain turned, in my heart, mind, and soul, into a source of struggle, giving, action, and loyalty. Sometimes, the lawyer's visit on Eid would remind me of the holiday that we cannot feel in the solitary confinement of the cell. The image of my children on this day would fill my mind, heart, and soul. I would wonder: Did Qassam wake up? Did my little princess, Ruba, wear the beautiful dress I bought her especially for Eid, or has it become too small for her as she grows while I remain here, motionless in the cell, unable to witness her growth? Did Sharaf wake up early, as usual, and wear the Eid clothes he was supposed to be so happy and proud of, more so than his siblings? Did Arab take his morning shower and wear his finest clothes, the one with impeccable taste and a love for elegance? And is there anyone to take them to the village mosque for the Eid prayer, bringing them from Ramallah and back? Or did they pray in the Jamal Abdel Nasser Mosque this time? Or have they stopped praying the Eid prayer altogether?

Who will kiss their cheeks this early morning and plant a kiss on their faces? Who will bear witness to Arab's elegance and his careful clothing arrangements, to Sharaf's honor, and to the beauty of Ruba's dress and the light shining from Qassam's face? Who will kiss my wife's hand today and plant a kiss of loyalty on her cheek? Who will tell

her that this dress is more beautiful than the others on this day? How can I apologize to my children and wife for my absence, for reasons beyond my control, on this day? How will I apologize to my mother for not kissing her hand three times, or ten times, today? Where is the taste of sweets that you find in the streets, homes, and squares? Who will offer you hospitality now, in this cell? Where is the home that is filled with relatives, friends, loved ones, and neighbors until midnight, where you feel that your cheeks are burning from the kisses exchanged with guests? Where is the joy, despite all the bitterness, pain, martyrs, and tears?

I find nothing around me except the guards I see every day, the walls I see every day, the rats I see every day, my window in an empty yard where I walk alone, and the sky covered by iron bars and barbed wire. No one offers you Eid greetings, no one shakes your hand warmly, no one is there. On this day, all you can do is what you do every day, forgetting that it is Eid, because your real Eid is your freedom. Your freedom is your country as a free nation, and your Eid is your national pride. I live this deprivation and suffering to create a celebration greater than all other Eids—a celebration for freedom and independence, where the entire people rejoice and the country smiles.

It is a struggle to make my children and my people happy, so that joy may spread to all people. Who said that one can celebrate Eid without being free? The Eid of the free is their freedom, happiness, and independence. To create this greatest of Eids and the greatest joy, there must be those who become martyrs, those who are injured, those who are imprisoned, tortured, hungry, who fight, resist, work, plant, and build. This path, full of blood, sweat, tears, suffering, and pain, will eventually lead to a day after the holidays, when we will pray together at the first of the two Qiblahs and the third holiest site in Islam, in Al-Aqsa Mosque and the courtyards of Jerusalem.

Similarly, the blessed month of Ramadan would come around year after year, and here you are, alone behind the walls, trying to feel that it is indeed Ramadan. But how can you feel it here? Ramadan has its own special rituals, customs, and traditions that bring you joy. The truth is, since my childhood, I have had a deep and very special connection with this month. I have always welcomed it and fasted through it, even during the harshness of childhood, before I was six years old. Since then, I have made sure to fast every year, even when traveling. I hold on to fasting, and I always feel a special joy and spiritual atmosphere in this blessed month.

Here, in the solitary cell, there is no prepared meal waiting for me, but instead, I receive a plate of food, which was handed to me two hours before the call to prayer, and it is completely cold. Along with it, there is a tomato or cucumber and a piece of bread. How can this be compared to the Ramadan tables at home, or with family and friends, or the hospitality that we share? I remember spending many of my iftars with the families of martyrs, with the wounded, and with fighters. I remember the tables that many institutions would organize for this occasion, especially for those with special needs and orphans, or for some clubs and community organizations.

I now remember my mother's table, the table of family and friends, and the table at home, and how, an hour before the call to prayer, I would walk around with Qassam, Sharaf, Arab, and Ruba, buying some items like tamarind, lemons, sweets, and we'd spend the time preparing for the call to prayer. Ramadan is a month of family visits, connecting with relatives, friends, and neighbors.



## **Chapter Five**

### **My Life in Solitary Confinement**

(The occupation failed to end my role in the struggle despite imprisonment and isolation... For the will of the human being and their faith are stronger than iron chains, high walls, and the darkness of the cell.)



## **My Life in Solitary Confinement**

### **No Life in the Cell**

One of God's blessings upon humans is that the mind is resistant to imprisonment, unlike the body. Here, in this narrow, dark cell, where deadly solitude prevails, you feel the greatness of the mind and spirit because all the power that the occupying state possesses, including nuclear weapons, has failed to imprison my mind, soul, will, and faith—even if it succeeded in imprisoning my body. In this space, you physically experience the greatness and value of imagination, for it is immune to confinement and arrest. With it, you soar through the skies and wander through the streets and alleys of your homeland... You walk through every city, village, refugee camp, ruin, and neighborhood. Through it, you recall your beloved wife, your companion in life, your partner in dreams, the one who endured the unimaginable. You remember your children, kissing them, laughing with them, hearing their laughter and shouts, and recalling the jokes of each one of them. You also remember your friends and comrades—the ones who have passed, and the ones who are still waiting, the loyal and sincere ones, and those who have never remembered you for a moment. This wonderful imagination sets you free despite the enemy, shattering walls, barbed wire, and iron doors. It makes you free to think, reflect, listen, see, and feel. Your imagination is your freedom in this dark cell, while your body is shackled by chains, deprived of everyday life, and even the smallest and most trivial things that you come to realize have value here. You come to experience the bitterness of deprivation—being unable to be free in your entire human essence.

Here, you don't find anyone to greet with "Good morning," "Good evening," or "Hello," or to share your thoughts with, or hear a comment on a scene from a TV show or a piece of news on the screen. Here, you don't know joy or happiness. Today is like yesterday, and yesterday is like today. It remains unchanged, unmoving. The only sense of the world changing comes from what you see on the TV screen or from messages sent by your beloved wife and children through the lawyer. You hear that one child has moved from this grade to that, or has entered high school, and you notice from the photos that the children have grown. The same goes for the lawyer. And you don't realize, or pay attention, that you too have changed in appearance and features. Here, you don't hear the laughter of children in the streets, or the sound of the vendors at the Manara Square in Ramallah—the newspaper seller, the ones selling cakes, falafel, or sweets. Here, it's a grave you live in while still alive—graves designated for the living. Here, you only see two women—the female guards—whose presence distorts the image of a woman, her gentleness, beauty, kindness, and greatness. I felt a deep sadness inside me because a woman was the one to lock the cell door and place the shackles on my hands and feet, especially since, throughout my life, I've been an advocate for women, supporting their full rights. I consider myself a fighter for their cause because I believe that the greatness of any society is largely determined by the place and status of women in it. Here, you don't see women or young girls—tall, graceful, with beautiful eyes, proud of their beauty. You don't catch a glimpse of a woman, dressed elegantly, sitting in a café or restaurant in Ramallah. You don't hear the shy giggles of young girls. Here, you don't smell the

scent of women that fills the soul and awakens the senses. No woman passing by catches your eye, leaving you captivated by her dress, her eyes, her hair, or her walk. Here, there is no presence of women, and thus, there is no life. Life exists where women are, and where they are not, there is no true or natural life.

Here, you can't enter a library and pick out a book you're eager to read. How much I used to enjoy wandering through libraries and choosing books, longing for certain ones the way a lover yearns for their beloved. I remember one day in Cairo, where I dedicated a whole day to visiting libraries, just as I did in every country I had the chance to visit. That day, I immersed myself in Cairo's libraries, and although I was there with my wife, I returned to the hotel with three bags full of books. My wife was visibly displeased and said, "Did we come to Cairo to take books, or to explore and have fun?" I replied, "You know how much I love books, and this is a rare opportunity. Besides, I'll carry them, anyway." One reason for her annoyance was that our apartment in Ramallah was small, and there was no room for the books that filled every corner.

One of the joys of life is reading a book you love, getting lost in it, and enjoying its pages, especially in prison, and even more so in solitary confinement. Reading a beautiful novel brings a joy unmatched by anything else; it frees the person from this place and takes them out of the cell, living the events of the story outside the walls, fences, and barbed wires. The time spent reading inside the cell or prison is time when we are free beyond the space, because the mind, body, and imagination can soar, move, and get caught up in the events of the story, moving from one place to another. I wonder, as I read novels and write, what the difference is between me and someone reading now on a plane, on a ship, sitting on a beach, or on a house terrace—do they experience the novel the way I do, here in this grave designated for the living? The truth is, I sometimes surprise myself with how much joy and harmony I feel despite the terrifying place I'm in.

Time here passes sharply, slicing away your life like the edge of a knife, distributing the years of your life into fragments. Here, you unleash your imagination and think about everything, from the most trivial things to the greatest, from the simplest to the most complex. You think about the incredible ability of humans to adapt and endure, about their behavior, about the secret of their existence, their philosophy of sacrifice, martyrdom, and faith in principles and ideals. You think about different concepts, about the mystery of life and death, about the evolution of human life from primitive barbarism to the state of humanity today—what it has achieved in the fields of natural sciences, technology, medicine, education, research, human rights, intellectual pluralism, freedom, politics, and the evolution of the state as the largest organization and entity created by humans.

At the same time, you observe the different worlds shaped by religion, ethnicity, color, language, and economic status. There are nations that are wealthy, prosperous, and have abundance and a very high standard of living. And there are nations living in poverty, hunger, ignorance, and death due to the lack of food and medicine, peoples under the burden of occupation and colonialism, suffering from oppression, injustice,

and persecution. Yet, despite all this, one looks with respect at the efforts made by nations, organizations, associations, governments, and individuals in this age to bring nations together, to develop, to rise, and to engage in dialogue and understanding. It will always be in the interest of all the peoples of the earth to unite in order to end occupation, oppression, injustice, racism, famine, poverty, and disease—not only because ethics, ideals, and human principles call for this, but because the interests of nations, states, peoples, and individuals demand it.

Here, I feel a deep sense of solidarity, support, and empathy for all the oppressed and wronged peoples, for the persecuted, oppressed, and downtrodden, for the poor and deprived across the world, because I belong to them, and I am one of them. I dream of a world free from occupation, colonization, oppression, injustice, wars, famines, poverty, discrimination, and fanaticism. I dream of a world at peace with itself and its diverse cultures, religions, and economies—one where people live in peace, security, tolerance, love, brotherhood, and equality.

### **Reading and Following Events**

When I entered solitary confinement, I had only a few books, quickly collected from fellow prisoners, in addition to the Quran. After a short time, a representative from the Red Cross began bringing me eight books per visit—every five or six months. These books were purchased by my wife and sent through the Red Cross, who coordinated bringing them to me. For many years, prisoners managed to gain permission to bring books during monthly family visits. This varied from one prison administration to another, and the prison authorities allowed certain types of books while refusing others, and they also set limits on the quantity.

The prisoners were keen to establish a library in each prison, which they managed themselves. After a long and arduous struggle, they succeeded in imposing an internal system for each prison, enjoying a minimum level of self-management, especially concerning the cultural and educational life inside the prisons. Prisoners set up educational programs, offering courses in Arabic, Hebrew, and English, as well as lessons on the history of Palestine, the literature of Palestinian factions, the history of Arabs and Muslims, the experiences of liberation movements, and many novels, books of literature, and stories. There were also educational sessions on Islamic religion and law.

Many prisoners enrolled in correspondence courses with the Open University in Tel Aviv, and some completed their studies, earning bachelor's degrees in various fields. It is worth noting that the courses are conducted in Hebrew. As for myself, I have been accustomed to reading since childhood, and this hobby was greatly intensified and enriched during my years of detention. I dedicated most of my time to studying and learning Hebrew and English, in addition to reading hundreds of books, notebooks, and studies.

Despite the harsh and poor conditions of solitary confinement, it provided a good opportunity to engage in reading and studying. However, the main issue was the limited number of books, especially in the early months before the situation changed slightly after a few months.

After a few months, I dedicated a specific period to studying the Quran and memorizing as much as I could, using this forced solitude to reflect deeply and contemplate my relationship with Allah. It was difficult to imagine a better setting for such contemplation than this place. Like all human beings, the questions of creation, existence, and the mysteries of the universe circulate in the mind and deserve serious reflection. I began reading the Quran intensively, researching its meanings in detail, and memorizing some sections, while paying close attention to others. Among the topics I focused on were the Quranic references to Christianity and Christians, especially since Palestine holds a special significance in relation to Christianity, being the birthplace of the faith. It is the land where Jesus Christ (peace be upon him) was born, lived, and spread his light to people everywhere, preaching love, peace, and faith while enduring immense suffering and hardship.

The relationship between Muslims and Christians in this holy land is particularly unique, strengthened by decades of co-existence and shared struggle for freedom and independence. After reading the Quranic verses related to this, I concluded that peaceful coexistence and mutual cooperation, based on mutual respect, lie at the core of the Quranic vision for Christianity.

Another issue I delved into deeply was the Quranic verses regarding women. It was clear that Allah addressed both men and women equally, with no discrimination between them. He called for justice for women and the granting of their full rights. The truth is, I have always believed in the necessity of partnership between men and women on an equal footing, without discrimination. I am firmly convinced that the progress and strength of any society depend largely on the degree to which it ensures justice for women and grants them their full rights.

I am completely convinced that the development of any society—scientifically, economically, socially, and politically—cannot be achieved in this age without true and complete partnership between men and women, and without the creative sharing of roles between them. Unfortunately, some societies still hinder the enormous potential of women, depriving both women and society of their capabilities. What is even more sorrowful is the ongoing debate stirred by some extremists about women's right to participate in society and politics, and their refusal to grant women their basic and fundamental rights.

It is neither understandable nor acceptable for the debate to continue over whether women have the right to drive, especially when women have already led entire nations and held top positions in many countries. Similarly, it is unacceptable to argue about women's right to vote, run for office, or hold political positions, under the claim that these rights conflict with religious texts.

In the Palestinian context, Palestinian women have played a pioneering role alongside men in the struggle for national liberation, return, freedom, and independence. They have continuously set an example of awareness, strong belonging, and a readiness to sacrifice and resist occupation. Since the beginning of the Zionist invasion of our country, women have participated in the struggle in various ways, not limiting themselves to any one approach but also taking up arms and fighting the enemy in all phases of the Palestinian revolution.

During the First Intifada, Palestinian women provided an unparalleled example of resistance, playing a major role in its activities, leadership, and continuity. Similarly, in the Second Intifada, women were deeply involved and provided heroic examples of martyrdom and self-sacrifice.

Palestinian women's participation remains active in every field. They are true and indispensable partners in the educational process, contributing significantly to the ongoing educational and cultural revolution in our country. Their involvement in all formal, popular, civil, party, and political institutions is clear evidence of the vibrancy and strength of Palestinian women.

Although the Palestinian Basic Law stipulates equal rights between men and women, and despite the increased representation of women in the Palestinian Parliament (Legislative Council), this representation still falls short of fulfilling even some of the rights of women. Additionally, women's representation in decision-making institutions, such as the government, leadership bodies of political factions, the parliament, and the PLO institutions, remains limited and does not align with the extent of women's active involvement and contributions to society and the national struggle.

It is clear that my experiences with my mother, grandmother, wife, and many other women throughout my work in various fields have strengthened my belief in the competence of Palestinian women. I still feel immense pride in the contributions of Palestinian women across all areas, particularly the wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters of prisoners and detainees. They embody steadfastness, patience, resilience, perseverance, support, encouragement, and the assumption of social, economic, and educational responsibilities for their families and children. They bear the pain of the long, harsh journey of prolonged and bitter imprisonment, for the suffering of a prisoner's family is no less than the suffering of the prisoner himself.

In this context, thousands of women have demonstrated examples of patience and endurance that will remain etched in memory, and time will never erase them. My experience with my beloved wife has also deeply strengthened my beliefs about the value and greatness of women, and what they can bring to life—vitality, renewal, beauty, and joy. She has shown tremendous creativity and effort, carrying my cause and the cause of all prisoners, and she continues to do so.

The experience of delving deeply into the Quran and reflecting on faith, while unleashing the mind for profound thought and contemplation—even within the darkness of the solitary confinement cell—was a beneficial and important one. Although I do not claim to have found answers to many of the questions that have swirled in my mind and continue to do so, these seem to be open-ended questions that will never have a clear answer. Reading and memorizing the Quran strengthened my faith, patience, and perseverance in the face of oppression and suffering. These cells and graves, which are unworthy of human beings and fit only for those who conceived, built, and oversaw them, have become the places where we cultivate our strength. Patience, resilience, and steadfastness, armed with absolute belief in our sacred right to this land, have been the key to enduring and facing difficult circumstances.

During this time, I managed to read a number of Hebrew books that address the conflict with the Palestinians, particularly those with a political focus. One of the most notable of these was a book about the Intifada titled *The Seventh War* by Avi Shacharov and Amos Harel, both of whom are journalists specializing in Palestinian and Arab affairs. The book compiles information and narrates the events of the Intifada, highlighting its key chapters with the help of some Palestinian and Israeli testimonies. It attempts to explain how the Intifada developed into what the authors describe as a "seventh Israeli-Palestinian war." The book remains useful, even though it is more of a journalistic investigation than a political or intellectual attempt to analyze the Intifada. The authors had tried to secure permission to visit me in my cell before publishing the book, but the Sharon government rejected their request. My situation was under the direct control of Sharon's office, and it was he who decided whether anyone could visit me or not. Sharon remained out of touch, refusing to approve any family visits or interviews, despite the persistent demands from dozens of local, Arab, Israeli, and international media outlets, some of which even approached Israeli courts. This was part of a broader strategy to intensify my isolation, aiming to silence my voice, push me out of the public eye, and suffocate my influence. However, despite all their efforts, Sharon and his fascist government failed in their mission.

I also read another important and distinctive book in Hebrew, *Boomerang: The Retaliation Strike* by Israeli authors Ofer Shelah and Rafiq Drucker. The book discusses the failure of Israeli leadership in confronting the Second Intifada. It provides an analysis of Israel's positions, methods, and attempts to suppress the uprising. The focus is on the leadership of Sharon's government, including Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz, Shin Bet head Avi Dichter, Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon, Military Intelligence head Zeev Farkash, and Mossad Director Meir Dagan. It also covers the occupation commanders in the West Bank and Gaza, police leaders, as well as the roles of the National Security Council heads, senior officers, the prime minister, and the cabinet ministers individually.

The book presents the Israeli perspective on the Intifada as a war allegedly planned and led by Yasser Arafat. The authors explore this theory, though there is a clear inclination to disbelieve it. I found it useful to read the book, though it contained some inaccuracies, as it relied solely on Israeli sources.

Additionally, I had the opportunity to read another book titled *One Step Away* by Israeli lawyer Gilad Sher, who served as a consultant to former Prime Minister Ehud Barak. This book focuses on the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations in which the author participated during Barak's term, with particular emphasis on the Camp David negotiations.

I also read several other Hebrew books written by former Mossad agents and Israeli security officials. In addition, I read numerous English-language books, aiming to expand my knowledge and vocabulary in that language. Among these was former U.S. President Bill Clinton's autobiography *My Life*, and *The Missing Peace* by U.S. mediator Dennis Ross, alongside several historical books that I thoroughly enjoyed. One of the novels I read was *Omerta* by American author Mario Puzo, the writer of *The Godfather*, which delves into the mafia in both America and Italy.

In Arabic, I read dozens of books, and sometimes I deliberately took my time finishing a book or novel because I feared it would end too quickly, leaving me in emptiness. Whenever a representative from the Red Cross brought six to eight books, I would dive into them with eagerness and joy. However, as soon as I began reading and finished one after another in a short period, I would slow down again, afraid of finishing them too fast.

Among the most notable books I read in Arabic were recent works by the renowned Egyptian author Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, such as *The American Empire*, *Arab-Israeli Secret Negotiations*, his book on the Gulf War, and many other of his works. I also read several Palestinian books by the late writer and advisor to President Arafat, Mamdouh Nofal, including *The Oslo Recipe* and *The Night of the President's Election*, as well as *The Complete Story of Oslo* by former Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei. Additionally, I read many intellectual, ideological, social, and literary works, including numerous poetry collections by the late great poet Mahmoud Darwish. Reading poetry fills the soul with much enjoyment and love for the Arabic language. This great poet gave the language new depth and beauty, instilling hope in life and the future.

I was especially happy to receive a poetry collection titled *What Are You Doing to Me?*, sent to me despite the barriers, wires, and geographic distance, by a dear and loyal poet. Although I had never met him personally, he has always supported the Palestinian struggle and stood by me personally, dedicating more than three episodes of his famous TV program *Khalik Bil Bayt* on Future Television to my cause. This dear friend and fighter is Zahi Wahbi, a Lebanese activist who was imprisoned by the Israeli occupation forces during the 1982 invasion of Lebanon. Zahi has always shown a particular interest in the issue of prisoners and detainees, both in his writings and TV programs.

Reading novels in the solitary confinement cell holds a special meaning, as it alleviates some of the isolation. You live through the events with others, which helps break the solitude to some extent. Some of the most notable novels I read included the three-part series by Algerian author Ahlem Mosteghanemi: *Chaos of the Senses*, *Memory in the*

*Flesh*, and *Crossing the Bed*. I also specifically enjoyed the novels by my cousin, the great thinker and late writer Dr. Hussein Jamil Al-Barghouthi, such as *Flowing Mirrors*, *The Blue Light*, *The Third Bank of the Jordan River*, and *I Will Be Among the Almond Trees*.

I also read *Dreams of Freedom*, a novel by the activist Aisha Awda, which poignantly recounts her experience with interrogation and detention. Other novels I explored included *Sophie's World*, *The Da Vinci Code*, and *The Alchemist*, among many others. I also read many publications from the Palestinian organization *Mawatin Foundation*, which is dedicated to promoting democratic thought, values of dialogue and pluralism, freedom of expression, and partnership within civil society institutions, as well as books on political party issues and political systems.

As for the newspapers, the Israeli authorities do not allow the entry of Arabic or Palestinian newspapers, except for *Al-Quds*, which is subject to censorship. It is the oldest and most widely circulated newspaper in Palestine, and it reaches us through the Red Cross, which distributes it free of charge in prisons. In solitary confinement, it arrived sporadically, often delayed by weeks or sometimes months. However, it was important for following local and Palestinian news, and I eagerly awaited its arrival to read it in detail, starting with the obituaries and local news. I remember receiving the July and August issues in December, five months after they had been published. Despite the delay, I was thrilled to receive them and read every word as they were fresh to me. Time has no meaning inside the cells; it is static and unchanging. Communication with the outside world occurs only through radio and television news, newspapers, lawyers, or family visits, which provide a sense of the passage of time. The routine inside the cell is mind-numbing and dreadful, as the walls, darkness, the faces of the guards, the food utensils, the daily headcount, the shape of the door, and the clothes never change.

The second type of newspapers is the Hebrew Israeli newspapers. The occupation authorities have long allowed prisoners to subscribe to them. Prisoners would regularly buy *Yedioth Ahronoth* and *Ma'ariv* alternately, for those who knew Hebrew. While in my cell, I requested a subscription to three newspapers: *Yedioth Ahronoth*, *Ma'ariv*, and *Haaretz*. These Hebrew newspapers greatly helped me stay informed and follow developments within the state of the occupation across various fields.

It is noticeable that Israeli media has generally shifted towards extremism, with many journalists who were once known for more liberal stances and criticism of the occupation state now defending their country's crimes against the Palestinian people. The Israeli press, including television and radio, has been used to serve the army and its brutal repression, distancing itself from its professional and critical role, aligning itself with the occupation forces. Only a few have maintained objectivity and critical stances towards the occupation's crimes, though they are very few in number. In this context, *Haaretz* stood out for its more liberal and open positions, providing space for many writers to express their critical and sometimes harsh opinions. It showed a notable interest in Palestinian affairs. Among those who deserve mention and appreciation for

their positions are Gideon Levy and Amira Hass. Additionally, articles by other journalists, such as Akiva Eldar, displayed relative objectivity on many events.

Regarding Israeli television, Yoram Binur emerged as an important journalist in covering Palestinian affairs through his reports on Channel 2. I read the three Hebrew newspapers daily, and they were undoubtedly rich with articles and analyses on various issues, with variations between different newspapers, channels, and radio stations. Daily reading of these newspapers helped me follow the details and developments in the state of the occupation.

Television, in general, played an important role for all prisoners, alleviating their isolation in the prisons. I recall that entire generations spent years from 1967 to 1990 without the right or opportunity to watch television in prison. I personally lived through that difficult period when the prison had no media source. The occupation authorities were eventually forced to allow prisoners to buy television sets at their own expense after a series of continuous hunger strikes. Furthermore, Israel applied special regulations to make prisoners' lives even more difficult. However, despite granting privileges to thousands of Jewish criminal detainees while claiming to apply the same laws to all, the authorities had to make some concessions to Palestinian and Arab prisoners.

In reality, television played a significant role in changing the atmosphere in the prisons, enabling thousands who spent long years, and continue to do so, to follow political, economic, humanitarian, scientific, cultural, and other developments through TV.

The television I bought from the canteen served as a significant human presence that greatly alleviated the harshness of isolation and provided me with some semblance of normalcy, helping to break the loneliness. I couldn't see or interact with the other prisoners, and I rarely spoke to anyone. If I did, it was through shouting over a long distance for just a few minutes, making it difficult to understand the conversation.

I primarily listened to the news, and there were satellite channels from the three Israeli television stations. In the isolation cell at Ayalon Prison, I was able to watch channels like Abu Dhabi, LBC, Al-Mustaqbal, Syria, and Jordan. In other prisons, the channels were fewer. For instance, in Beersheba Prison, there was no Abu Dhabi channel, and only a few main news channels, like the Egyptian, LBC, and Palestine TV. I followed many discussions, seminars, analyses, and newspaper reports through television. This helped break some of the isolation, bringing me closer to the events unfolding, even if just in a theoretical sense. I also followed the special programs from several channels, such as Abu Dhabi, which presented outstanding news reports, successful foreign films, as well as cultural shows and interviews with prominent Arab intellectuals.

The Egyptian satellite channel was particularly enjoyable during the month of Ramadan, with its special late-night shows, interviews, and discussions, which captured the beautiful Ramadan atmosphere in Egypt. I had the opportunity to experience this firsthand, having visited Egypt several times during Ramadan. I could sense the unique atmosphere that Egyptians live during this holy month—how they celebrate and truly

immerse themselves in its spirit. This experience brought me a lot of joy. Additionally, the Egyptian morning programs were engaging, rich in news, analyses, and interviews with well-known political and intellectual figures, along with readings of newspaper headlines and coverage of notable events.

The Palestinian Television, which should ideally be the most dynamic, powerful, and influential channel, has remained a traditional official station, characterized by slow performance, ineffectiveness, and a failure to keep up with current events. Regardless of its limited resources, this television could do better, and one struggles to understand the reasons behind its persistent shortcomings since its inception in 1994. It's important to note that many Palestinian media professionals are prominent in various prestigious Arab and international media outlets. Furthermore, the performance of numerous local Palestinian radio and television stations often surpasses that of Palestine TV. Viewers of this channel frequently feel disappointment and sorrow over its inadequate performance. The role of television should be to promote democratic life, encourage dialogue and the exchange of differing views, provide space for all opinions, and support parliamentary democracy. Unfortunately, the channel's contribution to these goals has been limited, if not negative. It has also failed to present a true representation of the intellectual, political, social, economic, and artistic landscape of Palestinian society. Its coverage remains inadequate, mostly limited to Gaza and Ramallah, and regrettably, it has not attracted Palestinian expertise. Naturally, this criticism is not meant to undermine the achievements and sacrifices of the dedicated staff, who are many, but rather to address the political and general administration that has failed to enable its workers to fully utilize their potential.

For a long time, the Lebanese channel LBC was the only station through which we could hear news updates in the isolation cells of Be'er Sheva, as it made sure to follow developments in Palestine and give attention to Palestinian news. However, as the focus shifted to the Iraqi story and some events in Saudi Arabia, the prominence of Palestinian news diminished, though it never disappeared entirely from the station. I followed the program *Al-Hadath*, which aired on Sundays, with interest, and the morning show *Naharkom Saeed* (Good Morning) was particularly notable. I would sometimes laugh when my day began in the cell as the host would open the program with the words, "Good morning." One of the best features of this program was the coverage of Lebanese newspapers, which were diverse in their political and ideological leanings and offered a broad freedom of expression. I also became familiar with many of the prominent personalities who participated in the lively and sometimes heated debates on the program, conducted by outstanding journalists regardless of their political orientations. I felt a great sense of joy at the vitality of the Lebanese people, their pluralism, and their ability to overcome the painful wounds and scars of the past. I have always wished that Arabs would protect and support this beautiful country, without negatively interfering in its internal affairs, and that Lebanon remains one of the free beacons in the Arab world. It is a country of creativity, a source of much valuable intellectual, literary, political, and artistic output.

I closely observed the transformations in Lebanon, a country that holds special significance for Palestinians, given the shared history of ups and downs between the Lebanese and Palestinian peoples. Lebanon's success in two important and pivotal battles represents a historic achievement: first, the liberation achieved by the resistance and the Lebanese people, led by Hezbollah, which set an important and striking example in resistance and responsibility towards others; and second, the battle of reconstruction that restored Lebanon, largely driven by the late martyr Rafik Hariri. Additionally, closing the painful chapter of the civil war and fostering understanding and the language of coexistence is an achievement that Lebanon can be proud of.

However, a deep sorrow remains in my heart due to the injustice the Lebanese state has inflicted on Palestinian refugees residing in Lebanon for six decades, enduring harsh security, political, economic, social, and educational conditions. Palestinians are denied the right to practice more than eighty professions, own property, attend universities, or open clinics and engage in free enterprise. They are completely excluded from the Lebanese fabric, confined to miserable refugee camps, living in dire and complex circumstances. Our Lebanese brothers know that the Palestinians most committed to the right of return are those living in Lebanon, who have paid a heavy price with sacrifices in the revolution, struggle, and the Palestinian liberation movement. It is time for the Lebanese people to lift the injustice from the Palestinians in Lebanon and grant them their civil and human rights. Their suffering will not last forever, and they will soon be at the forefront of those returning to Palestine.

It is important to highlight the role of local Palestinian radio stations, many of which broadcast to the prisons, where prisoners benefit from their coverage of local news and the programs dedicated to them and their families, aired for long hours throughout the week. These stations have become an essential means of communication and reassurance between the prisoners and their families, especially in light of the ban on family visits. For those in solitary confinement, these stations hold particular significance, as they allow prisoners to stay updated on news, developments, and especially local events.

I followed several local stations, the most notable of which was *Radio Al-Hurriya*, broadcasting from Hebron, which gave special attention to the prisoners and dedicated weekly programs for them. I benefited from its bulletins, which covered statements, news, and reports related to me. The station's staff showed me great sympathy and solidarity, which warmed my heart and strengthened my resolve, as words have a deep impact on a prisoner isolated in complete solitude, who realizes the loyalty of our great people to their sons and fighters. I also managed to follow *Radio Al-Hurriya* and *Voice of Youth*, both broadcasting from Gaza, as well as *Nagham Radio* from Qalqilya, *Voice of Hebron*, *Marah Radio*, *An-Najah*, *Amwaj*, and *Ajeel*—all of which provided continuous news coverage, allowing prisoners to stay well-informed on Palestinian events. *Voice of An-Najah Radio*, affiliated with An-Najah National University in Nablus, also offered comprehensive and distinctive coverage of local developments.

Following these radio stations and reading newspapers allowed me to closely monitor events with great accuracy and stay in touch with them in real-time. My focus was on the developments of the intifada and its course, as well as the ongoing brutal Israeli aggression from the very first day the intifada began. The silence of the cell enabled me to read the developments more clearly, observe events, and understand what was happening in the occupying state through detailed follow-ups of Zionist media outlets, including their visual, audio, and written channels, available around the clock.

Zionist crimes continued unabated, becoming more ruthless by the day, aiming to break the will of resistance after all efforts to reach a peace that preserves our basic rights had failed. I closely followed the brainwashing, lying, and distortion carried out by the Israeli political and security leadership on their people, aiming to secure their support for their aggressive policies and to cover up their heinous crimes. The truth is that the overwhelming majority of Israelis supported the aggression and stood behind Sharon and Mofaz. Events, along with the preceding ten years of negotiations, confirmed that Israeli society was not prepared for a genuine peace based on the minimum terms. The Israelis did not want peace, but rather land, security, and the subjugation of the Palestinians. The state they speak of is nothing more than self-rule under occupation.

I followed the Zionist crimes with a deep sense of pain for the suffering of our people. Nothing hurt more than this suffering—such as the severe economic and military siege, the war of starvation, the dissection and fragmentation of our unified homeland, the spread of hundreds of humiliating and oppressive checkpoints, the brutal inspections aimed at degrading us, and the continuation of mass arrests, which drained our people. Moreover, there was the ongoing Judaization of Jerusalem, the construction of settlements, the closure of national institutions, the confiscation of lands, and the culmination of all this with the apartheid wall and the policy of assassinations that targeted hundreds of leaders and cadres. But at the same time, what strengthened my resolve, bolstered my steadfastness, and gave me renewed strength and determination was the continuation of the intifada and resistance operations. They confirmed the failure of the Zionist policy and proved that the intifada and resistance were the movements of the Palestinian people for freedom and independence. They were not the actions of a group, leadership, faction, or authority, but the creation of the Palestinian people themselves—made by our youth and elders, citizens and politicians, workers and farmers, students and youth, women and men from the camps, villages, and cities. This intifada also included every intellectual, educated person, journalist, and writer. It was the uprising of the people, the uprising of a nation with determination and patriotism. With every martyr's fall, I would recite Al-Fatiha (the opening chapter of the Quran), and sometimes offer additional prayers for their soul. I cared deeply that the suffering of our people would end, in one way or another, but only on the condition that it would achieve its national goals.

I had a deep conviction and faith in our people's ability to endure and achieve national independence. This conviction never wavered for a single moment in my life. The years of isolation only strengthened this belief, that our people had made a historic decision, one that was irreversible, to end the slavery of occupation, to break free, and to achieve

freedom, return, and independence. I was, and still am, firmly convinced that Israel might defeat a regular army or a state in the region, and it could achieve victory over a faction, a leader, or a group. But no matter how strong it is, it cannot crush or defeat the will of a great people determined to resist. The steadfast, patient, and resilient Palestinian people have proven their strength, which has surprised the leaders of Tel Aviv. This is a people that has fought and endured for over a hundred years, never bowing to occupation, aggression, terrorism, murder, destruction, assassination, hunger, siege, or imprisonment. Israel's leaders have remained stunned by the resilience of this people and the strength of their belief in their legitimate national rights.

A long string of sacrifices made by our people kept running through my mind as I sat in my cell, reflecting on the Nakba, the Naksa, the loss of our homeland, and the unprecedented campaign of displacement and exile. Despite this suffering, which has been passed down through generations over the course of a century, I always try to clearly identify the strengths and weaknesses of the enemy in all its dimensions, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of our people, our national movement, and our leadership. I try to pinpoint the areas of weakness and failure that persist in our situation, because a great people like ours, with so much sacrifice, endurance, and resilience, deserves better and greater outcomes for its sacrifices and struggle. Our people deserve to make their own decisions and be led by those who embody their dignity, strength, and perseverance. They deserve leadership that can achieve their national goals in the shortest possible time, with the least sacrifice and suffering. I also thought deeply about the scourge of division, conflict, and disagreement that divides the Palestinian arena and affects the national movement. There is a dire need to formulate a unified Palestinian strategy, to unify the leadership framework, and to consolidate the tools, methods, and means of struggle. All of this should be based on the understanding that this land is the land of our ancestors, and our historic right to it will remain eternal, regardless of attempts to falsify history. Our people have the right to enjoy freedom, return, independence, and peace on their land, and to establish their independent national state with full sovereignty, with Jerusalem as its capital. Our people also have the right to return to the land from which they were displaced.

It is essential that our people unite around a clear political foundation that affirms our commitment to the option of resistance, alongside political, diplomatic, and negotiation efforts. There is no contradiction between these approaches, but it must be done with full awareness. To abandon the option of resistance is to abandon the option of freedom, return, and independence. The occupying enemy, arrogant as it is, will not end its occupation unless it becomes a heavy burden on them, with material, human, economic, political, media, military, and moral losses. The mission of the intifada and resistance is to turn the occupation into a losing project for its criminal perpetrators. These were the thoughts that occupied my mind as I followed every small and large detail, and my conviction grew stronger in the ability of our people to achieve their national rights and expel the occupation.

## Mobile Phones

In the mid-1990s, with the rise of mobile phones, some prisoners began thinking about smuggling mobile phones into the prison, especially since the mobile phone broke their isolation from the outside world. This was particularly important for those who spent decades in prison, many of whom had not seen a relative or communicated with a friend, brother, or sister. Family visits were often limited to immediate family members. Palestinian prisoners would watch the privileges granted to criminal detainees by the prison authorities, such as providing them with mobile phones through which they could contact whomever they wished.

The idea of obtaining a mobile phone inside prison became a major concern for the prisoners, especially after they heard about it, and particularly for those who were deprived of family visits, such as Arab prisoners and detainees from the "Al-Douriyat" (Special Forces). Some of these prisoners had spent over a quarter of a century without seeing their mothers, fathers, or families, like the heroic prisoners Samir Quntar, Abdul Karim Obeid, Mustafa Dirani, Anwar Yassin, Sultan Al-Ajlouni, and hundreds of others. This reality served as further proof of the suffering they endured, which exceeded the limits of human endurance.

The first to think about and plan for acquiring mobile phones were the Arab prisoners, especially the members of Hezbollah detained in Nafha and Ashkelon prisons. They quickly achieved their goal and managed to smuggle in mobile phones. However, this remained on a limited scale until 2000, when the Zionist forces launched an armed raid on the West Bank and arrested thousands. Prisoners, particularly the new ones, became highly creative in smuggling these devices, and the number of phones eventually grew into the hundreds, and in later stages, possibly the thousands.

The widespread access to mobile phones became an important opportunity for prisoners to reconnect with their families, relatives, friends, and fellow comrades. Obtaining a mobile phone was a significant achievement for the veteran prisoners, as it allowed them to reestablish the long-broken connections with their loved ones, stay up-to-date with social, family, political, and organizational developments more accurately. However, the primary focus of its use for most prisoners remained communication with family and loved ones.

What the occupation government, the prison authorities, and the Shabak (Israeli Security Agency) claimed—that prisoners exploit mobile phones for resistance purposes, incite armed actions, organize cells via the phone, and are responsible for many suicide operations—are inaccurate and highly exaggerated. These claims were part of a larger effort to justify the severe crackdown and persecution launched by the occupation authorities in an attempt to put an end to the phenomenon of mobile phones in prison. Their goal was to make the lives of the prisoners hellish, hoping that they would dispose of the devices themselves, even though the prisoners paid a heavy price for having them.

The Israeli authorities confiscated many of the prisoners' rights and significantly reduced them. These were achievements that prisoners had gained over decades of struggle. The prison authorities intentionally sought to deter prisoners from smuggling in these devices. Indeed, depriving prisoners of communication with their families and restricting family visits makes their lives even harder and more bitter. There is nothing harsher than living in a world of uncertainty, not knowing anything about the fate of one's loved ones.

Prisoners have waged numerous hunger strikes, one of their demands being the right to make phone calls to their families. However, the authorities have rejected this request over the past four decades. In response, prisoners have used a variety of methods to smuggle mobile phones into the prisons, and despite the restrictions, searches, persecution, and punishments, they have been highly inventive in finding ways to introduce the devices, achieving significant success.

In May 2003, the prison guards and the inspection police raided my cell. After a brief search, they found a mobile phone in my possession. They appeared shocked, as my cell was one of the most heavily guarded and monitored, and I had not been allowed any family visits—I had not seen anyone. So, how did the phone end up in my possession? The prison authorities and Shabak were in a state of shock. I was immediately isolated, with the claim that I posed a threat to the state of Israel, and that my presence among the prisoners could allow me to work and make contact with militant cells outside the prison. They argued that it severely compromised Israeli security, and that I would use the phone to organize prisoners to harm the state of Israel. The truth is, the prison authorities and Shabak could not find any explanation for how the mobile phone ended up in my possession, and they couldn't figure out how it had reached my cell.

It is worth mentioning that my brothers Mahmoud Issa and Hani Jaber had also used the phone with me. I felt that I had achieved a new victory over Shabak and the prison authorities by having the phone in my solitary confinement cell. Perhaps this was the only time in the history of solitary confinement cells that someone managed to smuggle in such a device, which helped alleviate my isolation, even if just a little. I made sure to use the phone to contact only one person, whose identity I could protect, and for understandable reasons, it's difficult to go into further details now.

When they interrogated me about the phone, I told them it was a setup by the prison police, and that they had placed it there—I had no knowledge of it! Strangely, the news of the discovery of the phone in my possession was the headline story on the front page, with a large photo of me, in *Yedioth Ahronoth*, the leading newspaper in Israel. It seemed as though they had discovered weapons of mass destruction in my cell!

## **The Ceasefire**

Communicating with the outside world and working from inside the cell were both difficult and almost impossible tasks. However, I was determined to continue my revolutionary work and contribute in any possible way to strengthening the intifada, the

valiant resistance, and the national unity that I have always believed to be the safeguard for our people's struggle and resistance. I believed that strengthening national unity would, in turn, reinforce our people's ability to resist and endure against the occupation. I was always eager to work toward alleviating the suffering of our people, knowing that this would enhance their resilience and determination in facing the occupation.

Since the beginning of the intifada, and on more than one occasion prior to my arrest, I supported initiatives for a temporary ceasefire as a "break for the fighters," not to clash with the political leadership or to tear apart the internal situation on one hand, and to buy time and provide some respite to rebuild what the occupation had destroyed in the structure of the resistance and its various formations on the other. I was fully convinced that the arrogant enemy would not offer any opportunity, even temporarily, to halt the aggression. I also remained convinced that a permanent ceasefire would only be achieved when the Israeli occupiers leave our land, allowing us the chance to establish our independent state with Jerusalem as its capital.

The first time President Yasser Arafat announced a ceasefire was following the Dolphinarium operation in Tel Aviv on June 10, 2001. However, the occupying state did not respond to this in any way and continued its aggression. Prior to that, a ceasefire was declared in the first month of the intifada, on October 17, 2000, following the Sharm El-Sheikh agreement, which called for a halt to what was termed "violence," but Israel did not adhere to any part of this already weak and fragile agreement.

The most significant Palestinian declaration of a ceasefire came on December 19, 2001, on the eve of a visit by the American envoy, General Anthony Zinni, representing President Bush. At that time, I had lengthy discussions with the leadership of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, including with both Khaled Meshaal, the head of Hamas' political bureau, and Ramadan Shalah, the Secretary-General of Islamic Jihad, in addition to the leaders of both movements in the Palestinian territories. I explained to them the importance of this matter for President Arafat, its vitality, and the necessity of giving the international efforts to halt the aggression a chance, to help President Arafat, and to preserve the unity of the Palestinian stance and the unity of the forces of the intifada and resistance.

I reiterated once again that we would use any break, even a partial one, to strengthen and reinforce the intifada and the resistance. Our strategic decision is to continue on the path of resistance and the intifada; it is a choice that is non-negotiable, and we will not accept any initiative, project, or agreement that does not lead to the end of the occupation within a clear timeline and with guaranteed assurances. The truth is that the leadership of Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and all the other factions responded to this initiative, and on December 19, 2001, a ceasefire was announced. I personally held a press conference in which I declared that we wanted to give the Arab and international efforts to stop the aggression a chance. However, we made it clear that we would respond to any Israeli act of aggression, incursion, or assassination.

This position was initially disseminated, and I contacted all the regional leaders of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades and the organization, asking them to adhere to the collective national decision of a ceasefire. The confusion within the occupying government and its agencies was evident as a result of the success of this decision and initiative. It became clear to them that the intifada and resistance were organized and had a political national reference capable of making any decision at any time it deemed appropriate and agreed upon.

In truth, the commitment was astonishing and beyond expectations. It lasted until January 14, 2002, when the occupying government assassinated the martyr leader Raed Al-Karmi, one of the most prominent founders and leaders of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades in Palestine and the first commander in the Tulkarem district. The assassination came after several failed attempts, the most recent being in August 2001, when Israeli helicopters fired two missiles at a car he was in, but he miraculously survived despite being injured and nearly losing one of his eyes. He was treated and secretly transported to Nablus, where I arranged for a foreign doctor to oversee his treatment, and a successful surgical operation was carried out. He returned to Tulkarem despite the checkpoints and pursuit, and after his martyrdom, he became a symbol of the Brigades in Palestine.

The Al-Aqsa Brigades in Tulkarem were able to carry out a series of daring and heroic operations against the occupation forces and settlers, killing and injuring dozens of them. Al-Karmi became a constant nightmare for the Shin Bet. Despite some debate about his assassination, the Israeli government made the decision, not anticipating a strong response to the crime that ended the most serious ceasefire since the intifada began 15 months earlier. The martyr leader had played a key role in the success of this ceasefire, but this commitment did not prevent the enemy from carrying out the cowardly assassination using a bomb packed with a large amount of explosives placed on the road near his home.

Following the assassination, the ceasefire collapsed. The Brigades carried out a series of operations, the strongest since the outbreak of the intifada, in retaliation for the killing of one of its most prominent founders, leaders, and knights. The swift and widespread response led to a state of shock within the occupying state, its government, and its security agencies, and it caused much surprise among many. Later, several Israeli leaders admitted that they had made a grave and uncalculated mistake by assassinating Al-Karmi and that no one in the security agencies had anticipated such a powerful, violent, and courageous response.

Following the war on Iraq in March 2003, the Quartet (the United States, the European Union, the United Nations, and Russia) proposed a plan to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, known as the "Roadmap." Under pressure from U.S. President George W. Bush, the Quartet conditioned its involvement on not engaging with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, who, since the early days of the intifada, was considered by both Israel and the U.S. as "irrelevant." The discussion then shifted to appointing an alternative leadership that would reject the intifada and resistance.

Due to the inability of the U.S. and Israel to remove Arafat, an agreement was reached to create the position of prime minister for the Palestinian Authority, a role intended to satisfy the Quartet and the international community, while also taking on significant powers previously held by Arafat. After much debate, Arafat agreed to the appointment, choosing Mahmoud Abbas ("Abu Mazen"), a longtime colleague, and a leader of Fatah and the PLO, who had played a central role in the Oslo Accords and held a negative stance toward the second intifada, rejecting armed resistance.

Abu Mazen's appointment was approved by the Palestinian Legislative Council and received broad international support, much of which was more about opposing Arafat than supporting Abu Mazen. The goal of the appointment was to implement the Quartet's Roadmap plan. Internal Palestinian discussions then began about negotiating a ceasefire to allow Abu Mazen and his government to function. Despite the Israeli government's official praise of Abu Mazen, it was largely superficial and aimed at weakening Arafat. From the outset, it was clear that the Israeli government would offer nothing substantial to Abu Mazen, engaging in negotiations purely as a tactical maneuver.

As part of my contribution to the internal dialogue, and due to my ongoing communication even from within my cell with the leaders of Palestinian factions, as well as with President Arafat and Abu Mazen, I decided to intervene once again to ensure the success of the ceasefire initiative. I was convinced that this would help prevent division and fragmentation within the Palestinian arena, and possibly even worse outcomes. It would also alleviate the suffering of our people, even if only for a short and limited time, and provide an opportunity for the resistance forces to rebuild their situation after the severe exhaustion they were enduring due to the relentless and criminal Israeli aggression that had been ongoing for years. I sent two senior Fatah leaders, Ahmad Ghnaim and Qadoura Fares, along with the lawyer Khader Shuqayr, who had been in contact with me since the beginning of my detention. The delegation traveled to Damascus and met with the leadership of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, where they engaged in a long and detailed discussion about the Palestinian situation. They carried a comprehensive message for brothers Khaled Meshaal and Ramadan Shalah and coordinated with Abu Mazen and President Arafat, who was not enthusiastic about the initiative for well-known reasons. After exchanging several messages and clarifications, a joint statement was agreed upon, and it was decided to announce and sign it in my name alongside Khaled Meshaal and Ramadan Shalah. This came as a surprise to many faction leaders who were in talks in Gaza and Ramallah but had not been able to reach any results. Quickly, consensus was reached on this agreement, and most leaders committed to it, although some Palestinian leaders expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that such an important agreement had been reached without their knowledge, participation, or consultation. They considered the agreement to weaken the official leadership and viewed it as signaling the emergence of a new leadership, symbolized by the signatories of the agreement.

The agreement received overwhelming popular support, including from the armed resistance factions. However, the Israeli government decided to oppose and sabotage the ceasefire, labeling those who initiated it as "symbols of terrorism," with the aim of buying time to rebuild militant cells and groups. Events later confirmed the validity of this analysis, as Israel took deliberate steps to undermine the ceasefire. It continued its aggression through blockades, closures, checkpoints, wide-scale arrests, assassinations, and a rejection of any withdrawal from cities or the release of prisoners. While praising Abu Mazen, Israel simultaneously did everything in its power to weaken and fail him, offering him no support, and in fact, played a major role in his failure.

The Palestinian people had initially felt optimistic about the formation of Abu Mazen's government, believing that it would succeed in stopping the aggression and alleviating the suffering of the Palestinian people. They hoped it would end the siege, checkpoints, assassinations, and arrests, and lead to the release of prisoners. Many also believed that this government would lead a comprehensive reform process within the Palestinian Authority and its institutions. Despite the government's good intentions and our efforts to assist it in the best interests of our people, it had no real chance of success due to the aggressive Israeli-American policy and the internal obstacles it faced. It is no secret that President Arafat placed many hurdles in front of the government's success and worked to shorten its tenure. As a result, the government fell faster than many, including Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas himself, had anticipated.

That period proved that, despite being in solitary confinement and under an absolute siege, I succeeded in playing an important role in arranging the ceasefire and helping to avoid internal strife. This caused shock within the Israeli government when they heard through the media about my role in the ceasefire. Initially, they couldn't believe it, considering my complete isolation, which was always reinforced by the criminal Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. The occupation failed to end my political, organizational, and revolutionary role, despite imprisonment and isolation. That period showed that the will of a person and their belief are stronger than iron chains, barbed wire, high walls, and the darkness of a prison cell. This gave me more confidence, determination, and resilience, and strengthened my will to challenge the occupier and the jailer. The wonderful cooperation I received from the leadership of the factions, as well as the popular support and rallying around the agreement, was a great source of comfort.

However, I was deeply saddened by the attitude of a few individuals who declared that no one from the prison cell should be making decisions for us, saying, "What do we do here in the leadership?" These individuals, rather than appreciating the role I was playing, which represented a challenge to the occupier, saw it as a challenge to their own positions. What saddened me even more was that some even envied me for being in a prison cell. Perhaps some of them wanted the cell to be the end of the road, to silence my role, my voice, and my position that had disturbed the complacent, the lazy, the opportunistic, the corrupt, and the cowardly. These people have always played a negative role, burdening the Palestinian people and their ongoing struggle.

## Health Concerns

One of the concerns that worry a prisoner from the very first moment of interrogation is their health, especially for those suffering from certain illnesses or health problems. A prisoner fears a deterioration in their health due to the absence of proper medical care, although there may be an opportunity to see a doctor in the interrogation clinic or the prison's clinic later on. With poor food, inadequate nutrition during interrogation, weight loss, and the emergence of new ailments or complications, the prisoner's anxiety increases. The interrogators often try to intimidate the prisoner and scare them with the possibility of their health deteriorating.

It is well known that prisoners in Israeli prisons suffer severely from the lack of proper medical examinations and appropriate medical supervision. In previous years, there was virtually no quality health care available. However, this situation improved slightly in some prisons due to the prisoners' demands, strikes, and the struggle they led. Despite this, hundreds of prisoners still suffer from a lack of care and the deterioration of their health. Dozens of prisoners have died due to medical negligence and the lack of care over the past years.

It is true that a prisoner is allowed to see a doctor once every two weeks, but the doctor is usually a general practitioner who "diagnoses" all kinds of illnesses and ailments, providing treatments and medications that are often just temporary pain relievers. In the absence of proper medical exams to assess the patient's condition, illnesses often worsen. If a prisoner requires further tests, it could take months, sometimes even a year, to undergo an X-ray, blood test, heart monitoring, or other procedures. If a prisoner needs surgery, they have to wait their turn on a long waiting list. The disease may worsen, or the prisoner may die before they receive the necessary surgical treatment, although the situation can vary from one prison to another.

In solitary confinement, the anxiety is even greater due to the complete isolation and solitude. In regular prisons, you can rely on your fellow prisoners in the rooms or sections; they can help you summon a nurse if you begin to feel unwell or if your condition worsens. However, the nurse usually only provides painkillers, and there is no doctor available at night. In solitary confinement, you feel the harshness of illness and the need for human contact. If you feel tired or in pain, there is no one to call for a nurse, and no one will knock on your door until a guard arrives, which could take an hour. After that, the guard decides whether or not to summon the nurse. Even if the nurse does come, the "magic" medication they are allowed to dispense without consulting a doctor is a painkiller called *Akamol*—regardless of the nature or location of the illness or pain. The nurse will ask from behind the closed door or through the small window, and no matter how you describe your symptoms, you will always receive the same pill (*Akamol*).

Some prisoners, out of irony, would call the nurse and tell him they had pain in "*the testicles*," and the nurse would give them the same pill they had previously given to a fellow prisoner just moments before.

The truth is, I thank God that I did not suffer from any significant illness during my interrogation. Despite suffering from infections or a herniated disc in my neck, back, and entire right side of my body prior to my arrest, I did not experience any serious pain during the months of torture and shackling. My suffering was limited to a painful hemorrhoid that became severely inflamed and bled, as well as some abscesses from sitting for long periods in the interrogation chair.

In the solitary cell, I endured many painful moments. The worst of these came in the early months of isolation when I experienced severe shortness of breath, which made sleeping for even a few hours difficult. There were many times when I woke up feeling almost suffocated. I overcame this condition by using some medication that I prescribed for myself and requested from the doctor. I remember needing a blood test during that time, and when the doctor came, he asked me to extend my hand through the small window of the cell for the test. But the guard insisted on shackling me first.

Another time, I suffered severe throat pain, even though I hardly spoke or used my voice. This was due to the constant speeches and words I had to deliver, especially with the start of the uprising, where I had to use a loud voice. It seemed that my vocal cords were exhausted and strained. Many of my brothers insisted I get checked, as they saw the situation as potentially serious even before my arrest. I requested the examination while in solitary confinement, and after more than thirteen months, I was able to receive the check-up, which lasted less than two minutes. The doctor reassured me that there was nothing to worry about.

As for the pain from the herniated disc in my neck and the severe pain in my right arm because of it, I endured it for several days without treatment, as well as the pain in my right leg and back, relying on painkillers for a few days and doing some light exercises. Several times, I felt the harshness of illness, especially when I caught the flu, with a high fever accompanied by a headache and an inability to eat or move. I also felt a deep chill when I got up from under the covers to relieve myself. This illness reminded me of my need for my mother, wife, and children. Here, there was no one to console me or alleviate my pain. There was no one to bring me a cup of tea, soup, or food, and no one to gently stroke my head or place their hand on my forehead to take my temperature.

Here in the solitary cell, I sit alone, staring at these walls that I know by heart. I know every crack and every hole in them, and what comes in and out of them. I sit here, not knowing how I will be after hours or days, and in these difficult moments, I feel an overwhelming longing for my home, my family, my wife's embrace, the warmth of my children, my relatives, and my friends. Undoubtedly, the heavy isolation makes a person wonder if this cell will turn into an actual grave. To die in a cell is a difficult and bitter reality, although, thank God, I never truly worried about that. I thought about it only in passing moments. I remained confident and certain that I would overcome this challenge successfully and peacefully. Many of my brothers would often marvel at my constant optimism about the future, even under the most impossible circumstances, and at my high spirits and unshakable faith in victory and freedom.

I remember that at one point, the head of the prison service, Yaakov Ganot, along with his assistants and senior officers, came to visit my cell as part of their usual rounds through the prisons and isolation sections. I recall one officer addressing his superior, saying, "Marwan Barghouti still acts as though he is in Ramallah or Gaza, not behind bars. He talks about the imminent end of what he calls the Zionist occupation, while he is in a solitary confinement cell, cut off from the world. Clearly, people like Marwan Barghouti never change." On another visit, Ganot, who was a general and a former commander of the Zionist Border Guard Forces, as well as the head of the police immigration department (and who apparently lost one of his eyes in a clash with a group of fighters), said to me, "I am amazed you're still alive. You should have died. It's unfortunate that you're still here."

### **Solidarity and Echoes in the Cell**

As I mentioned earlier, the interrogators try with all their might to make the detainee feel that he is in a world of the unknown, that no one can reach him, and that they can do whatever they want to the prisoner without anyone knowing. They want him to feel that no one is asking about him, and that his family or organization has not sent him a lawyer, even though it is they who prevent the lawyer from visiting. All of this aims to break the prisoner's morale, hoping that feelings of anger and frustration will overwhelm him and push him toward surrender.

In solitary confinement, there is no interrogation, and the conditions are better than during the period of investigation, more stable, and more comfortable. However, it comes with its own challenges. One of the goals of solitary confinement is to sever the prisoner's connections with his family, society, the organization, and the outside world in general. It is designed to break him psychologically and physically, and to impact his thinking and mind during the isolation and loneliness. The truth is that any good news about family or friends brings joy to the prisoner and strengthens his resolve.

From my own experience in this regard, I can say that I feel immense pride and gratitude for everyone who stood by my side and showed solidarity with me. I consider that solidarity not only with me but also with the Intifada, the resistance, and in loyalty to Palestine, its people, and its cause.

### **Solidarity and Strength in the Face of Oppression**

The complete popular Palestinian solidarity, the partial official solidarity, and the widespread Arab and international support from friends and advocates of freedom and peace around the world created a moral strength that reinforced my steadfastness, my position, and my ability to challenge. Every piece of news, protest, image raised in a march, sit-in, festival, seminar, press statement, or interview, every poem, article, or statement, strengthened the wellspring of resilience and unwavering faith within me. It made me more powerful in the face of the prison guards.

In this regard, I take pride in the grassroots campaign for my release, founded by family, friends, and comrades, which was transformed into an organization working on all fronts to expose Israeli policies, particularly regarding my kidnapping, arrest, and the broader issue of prisoners and detainees. The campaign organized hundreds of activities both within Palestine and internationally, as well as across the Arab world. Brothers and sisters in the campaign worked tirelessly to organize a broad solidarity movement that continues to this day.

My wife, my life partner and companion, lawyer Fadwa Barghouti, played a prominent and leading role in this campaign. She continues to lead it, participating in local activities, as well as in dozens of Arab and international meetings and visits. She endured great hardship, traveling and spreading the cause of the prisoners and their right to freedom, viewing it as a national, human, and human rights issue. She contributed significantly to the efforts to free the prisoners and raise awareness about their plight.

She toured over forty countries, meeting with many of their leaders, foreign ministers, political party leaders, parliament members, public opinion representatives, academics, solidarity organizations, and diplomats. She also engaged with numerous media outlets—television, radio, and print—and became an exemplary ambassador for the cause of prisoner freedom. I was fortunate enough to witness some of the solidarity written for me, both in the Arab world and internationally, and to hear some of it through the media. This greatly strengthened my morale and conviction.

### **The Palestinian Cause and the Power of Solidarity**

The issue of Palestine is the foremost issue of freedom and justice in the world. Solidarity with Palestine is solidarity with the causes of truth, justice, and freedom across the globe. I have always believed that the hearts of the Arab and Islamic nations are with Palestine and the uprising, which represents the free will of this nation—the will for freedom, life, independence, and dignity. The voice of solidarity with me echoed in my small cell, and I heard the call of solidarity that emerged from Egypt, from its intellectuals, poets, artists, and activists, and from the Egyptian people across all sectors—students, workers, farmers, women, and men. I read the poetry of Abdel Rahman El Abnudi, "Raise your hands," along with dozens of other poems by Farouk Shousha and many journalists, writers, and professors. It is difficult to describe the immense moral impact that this solidarity, the words, poems, articles, and statements had on me and on the thousands of prisoners and detainees.

Similarly, in Syria—both officially and among the people—my wife was received in Damascus at the highest levels, and all solidarity and support were shown. In Lebanon, too, there was deep sympathy and backing, as well as a warm reception from most Lebanese, across all levels of society. And naturally, this solidarity was felt across all Arab countries that I was able to visit. The solidarity from Palestinians, both in the homeland and the diaspora, was and remains beyond description.

But this solidarity was not confined to the Palestinian and Arab spheres alone. It extended widely across dozens of European, African, and Asian countries. Solidarity, in any form, has the power to pierce through prison walls, barbed wire, and iron bars; it penetrates the walls of the cell. It strengthens the will for freedom, resilience, and resistance in the heart of the fighter, and enhances their dignity and defiance against the occupiers and the jailers. On many occasions, they noticed this solidarity through their media, and this had an effect on the occupying forces and their guards. In any case, this solidarity is an important part of the battle the fighter wages in the cell against their oppressors.

### **The Changing Reality of Palestinian Prisons and the Impact of Solidarity**

Prisons today are very different from what they were in the past. Detainees are now able to monitor and follow events in great detail, thanks to the availability of television, satellite channels, Hebrew newspapers, and radio. The ability to track developments inside the prisons makes the movement of solidarity, along with activities and events for the liberation and freedom of prisoners, of utmost importance. This has a direct impact on their resilience, morale, and their ability to endure the hardships of detention and torture.

The information transmitted by Palestinian and local media about the prisoners' suffering, concerns, issues, and the solidarity activities is followed by the prisoners with great interest. They watch the weekly sit-ins outside the Red Cross or United Nations offices, observe the participation of their families and loved ones in these events, and also follow the marches and demonstrations. They read articles about them, listen to and watch statements from leaders and officials, and gauge the seriousness and credibility of these statements. Through this, they can assess how well those making these statements understand the prisoners' issues and suffering.

Additionally, they keep track of what is being said about them in available Arabic and international media, even if it's minimal. Despite being incarcerated for many years, enduring isolation, and living under oppression, prisoners do not live in a faraway or detached world. In fact, they are among the most informed people about current events and developments. The amount of news, discussions, and commentary they hear and follow surpasses, in many cases, what is available to those outside the prison walls, especially in political matters.

### **Al-Qassam**

Fate had it that I would be imprisoned in this very same jail, the Beersheba prison, in this very section, eighteen years ago. I was in a large room adjacent to the isolation section, accompanied by thirty-five other fighters from the leadership and cadres of several Palestinian factions. I was their spokesperson. In September of 1985, we decided to go on a hunger strike. On the fifteenth day of the strike, my lawyer came to visit me and brought me some joyous and happy news. In a difficult, harsh, and bitter time in prison, during an open-ended hunger strike and in a difficult health condition, I

received the happy news that my wife, Fadwa, had given birth to a baby boy in the maternity ward of Ramallah Hospital on that morning, October 3, 1985.

I forgot about the hunger strike, the heavy burden of deadly hunger, and the difficult health condition. I was filled with joy and a feeling I had never known in my life. I now had a son, and what a wonderful moment it was. The lawyer reassured me about the health of my wife and the newborn, then left. But not before I reiterated my request that the newborn be named *Al-Qassam*. I had already agreed on this with my wife earlier, but my insistence was for further confirmation. I hold a special admiration for the courage of this noble Syrian Arab sheikh and his wisdom. He led a resistance movement in Palestine and was martyred there, remaining a symbol of Palestinian struggle. I believe it is essential to immortalize our revolutionary symbols and, at the very least, give our children their names.

And today, on December 23, 2003, I sit in my cell, number 5, in the same prison where I once received the joyful news of my firstborn son Al-Qassam's birth. Now, I receive another piece of news about him, but this time, it is the announcement of his arrest at the crossing point from Amman to the West Bank, known as "the bridge." I hear it through the media. Al-Qassam had been returning from the American University in Cairo, where he had started his studies and nearly finished the first semester, to spend a week with his mother and siblings, whom he had never been apart from. It was difficult for him to be away for several months in Cairo, so he seized the opportunity of the Christmas and New Year holidays to return to his family and his beloved city of Ramallah. But the occupiers arrested him and took him to the cells for interrogation.

The news hit me hard. For three decades, since my first arrest, my dream had always been to never see my son in prison. I hoped that we, along with our generation, could end the occupation, gain freedom and independence, and build a state where our children could live freely and with dignity. I wanted them to never experience the suffering and hardship we endured over the years. But now, what I feared has come true. Al-Qassam has joined me in detention before he even turned eighteen.

The situation was difficult, and it was made even harder by my being in the cell. The thought of the chains around Al-Qassam's wrists was painful for me, and knowing that he was in a cell undergoing interrogation by those criminal occupiers filled me with anger. I knew they would deliberately humiliate, break, and torture him. I also felt the harshness of his arrest and the bitterness it caused his mother and siblings, who were eagerly waiting for his return. They had prepared many things for him, only to be hit with this cruel surprise. On this same day, my wife, Fadwa, was discussing her master's thesis in law and preparing to celebrate Al-Qassam's return and her achievement of the master's degree. My worry was not just for him, but for his mother and siblings as well. I trust in Al-Qassam's strength, awareness, culture, steadfastness, and resilience. I fully understood that one of the main objectives of this arrest was to take revenge on me by imprisoning him, which lies at the heart of the mentality of the occupying Zionists.

It is important to note that the Israelis had previously arrested Al-Qassam at the beginning of the Intifada, claiming they had photos of several young men who had thrown stones at the Israeli army stationed at the Sarda military checkpoint in 2000, and that Al-Qassam was among them. At that time, the Palestinian liaison officer contacted his Israeli counterpart, and after an inquiry, he was told that Al-Qassam was not in their custody. Later, the spokesperson for the Israeli army announced that the news published by some agencies about the arrest of Marwan Barghouti's son, Al-Qassam, was completely false. This caused me further anxiety, and when the liaison officer repeated the question, they again confirmed that Al-Qassam was not detained, but there was a young man in their custody, around 15 years old, and they gave his description, noting that he did not have an ID because of his young age. They confirmed his name but were not sure about it. The liaison officer then went to the detention center near Ramallah and met the young man (the boy), who was indeed Al-Qassam. When asked his name, Al-Qassam gave another name, but the Palestinian officer informed him that he had come to take him with him. Al-Qassam then said, "If I am leaving with you, then I am Al-Qassam Barghouti."

It became clear later that Al-Qassam had denied his name and given the Israeli soldiers another one, which caused the confusion.

After his release that night, I asked him where he got the idea to deny his name. He replied, "So I wouldn't have to answer any questions related to you or the young men around you." From that moment, my trust in his resolve grew stronger.

After his arrest in 2003, the interrogators threatened to kill him due to his statements to the press about his readiness to carry out a martyrdom operation. The truth is, he was actively participating in demonstrations, marches, and confrontations, and had been injured several times. When his mother asked me to encourage him to stop participating because of his young age, I replied, "May God protect him and all the youth. Don't worry, a person only gets what is destined for him. What happens to the children of others will also happen to our children."

Of course, this did not eliminate my concern for him, but I was always prepared to accept any price in this historical struggle our people are enduring through the Intifada and resistance.

Three years after my arrest, Al-Qassam was still languishing in Israeli prisons, and I had not been able to see him since my arrest until today. The truth is, I have never seen myself, my children, my wife, or my family far from the battle in any significant way. The occupation had previously arrested my mother and interrogated her for weeks at the Al-Maskobiya interrogation center. All five of my brothers had been arrested as well. Dozens of my relatives have been martyred over the years of occupation, and there are hundreds who have been arrested. More than 150 of my relatives remain behind bars, including Fakhri Barghouti and Nael Barghouti, who have spent 32 years in prison so far.

One of the most painful moments for me was when I was on my way to the court in Tel Aviv, and the prison transport vehicle (the "bosta") would usually stop at the Ramla prison in the "Checkpoint" section. There, in the "Checkpoint" section, three children were calling out to me. When I looked closely, I realized that their height didn't reach the window in the middle of the door. I prepared food for them and sent it with one of the section workers, a criminal inmate. I discovered that they were between thirteen and fourteen years old, and I immediately thought of my own children. I wondered, what kind of mentality shows no mercy to children, women, the elderly, the disabled, or the sick? What kind of state expels an entire people, imprisons them, harasses them day and night, demolishes their homes, and jails their children? What kind of human beings are these criminal occupiers?

My pain wasn't just for Al-Qassam, but for all the children of his generation, who are considered the bravest and greatest among the Palestinians. They set an example of sacrifice, martyrdom, and resistance against the occupier—something no previous generation in our history has achieved. My pain is that these children should be in schools, universities, behind computers, playing in fields, courts, libraries, pools, and clubs, living their lives. Instead, they are thrown into prisons and cells. I feel that their parents and grandparents bear a huge responsibility for their failure to secure freedom, return, independence, and the establishment of a state—a national state where they can live freely.

While I was in my cell, a representative from the Red Cross brought me a message from my son, Al-Qassam, from his prison. In his message, he wrote: "Don't worry, Dad, don't be concerned. They couldn't get a word out of me. I came out of the interrogation without giving anything away, and I'm proud to be your son. I'm ready to pay any price for being the son of Marwan Barghouti, no matter how heavy it is. And know, Dad, that I am a man and capable of facing any challenge. You taught me that Palestine is bigger than everything, and it's worth sacrificing for, no matter the cost..."

He also said: "Everything is fine, and the brothers on both sides send you their greetings. I am in Ofer prison, where there are hundreds of prisoners. My situation is good, don't worry at all. You know, my father, how much I love freedom..."

I felt a sense of relief when I read this letter from Al-Qassam, even though the last sentence caused me great pain. The truth is, the pain is immense for parents whose children are imprisoned with them, as well as for siblings. Though it is somewhat lighter than the situation of a father and son together, there are hundreds of families with relatives, sometimes more than one, in prison, and sometimes both the mother and child, the brother and sister, and most often, the brothers themselves. There are many families with more than three members incarcerated, such as the case with the family of brother Nasser Abu Hamid from the Al-Am'ari refugee camp in Ramallah, where six brothers were arrested for the fifth time, five of whom were sentenced to life imprisonment, and one was sentenced for many years. Additionally, their seventh brother, Abdel Moneim Abu Hamid, was assassinated by the occupation forces. The same situation applies to the family of brother Ahmad Al-Maghrebi from the Dheisheh

refugee camp, the family of Fakhri Barghouti, the family of Omar Barghouti, and hundreds of other Palestinian families.

Another concern that weighs on me in this cell is the fate of my mother, whom I cherish and love very much. She has endured a painful life. She lost her husband nearly a quarter-century ago, but she found in her children the husband, father, mother, brother, and sister. She lost her own mother at a very young age, as well as her father and her husband, but her life was centered around her seven children, to whom she devoted her entire life.

I find myself returning in memory to a long reel of my life with my mother, and I ask myself: Will I see her again? Will I be able to kiss her pure hand soon?

And will I finally express to her the things I've never said before, even though I love and cherish her beyond measure? I want to tell her how much I have learned from her lessons, which have had a profound impact on my struggle. She doesn't know how much she influenced me. Why didn't I tell her what's in my mind now before? Will God grant her a long life until I am out of this prison, out of this cell? Will He also grant me a long life?

Will we meet again, speak, and I'll share with her this difficult and bitter journey, filled with sweat, blood, and tears—one she always encouraged me to endure, to challenge the occupation, to continue the struggle, and to never bow in the face of challenges and hardships?

In any case, all I can do is pray for her long life, health, and well-being, and hope that I will be able to meet her.

What mothers endure in the pain of having their sons and daughters imprisoned is unparalleled. They remain in constant worry and stubbornly bear the long journey to visit their imprisoned children, waiting for hours. The trip to the prison itself takes between 10 to 15 hours, and the visit lasts no longer than 45 minutes. There are mothers who have been visiting their children and loved ones in Israeli prisons for more than a quarter of a century. One of the most painful experiences for a prisoner is the death of a father, mother, or close relative, especially the parents, where solace is difficult and saying goodbye is impossible.

Returning to the topic of Al-Qassam, I wrote a letter in response to his letter from my cell, and in it, I said:

In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

My dear son, my precious child... my brother and companion on this journey... my beloved Qassam,

May you be in the best of health every year, and may this letter reach you in the best of spirits. On the occasion of your glorious birthday, we light the twentieth candle of your long life, God willing, on the 3rd of October, 2005.

My dear Qassam, as I write you from my small cell in these days, I hope that this letter will reach you in your own cell in prison. Only God knows the extent of the pain I feel, seeing you now spending your second year behind bars. There is nothing more difficult for a parent than to feel, see, or hear that their son, their flesh and blood, has been arrested and imprisoned. Especially since I too am in prison and understand what it means to be shackled. How hard it is for me to know that you are blindfolded, your hands bound, your feet shackled, especially at your young age, at the tender age of flowers.

My dear Qassam, these days my memory takes me back to the day you were born, early in the morning of October 3rd, 1985, just after 3 a.m. How I felt both pain and joy together at your birth! It so happened that you were born while your mother and I were separated, and I was in Be'er Sheva prison. At that time, I was one of a group of 35 fighters held in isolation at Be'er Sheva prison, transferred from Jenin prison in Nablus in early September 1985. Your birth didn't just occur while I was in prison—it also coincided with the open hunger strike that we were conducting. It was a difficult, harsh, and bitter time. The hunger strike, which was one of the most crucial weapons in the prisoners' struggle for their rights, had been waged by the detainees on numerous occasions throughout the history of the prisoner movement. It remains the only weapon they have to defend their dignity against their oppressors and to maintain their honor.

Over the four decades since the occupation of 1967, Palestinian prisoners have gone on numerous hunger strikes, both collective, involving all prisons, and specific to certain prisons. These hunger strikes led to the martyrdom of dozens and caused hundreds to suffer from chronic illnesses, which later led to the death of many of them.

The first martyr of the prisoners' movement was Abdel-Qader Abu Fham, who died during a hunger strike in Ashkelon Prison on July 4, 1970. He became a symbol of steadfastness and determination. The strikes continued to escalate in prisons over the years, gradually leading to some improvements in the conditions of detention and daily life.

The most recent strike, which began on August 15, 2004, was one of the toughest and harshest in the last four decades. The Israeli occupation forces launched an unprecedented brutal assault on all prisons in an attempt to break the strike and crush the prisoners' will. They used the most horrific and vile tactics, such as dispersing and dividing the leaders of the prisoners, transferring them from one section to another, and from one room to another—sometimes multiple times in the same day and from one prison to another. These conditions were designed to weaken and demoralize the prisoners. In addition, there were continuous 24-hour searches, deprivation of basic rights, and a refusal to provide even the simplest essentials, including the denial of liquids and salt, which helps prevent the decay of the stomach and intestines.

Hundreds of prisoners were subjected to beatings and humiliation, and the guards refused to provide any assistance to the sick. Some of the prison doctors even resorted to blackmailing the patients, bargaining with them to break their hunger strike in exchange for saving their lives or giving them a pill. Additionally, the authorities launched a campaign of false and malicious rumors, claiming that certain leaders had ended their hunger strikes, and that others had never even participated. They even went so far as to distribute a photo of me eating in an isolation cell, which had been taken before the strike, but they falsely claimed it was taken during the strike. I was subjected to an atrocious campaign of mistreatment during this hunger strike, which lasted 24 days.

Although the brothers in solitary confinement were not required to join the strike due to the unique and harsh nature of their situation, I chose to stand in solidarity with the fellow prisoners, despite being completely cut off from them and from any news about them during the isolation period, especially during the hunger strike.

The Palestinian prisoner movement has provided a model for freedom fighters around the world— a model of resilience and defiance, a model of internal organization, a model of political and national awareness and culture, and a model of revolutionary and ethical behavior that is rarely matched. Despite the difficult, harsh, and bitter conditions, the prisoners were able to carry the banner from one generation to the next, preserving its national, pure, and revolutionary essence. The prisons, which the occupiers intended to be places where the will of the fighters, revolutionaries, and freedom fighters would be broken, and where their national spirit would be crushed, transforming them into mere symbols of despair, frustration, and behavioral deviation, instead became schools. These prisons produced thousands of fighters and activists who viewed their imprisonment as a valuable experience in their revolutionary journey. They emerged from these prisons equipped with knowledge, expertise, and experience. The fingerprints of the prisoners are clear on the Palestinian movement's revolutionary, political, military, security, cultural, and literary experiences and its structure. Their rich experiences have significantly contributed to strengthening the Palestinian national struggle.

Yes, my dear, the light of my eyes, Qassam... your birth came on the thirteenth day of my hunger strike. I was confined to a room with 35 other fighters, all of whom were held under administrative detention, some of the finest fighters and cadres from various Palestinian factions at the time. It so happened that I was the spokesperson for the prisoners during this strike. We were deprived of any visits, and my mind was preoccupied with thoughts of you, knowing that I had been arrested while your mother was pregnant with you, and she had less than a month and a half left until your birth. I kept counting the days and hours until the lawyer came to visit me, followed by my dear uncle, the late Abu Saif, who informed me that you had been born that morning, the third of October. My feelings changed immediately. I now had a son, a son named Qassam. Despite the bitterness of the hunger strike, the empty stomach, and my weight dropping to 47 kilograms, I was overwhelmed with joy. On one hand, joy filled my heart, but on the other hand, the harshness of hunger and the bitterness of the circumstances

gnawed at me. I thanked God that you were born healthy and that your beloved mother was also safe. I returned to the room where the 34 brothers surrounded me, without exception, to congratulate me on your birth. I had nothing but a small amount of salt, which I shared with them as a modest celebration of your great birth, which coincided with the beginning of October, a month that fills us with pride and dignity, as it marks the anniversary of the October War.

Then I lay on my bed, which we prisoners call the *bresh*, and I began thinking about you for a long time. What does Qassam look like? What color are his eyes and skin? What will his hair be like, and how tall and beautiful will he be? I tried to imagine your image in my mind, but despite the billions of people in the world, God willed for every one of us to be different. I couldn't quite succeed in picturing your true image, even though I made a tremendous effort to imagine you. More than that, I was filled with a feeling that I believe all fathers experience when their first child is born. It's a feeling I try to translate into words, but I'm unable to. Perhaps it's a feeling that cannot be translated or explained. How happy I was, how full of joy and something strange that I had never felt before your birth. As soon as I knew that you had entered the world and that everything was fine, I was overwhelmed with a sense of pride, joy, and emotions I couldn't interpret or express.

The days that followed were long, harsh, and difficult. Although we had ended the hunger strike, I was deprived of seeing you and did not have the chance to visit you to get to know you. How could I not see you, my dear son, the child I had eagerly waited to meet? After several months, we were transferred from Be'er Sheva prison and brought back to Jenin prison in Nablus, where a wonderful surprise awaited me: I would be able to see you through the "visitation mesh." I will never forget that moment. I was burning with longing to see you, and I was emotionally overwhelmed. Although I always tried to hide my feelings from the guards, I left for the visit feeling somewhat nervous. We had to wait in the room after being informed of the visit and instructed to prepare. We waited for over an hour before we were allowed to pass through more than six gates, one after the other. At each gate, we waited between five to ten minutes, then entered the waiting room. After about half an hour, a guard escorted us to the visitation room, where we were more than ten brothers, each of us focusing our eyes on the mesh, scanning the faces to see if our mother, father, or children were among the visitors.

After greeting everyone, the surprise came. Without warning, you appeared before me, standing near the long tile along the "mesh" that separated us from the family. I opened my eyes to see in front of me a beautiful, wonderful, and astonishing child—more beautiful than all the images I had imagined of you in my mind. I was speechless and overcome with astonishment. It was an incredible moment. Finally, I had seen my son, but I couldn't touch you, hug you, or kiss you because of this cruel occupying barrier. I sighed repeatedly, took a deep breath, and gradually spoke to your mother and grandmother, congratulating them on your birth, Qassam. This must have been in late December or early January 1985-1986.

I returned from the visit filled with immense joy and happiness, but deep inside, I felt some pain. Because, naturally, a husband should be by his wife's side when she gives birth. It is natural for him to stand beside her, to support and encourage her, as she undoubtedly needs him in such a moment. These are difficult moments in the life of any woman or wife. Similarly, it is every father's right on earth to see his son the moment he is born. It is also the newborn's right to receive care and to open his eyes and see his father in front of him, regardless of whether the child understands or knows the significance of the birth moment.

It is simply unjust to see your son for the first time through bars and barbed wire. It is unjust not to be able to kiss or hold him, even for just one minute. It is unjust for the father, mother, and child to be deprived of these precious moments together. For this, I apologize to you, my dear son, my joy and light, because I was unable to be the first one you saw after your birth. This was not due to neglect, carelessness, or being preoccupied with personal work, business, or a paid job. It was because I was on the journey of fulfilling my duty for the freedom and dignity of this homeland, and for the sake of this great people.

My dear Qassam... You were born one year after your mother and I got married. Our wedding was on October 21, 1984, and you were born on October 3, 1985. Perhaps the circumstances did not allow me to tell you the story of my life with your mother, my beloved wife Fadwa, my companion on this journey and partner in life.

You know that we both grew up in the same town, the village of Kober. Let me tell you that my personal situation was difficult, as was the case for our family's social and economic circumstances. Our family lived through conditions that were perhaps the harshest and most difficult in our village. My siblings, our father, mother, and I experienced deprivation, poverty, hunger, and need. We knew the harshness of housing, clothing, and food, as well as the difficulty of paying school fees and obtaining uniforms. These were conditions that many families in our community went through, and some are still suffering from poverty and hunger today.

Your mother's family had relatively better circumstances compared to ours. Her grandfather, "Uncle Abu Shaer," was a man of pride, known for his sense of dignity and his commitment to organizing his daily life. He had served in the military for many years before retiring, and he owned a beautiful house, lands, and resources. He was the first to send his daughters to complete their middle school, high school, and university studies in Ramallah and Amman, taking on significant burdens in doing so.

Though his circumstances were more comfortable compared to ours, no one would have blamed him if he had decided not to send his daughters to school, bearing the weight of such expenses. The village schools, for both boys and girls, only offered primary education, which prevented many children from continuing their studies. The occupation deliberately targeted education, restricting schools through various methods. A military officer was in charge of the education system, controlling teacher

appointments, and hundreds of teachers were dismissed due to their national activities or for mentioning the name of Palestine in schools.

This officer tampered with the curriculum, and despite the heavy taxes imposed on the people, the occupation did not build schools or hospitals. In fact, it often obstructed the building of schools funded by the local community. I completed my middle and high school education at Birzeit School, and like many of my classmates, I endured a lot. We had to walk 8-10 kilometers every day to and from school.

In short, I met your mother—my wife, my beloved, and my companion in life—when she was in middle school. I won't hide from you that my admiration for her grew day by day. She was an incredibly beautiful student, always wearing a green school uniform and a white headscarf. Her face was like the moon, and her green eyes gave her the look of a lioness. Her hair was the longest among the hundreds of girls in her class. In short, she was like a gazelle radiating beauty, and at the same time, she was an example of dedication and excellent behavior, always the top student in her class, excelling in scientific subjects with remarkable distinction.

Fate had it that I was arrested while I was in my second year of high school, with just one year remaining before the final high school exams (Tawjihi). I spent the years from 1978 to 1983 in prison. Many suitors came to ask for your mother's hand in marriage, but she stubbornly rejected them, even though she couldn't initially explain the reason for her refusal to her very conservative father. Yet, she stood her ground and made it clear that she wanted to wait for me to return from prison. After I was released, we officially announced our engagement, and about a year and a half later, we got married.

I should remind you that we tried to get married several times before that and set several dates, but each time, the occupation forces had targeted me, which led to delays. I was arrested in September 1984 and released in mid-October of the same year. At that point, we rushed to set a date for our wedding before another potential arrest. On October 21, 1984, we were married.

Three months later, the occupation forces started pursuing me again. At the end of 1983, I was the president of the student council at Birzeit University and the head of the Youth Movement (Shabiba) in universities and institutes in the West Bank and Gaza. There was a higher committee for the youth movement that I personally chaired.

My dear Qassam, at the end of February or the beginning of March 1985, your mother told me, after much hesitation and caution, that she was pregnant. She said this nervously, thinking that I might not want a child at that time, given the situation—since I was being hunted by the occupation forces. She was carrying the burden of continuing her studies in science and mathematics on her own. Afterward, she began working as a coordinator for kindergartens in the West Bank, overseeing more than a hundred schools set up by the General Union of Palestinian Women for social work. This was a women's organization founded by Fatah in the occupied territories. Your mother was one of the founders of this organization and personally contributed, albeit modestly, to

establishing its system and providing support, believing strongly in the role of women in our struggle.

The economic conditions were difficult and harsh during my studies at university, and your mother bore the greatest burden. She was paid sixty dinars per month for her work in establishing and coordinating kindergartens. This forced her to move and travel a lot between cities, villages and camps. She was the one who provided for us, in addition to the assistance that your uncle Abu Tamer, who has been working in Saudi Arabia for thirty years, did not skimp on. The important thing is that your mother was surprised by the extent of my happiness and joy when she told me that she was pregnant. I expressed this and told her that this was excellent and wonderful news, and thank God for that. The truth is that my joy was for two reasons. The first is that, like every husband, I want to see children, and I used to tell your mother that we had to end the "subject" of having children within five years and that I wanted to see my children grow up together. The second reason that made me so happy about the news of my pregnancy is that in 1978 I was subjected to brutal torture and interrogation by the Israeli intelligence, specifically by the investigator called "Sami" which is a pseudonym of course, and this was under the supervision of another investigator called "Ghazal" who is now the deputy head of the Israeli intelligence, and his real name is Ofer Dekel. Among the torture that I was subjected to, like thousands of other freedom fighters, in addition to the ghost operation for days and weeks and the abuse and beatings, were severe blows to my genitals ("the modesty"). After I was stripped of all my clothes, including my underwear, and I was completely naked, I was made to stand against the wall, then I was severely beaten with a thick stick, as a result of which I fainted and woke up after several minutes on the ground, drowning in the water that the investigators had poured on me to regain consciousness, and I was bleeding from my forehead because of my collision with the wall. That day, the investigator called "Sami" said to me: "You will not be able to have children anymore, and you will not be blessed with children. Someone like you must stop having children." Of course, at that time I did not know the extent of the impact of these blows. Although I was not in a state of fear or even great fear, what "Sami" said kept resonating in my mind.

Hence, when your mother informed me that she was pregnant, I felt happy and victorious over the spiteful occupying investigator who did not want us to have offspring or children, and I had not told your mother about my story in the investigation before.

Despite the difficult and harsh economic conditions your mother endured, she was a model of a fighter and a resilient woman, one who bore poverty and the hardships of life with unwavering strength. In fact, before our engagement, I had a long conversation with her, and I said something along these lines: "I have a message I have chosen freely, and that is the message of our homeland—Palestine, its liberation, and its freedom. I am coming out of prison after several years of suffering, pain, and oppression, but I have learned and gained from my time in prison things I never could have learned in school or anywhere else. I have prepared myself well, and I now have valuable experience in the struggle, in security, and in resisting the occupation. I will continue down this path until the occupation ends.

I know this may sound like a lot to ask, and perhaps you might wonder why I am telling you all this, but I want to be honest, faithful, and clear with you. I do not intend to dedicate my life solely to a woman or a family. The priority must be for the homeland and the people... It is about breaking free from the shackles of occupation and reclaiming our stolen land. I tell you that I have ruled out the idea of building a house or owning property, because this is not what concerns me. I believe my future will either be martyrdom or a life of lifelong imprisonment."

I added, "I don't want you to suffer alongside me because the burden is heavy. I know what might be running through your mind right now—you may think that I am trying to avoid commitment, but this is the truth that must be said."

I continued speaking to her: "I have read dozens, perhaps hundreds, of books, and I had the opportunity to meet many leaders of the prisoner movement in the isolation section of Tulkarem Prison from various factions between 1979 and 1983. I learned a lot from them, and now I am more prepared for sacrifice and selflessness. I will start immediately, and my going to the university is not just to obtain a degree, although that is important. It is to establish a special position for me and serve as a launchpad for national work. I ask that you take some time to think before answering."

But your mother did not take any time to think. She responded directly and said, "Is Palestine only yours?" I answered, "No." She replied, "Then I am ready to do my duty, and I will stand by your side in all circumstances, come what may. Trust in God, I am with you forever."

After this conversation, we agreed to get engaged and married.

The year 1985, the year of your birth, witnessed significant developments. Early in the year, I was elected for the second time as president of the Student Council at Birzeit University, and also as the coordinator for the student youth movement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. By this time, the youth movement had spread like wildfire across the homeland, in villages, camps, and cities. This organization was formed through the initiative of a large group of Fatah cadres, many of whom had been released from prison in the early 1980s. By 1985, there were tens of thousands of members in the student and social youth movement, which included women, workers, farmers, students, and professionals. We insisted that this framework be democratic, and we established an electoral system in both the West Bank and Gaza. By the time of the first Intifada, there were about seven thousand elected cadres in the youth organizations and frameworks across both regions. This structure enabled the movement to withstand the blows of the occupation over many years, from 1982 to 1993.

On May 20, 1985, one of the most important events regarding prisoners took place—the prisoner exchange deal between the PLO, through the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - General Command, and Israel. Israel released 1,150 prisoners, including over 800 prisoners sentenced to life imprisonment. Most of them returned to Palestine, while some went abroad. This exchange became known as the "Ahmad Jibril Deal,"

named after the Secretary-General of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - General Command. This was the most significant prisoner exchange in the history of the prisoner movement since 1967.

This event became one of the major highlights of 1985. Joy and celebrations swept across Palestinian territories, boosting the momentum of the Palestinian national movement. During this time of overwhelming joy, as we organized celebrations and traveled across the homeland, I was arrested as I was leaving the village of Saida in the Tulkarem district. I was placed under house arrest, which prohibited me from entering Birzeit University or leaving my hometown of Kobar. I was required to sign in daily at an Israeli military police station in Ramallah. This occurred on May 24, 1985.

Five days after the house arrest order, on May 29, 1985, I was arrested again. I was released after fifty days of interrogation. On July 20 of the same year, I was released again but placed under renewed house arrest in the town of Kobar. On August 5, 1985, I was struck by a great personal tragedy. My father, your grandfather Haseeb, passed away. He was my best guardian, a friend, and a father figure to your mother. He was very happy when he learned that she was pregnant and used to buy her what she needed. He loved her dearly and cared for her deeply, counting the days until she would give birth to you.

Your grandfather, may he rest in peace, was a poor man, but a fighter. He lived a harsh and difficult life. He loved people deeply, and they loved him in return. They respected and appreciated his struggles, resilience, and simplicity. Many of the villagers shared the same tough circumstances, which created a special bond with him. Despite his poverty, he carried himself with dignity. He lost one of his eyes in early childhood, and the other had poor vision, for which he underwent several surgeries. Before the Nakba in 1948, your grandfather worked in the quarries in Ras Al-Ayn, Lydda, and Majdal As-Sadiq. He married relatively late by the standards of the 1940s, at the age of 35. He was an epitome of honesty, love, and empathy for others, despite never learning to read or write. He came from a generation that experienced deprivation, poverty, and illiteracy. In the early years of my life, he was often absent, working away for weeks at a time. I don't recall much about our relationship during those early years, but between the ages of 10 and 18, we shared an exceptional bond. I was always keen to earn his approval, even in matters I didn't fully agree with. In the 1970s, many people, especially farmers, dropped out of school and moved to work in the Israeli labor market. This was a result of the occupation's strategy to cripple the Palestinian economy, flooding the market with Israeli products that were subsidized and competitive, undermining Palestinian agriculture and local goods. The occupation imposed taxes, seized agricultural land, prohibited the digging of artesian wells, and controlled water resources. Dozens of factories were closed, and no new licenses for factories were granted. Export markets were shut down, and imports of raw materials were obstructed. As a result, tens of thousands of farmers turned to work in Israel, where cheap Palestinian labor was exploited. I remember your grandfather, due to poverty, often asking me: "What do you get from school? Even if you finish, what will you do? Will you become a teacher? Teachers don't earn enough to survive in Israel!" He would also tell me he couldn't help

with the school fees because he didn't have the means. Nevertheless, I insisted on continuing my education. We reached an agreement where I would work on Thursdays in the local workshops in the village and surrounding areas. Your grandfather didn't hate education, the school, or knowledge. What he despised was poverty and need. He couldn't afford to think about the future; he was focused on securing his daily bread. I worked with him in agriculture on "Al-Zaroura" land. Together, we planted hundreds of olive trees in the 1970s, and today, those trees bear fruit that requires a ladder to harvest. I still remember each tree and sapling, and I hold them in my heart with a special love that your grandfather instilled in me. He connected me to the land, day by day, and I learned then that the land gives to those who care for it, nourishes those who nurture it, and protects those who preserve it. There is a special bond between the farmer and the land, the trees, even the stones in this land—perhaps a bond of kinship or a unique friendship. The tree grows like a person; it can smile or frown. There are things that can't be explained, but there's an undeniable, unique relationship that forms with the earth, the trees, the plants, and even the stones. Do you remember when we went to Al-Zaroura together? I told you in detail about the trees and the land.

The death of your grandfather, Haseeb, may he rest in peace, was a heavy blow to me. Even though I believed in the inevitability of death and that there is no escaping this fate, I had hoped that this poor man, who had fought so hard to provide for his family and children, could stay a little longer. I wished that he could live to see his children grow up, achieve some success in their work, and build their own families. I wanted him to live a few years of comfort after all the hardships he had endured—working in the quarries, sleeping in the open, moving from place to place. I wanted him to see his grandchildren, especially you, Qassam. I'm sure he would have been so proud of you and your siblings, and loved you all deeply. But it was God's will. I lived in deep sorrow for many days, more than I had ever expected. In the midst of this grief, the Israeli government imposed its iron-fist policy on the occupied Palestinian territories. This manifested in the deployment of paratroopers, the establishment of widespread military checkpoints, the increasing pace of settlement expansion, the confiscation of land, the closure of Jerusalem's institutions, the occupation of homes in the Old City, the renewal of deportation policies, and the reinstatement of administrative detention. On the evening of August 28, 1985, while I was still under house arrest—which I had never adhered to—I used every method to escape and circumvent it. On that night, I was arrested after attending a national celebration in the town of Silwad. Fourteen activists were arrested that night, and three of them were deported, while the rest were transferred to administrative detention. My arrest at that moment felt especially painful because your birth was less than a month and a half away, and your grandfather had passed away just a few days earlier.

My dear Qassam... Because I expected arrest, exile, or martyrdom, I had previously agreed with your mother on a name for the child if it was a boy, and we chose "Qassam." I was completely convinced of this name, without any hesitation, even though it was not a common name in our country. The name most people used was "Az-Zaidin," not Qassam. The decision regarding your name had actually crystallized in my mind while I was in prison, years before your birth. I still hold a special respect for

Sheikh Izz al-Din al-Qassam, who fought and resisted French colonialism in Syria. When he fled from the colonial forces, he moved to Haifa and became the preacher of the Al-Istiqal Mosque in 1926. From there, he began calling for jihad and resistance against British colonialism, firmly believing that resistance should be directed against the colonizers, not through compromise or seeking their friendship, especially in confronting the Zionist and settler project. This project, which was first supported by the Balfour Declaration and later through British mandate rule, was itself a product of British colonialism. Al-Qassam was correct in identifying the main and direct enemy, and he laid the groundwork for a well-organized movement that eventually led to the firing of the first bullet in 1936. In short, I saw in Izz al-Din al-Qassam a model to be emulated in behavior, courage, and determination, as I studied his experience in detail.

There is something important that must be said: even though I greatly admired revolutionary names and national symbols, life and experience led me to be cautious about naming my son after living revolutionary leaders or figures, for fear that they might later deviate or change. Therefore, only martyrs remain unchanged and unalterable, and we can trust them completely. It is important to honor them by naming our children after them. For this reason, I decided that you would be named Qassam, after consulting with your mother, who agreed without hesitation and welcomed the name. I was always confident that you would be worthy of carrying this name, without feeling burdened by it. It is a matter of honoring our great martyrs with the simplest gestures possible because nations and peoples take pride in and value their martyrs. They are the honor of the nation, the symbols of its dignity and pride, and the expression of its free and authentic will. Because the freedom of peoples can only be achieved through sacrifices, and the creators of that freedom are those who gave their lives for the liberty of their countries and the independence of their people. In our case, the Palestinian martyrs have revived our national identity, which our enemies sought to erase and bury. It is the martyrs who achieved international recognition for our cause, and it is they who brought Palestine back onto the political map, and later, onto the geographic map as well.

My dear beloved... my precious son... Our first meeting was on March 1st, the day I was released from administrative detention. I remember that day as if it were yesterday, and you were only five months old, eager to return home. I had been released from Junaid Prison near Nablus, and the road home took less than an hour, though to me it felt like an eternity. The moment I arrived home, I rushed to you, kissed your hands, your feet, your head, your eyes, and your beautiful cheeks. I held you in my arms for those precious days, playing with you, so proud and joyful. During that time, a thought consumed my mind: it is unjust for you to grow up under occupation, to live a life that leads to prisons and suffering. It is not right that our fathers and grandfathers lived under occupation in all its forms, only for us to suffer the same, to bear the shame of Israeli occupation and its prisons, and to pass this on to our children. As I kissed you and looked at you, I told myself, "I must not let you and the children of your generation live this humiliation and oppression we endure under occupation." We must not let you go to prison, and we cannot accept burying our children. It must be the other way around—our children should bury us, as is the natural law, the order of life. This thought

grew stronger in me with each passing day, and I felt like we were in a race against time—between letting our children grow up and achieving freedom and independence for them, so they can be spared the suffering we lived through. I spent a few months with you in 1986, until the Israeli forces began pursuing me again in October 1986. From then on, I was deprived of the joy of sleeping next to you and kissing you every morning and evening. During that time, your grandmother took care of you constantly, her love for you boundless. In that period, on November 28, 1986, your mother gave birth to your beloved sister, Ruba. Despite the constant pursuit, I was able to reach the hospital and check on your mother and our precious little Ruba, a name connected to the earth, the hills, and the valleys. I was so happy with the birth of your sister because I had always hoped that God would bless me with both sons and daughters. I consider women to be the source of life's most beautiful meaning. They are its ever-renewing spring. My belief in the role and rights of women is unshakable, and it is fundamental to any society. The most successful and advanced societies are those that grant women their full rights and recognize their essential role in all aspects of life—political, social, economic, and beyond. In our Palestinian case, women play a prominent role in rooting our national identity, in education and upbringing, and in the development of our society. Since the launch of the Palestinian revolution in 1965, the role of women has been strengthened, and they have engaged in every form of struggle without exception. Women have carried weapons, stones, Molotov cocktails, pens, books, and cameras; they have worked in schools, healthcare, and the economy. There is no field they have not entered alongside men, forming an essential pillar of the Palestinian national liberation movement, with all its factions. We cannot imagine a modern society without women fully taking their rightful place and role.

My dear Qassam...After more than eight months of being pursued between 1986 and 1987, I was arrested and exiled from our homeland by a military order signed by the Israeli Defense Minister at the time, Yitzhak Rabin. The years 1985 to 1989 witnessed a wave of deportations, affecting dozens of Palestinian leaders and revolutionary figures. The policy of deportation was implemented by the Israeli occupation authorities from the very first day they took control over the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The aim was to empty the Palestinian territories of prominent figures, leaders, and activists, stripping the people of their rightful leadership. Clerics, writers, journalists, intellectuals, university professors, mayors, political leaders, and fighters were all targeted. The objective was to deprive the Palestinian people in the occupied territories and their national movement of experienced and skilled leaders and cadres, in order to facilitate the occupation's control—an illusion in the minds of its leaders.

I tell you, my dear Qassam, that in many of the arrests I endured, and through the various forms of torture and imprisonment, I never cried. But I confess to you that when one of the Israeli military leaders read to me the deportation order, I could not hold back my tears. It was one of the harshest, most bitter, and painful moments of my life. Who has the right to expel me from the land of my ancestors? Who is this military commander who decides to uproot us by the force of arms from the land where we were born, raised, and grew up? Isn't this aggression, injustice, tyranny, and oppression? Who gives the right to someone who came from Poland, Russia, or America, just a few

years or even decades ago, to expel the rightful owners of this land—those who have lived here for at least four thousand years? The age of my ancestors in this land is the same age as the land itself. Its soil is a part of us, and we are part of it. Throughout history, we, the Canaanites, developed our great civilization here. We resisted the invaders who came, occupied, and ruled this land, but they all passed, and we remained. Our land remained ours. Our ancestors stood firm against the various invaders, regardless of their names and types, and all the invaders left. The Palestinians stayed on this land. Allah honored our land, and this earth, by choosing it to be the cradle of the three monotheistic religions. It is the first qiblah and the third holiest sanctuary. It is the place of the ascension of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and the birthplace of Jesus Christ (peace be upon him). This land has a magnificent history, one that is rare to find in any other country. No great or mighty empire in history failed to extend its ambitions to this land, which is distinguished by its geographic and strategic location, its climate, its terrain, and its rich history and diversity in society.

Throughout history, our people have preserved their civilization and their land, maintaining unity within a framework of bold religious and political pluralism. They have always upheld peaceful relations with their neighbors, continuously cultivating their land and developing their civilization until the Zionist invasion came, using all means to take control of our country. The Zionist movement harnessed the vast financial resources of Jews worldwide, gathering them from various parts of the world, pooling money, men, and women under the banner of returning to the Promised Land—the land of milk and honey—and employing every method to seize the land and launch its settlement project. The Zionist movement considered itself the spearhead of the colonial and imperialist settlement project, which was facilitated by the Balfour Declaration, the British Mandate, and then by weapons, money, equipment, international support, and the 1947 partition plan. After the partition, armed Zionist gangs were immediately formed, receiving the best military training from the generals of great powers like Britain, as well as modern weapons in massive quantities, and they formed a regular army of at least 80,000 armed soldiers organized into units, brigades, and well-coordinated divisions. In addition, there were tens of thousands of trained fighters in Zionist militia camps who waged an aggressive war aimed at expelling the Palestinian people, the rightful owners of the land. They committed dozens of massacres and killed thousands, with the massacres of Deir Yassin, Tantura, Jaffa, Haifa, Safed, and others being just examples of these atrocities. The Zionist forces also carried out an unprecedented ethnic cleansing campaign in the history of this land, forcing the majority of Palestinians to flee, using massacres, intimidation, threats, starvation, and terrorism. They destroyed more than 524 Palestinian villages, some of which were over two thousand years old. The Zionists also destroyed tens of thousands of homes, looted the property of their owners, and built their state and entity on the ruins of our cities and villages, and on the ruins of hundreds of thousands of refugees. They did not stop at establishing a state according to the 1947 partition plan, which granted them 55% of the land of Palestine. They occupied half of the territory designated for the Palestinian state— 22%— and thus, the Zionist entity was established in 1948 on 78% of the land of Palestine. After a brief respite of nearly two decades, they went on to occupy the remaining land of

Palestine, making all of Palestine, 100%, under Zionist occupation following the 1967 aggression.

Naturally, our people have resisted from the very first day of the Zionist-imperialist invasion of our land. They protested by all means against the establishment of settlements, opposed the sale of land, held conferences, sent memorandums, engaged in dialogues with various parties, and communicated with them. However, the Zionist colonial settlement plan was larger than the capabilities and resources of our people. The 1936 Revolution was one of the most significant revolutions witnessed in the Arab world at that time, and one of the prominent revolutions globally. Yet, this revolution failed, and it effectively ended in 1939 after the outbreak of World War II, largely due to the massive British repression of the uprising, which included house demolitions, sieges, restrictions on movement, destruction of crops, increased taxes, the arrest of thousands, the execution of hundreds, and the expulsion of dozens of leaders. Additionally, there were internal Palestinian factors that contributed to its failure, chief among them being the lack of unity in political and military leadership, the absence of supply lines, weapons, provisions, and funding, as well as the prevailing division between opposing factions, and the outbreak of internal armed conflicts in several areas. At the same time, there was a lack of a regional or international ally to support the cause.

Despite all the sacrifices made by our people, this did not prevent the Nakba of 1948. While we hold in high esteem all the officers, soldiers, and Arab volunteers who fell in the battle to defend Palestine in 1948, the combined forces of the seven Arab armies, along with the volunteers, were no match for even a single Zionist brigade in terms of armament, numbers, equipment, and training. The armies came without a unified plan or effective leadership, and were instead led by regimes tied to British and French colonialism. This led to their defeat, despite the widespread illusions among Palestinians who believed that these armies were capable of defeating the Zionist occupation gangs, which were supported by Britain.

The Nakba of Palestine constituted an unprecedented disaster in the history of our people and our nation. It is one of the prominent historical crimes of the modern era and a form of genocide that some peoples and human groups have suffered, including the Jews themselves, who were subjected to a genocidal campaign by the Nazis during World War II. Ironically, the Palestinians fell victim to the genocide, killing, displacement, exile, and land and homeland theft at the hands of those who had endured the agony of genocide at the hands of the Nazis. Thus, the Palestinians became victims of the victims of Nazism. If World War I brought upon us the catastrophe of the Balfour Declaration and British occupation, World War II led to the partition of Palestine and the establishment of the State of Israel on the ruins of the Palestinian people.

The catastrophe of the Nakba was harsh and bitter, a tragic shock for the people of Palestine. It was the first time Palestinians were subjected to a war of genocide, mass killing, destruction, and forced expulsion from their homeland. For the first time, Palestinians saw their cities, villages, towns, and properties being destroyed and

violated. For the first time, the vast majority of the population became refugees, needing assistance, relief, and care. In the aftermath of the Nakba, our people entered a dark tunnel, living in a state of displacement, diaspora, confusion, guardianship, and a loss of identity, along with the collapse of their national movement and leadership.

After nearly two decades of the Nakba, Palestinians began anew by launching the contemporary armed revolution led by the Fatah movement on January 1, 1965. This marked the beginning of a long, arduous, and bloody journey to reclaim their identity, land, and country—a journey for the liberation of their homeland and the attainment of their freedom and independence.

My dear son and companion on this journey... the journey of pain, after the forced, painful, and unjust exile from our sacred land, a few months later you, your mother, and your sister Rabi joined me, likely in June, when we had our first meeting after nearly a year of actual separation, in Amman. It was a heartfelt reunion that ignited within me all the emotions of fatherhood and affection. It was the first time we gathered under one roof as a family, even if it was in exile and far from our homeland. Exile, since the Nakba, has become an inseparable part of Palestinian life and memory, carrying with it suffering and a harsh internal struggle with memory, along with oppression and bitterness. It represents the hardship of living away from home, from family, and the deprivation of the streets, alleys, neighborhoods, trees, buildings, people, and the very nature of our land—the mountains, plains, trees, springs, wells, the soil, stones, sun, rain, houses, and homes. The longing for the homeland is an unparalleled feeling, especially since, as you know, I had never left Palestine except on the day of my exile. Throughout this time, I fought a battle with my memory, which insisted on rejecting the places of exile, in order to preserve the image of my homeland with all its details.

Exile was not an easy experience; it was harsh, bitter, and carried with it a sense of humiliation. The painful and difficult life in our homeland, even under occupation, is far easier than exile, because within your homeland, you live on your own land, surrounded by your people. Someone fighting for their homeland feels a sense of freedom and refuses to accept that they are under occupation; they reject it and never compromise with it, even for a single day.

However, what eased the burden of exile for me was having you, your sister, and your mother with me at all times. It was the first time I truly felt the presence of a family and understood what that meant for me and for all of us. Those days were relatively enjoyable in some ways, because I felt I could make up for the time we had lost, even if only to a minimal extent. But I soon became immersed in work and duty once again, and life remained this way until we returned to our homeland.

It was the first time I took you to an amusement park, and my joy was no less than yours in those moments. It was a first for both of us, as in my childhood, I had never seen such games, a park, or anything else that could bring joy and entertainment to children, just like all the children of my generation.

Do you remember, my dear Qassam, the first story I told you? I am sure you still recall it. I talked to you about "Dalal al-Maghrebi," and I created a story from my imagination about this heroine, which I repeated to you many times before bedtime. I also tried to talk to you about the Nakba, the occupation of Palestine, the refugees, the camps, the revolution, the refusal of the Nakba, the rejection of the occupation, and the role of women and their bravery in the Palestinian revolution. I took Dalal al-Maghrebi, the leader of the fidayeen operation on the Palestinian coast, as an example. Through this story and others, I wanted to share with you, early on, the path of Palestinian suffering, without overwhelming you too much, but I wanted you to know.

Do you remember how many nights you stayed awake beside me while I was writing and preparing messages for the organization and the leadership of the uprising inside? During my time in exile and until my return, I worked as the coordinator for the movement and organization inside. You saw, Qassam, how I wrapped the messages in nylon to turn them into "capsules" that could easily be smuggled through the crossing bridge from Palestine to Jordan, a bridge that later became known as the "Karama Crossing." I also remember that while I was preparing the messages and sealing them with nylon, you would do it alone, helping me.

I made sure that you and the family would return to Palestine every year. I considered it a way to compensate for the deprivation I lived through. Through your eyes, Qassam, I was able to see the streets, the alleys, the homeland, the family, and the friends. Sometimes, I would take you to the crossing point that I had never crossed or passed through, only to return later with a heavy heart, shedding tears along the way.

Do you remember, Qassam, when you sat in the lap of Martyr Abu Iyad at Martyr Abu Jihad's house in Tunisia? Abu Iyad asked you, "Who do you love the most in this world, Qassam?" You answered that you loved Abu Ammar, Abu Jihad, Tom and Jerry, and then you pointed to Abu Iyad and said, "You." That answer made everyone burst into laughter.

My dear Qassam... Exile was a period filled with personal suffering and hardship, far from the homeland and family. It was not without its obstacles and struggles with close relatives from the Arab brethren. However, having you with me greatly alleviated much of this pain. Do you remember, Qassam, the moment of returning to the homeland? It was the most beautiful moment I have ever lived in my life. It was a great day, on April 5, 1994, when the first group of exiled Palestinians returned after the Oslo Agreement. The vast majority of this group were leaders and cadres of the first intifada. Do you remember that boundless joy? I was determined to bring you with me on this eternal journey back to the land of our ancestors.

I remember that I couldn't sleep or rest, I was so excited. We set off early on the morning of April 5, a beautiful spring day, toward the bridge of return. Although the journey was tiring, especially for the little ones like you, Qassam, it was worth every bit of that exhaustion. I carried you with me in every moment, in every place, in front of the

people, at the reception, and when I spoke to the people on behalf of the returning exiles. I wanted you to enjoy this magnificent return.

I told you, Qassam, that we are returning, and a small window for returning to Palestine has opened. The greatest thing now is that the endless waves of displacement, expulsion, exile, and deportation will stop, forever. History will record, starting from today, April 5, the beginning of the return journey and will forever close the chapter on forced displacement and expulsion. Despite my reservations and fears about what lies ahead, about the Oslo Agreement and its clear shortcomings and the possibility of its failure, I was convinced that a much better agreement than Oslo could have been reached. But the agreement was signed, and we were given the opportunity to return, so we should not hesitate for even a moment. I cannot understand any Palestinian who is given the chance to return and does not take it for any reason.

The day of return was beautiful and unforgettable. I returned to my homeland, my family, my home, my village, my university, to the streets, the alleys, the mountains, and the trees I loved. I could not get enough of kissing them and looking at them, even until now. My dream was for us to succeed in ending this bloody conflict, even at the minimum. I understood that the Palestinians would give the agreement and peace a chance because, in their view, peace means the end of occupation and the establishment of an independent state on the lands occupied in 1967, with Jerusalem as its capital, and the resolution of the refugee issue by returning in accordance with UN Resolution 194. We all worked towards achieving this goal, and I believed it was necessary for us to experience this opportunity and spare our people further suffering, giving a chance for peace between the two peoples.

I believed this was our duty to our people, to our country, and to our children. I tried, Qassam, to explain this to you and to give you hope for a new era of freedom and peace, even though the unanswered questions kept coming and made the talk of peace seem contradictory to the reality on the ground. You had dozens of questions that were difficult to answer, yet I saw you enjoying life in the homeland, at school, with friends and classmates, despite the lack of facilities for children. I thought that we should do everything we could to spare our people and your generation, Qassam, from returning to this bloody conflict. I didn't want you and your peers to witness another war or violent struggle. I wanted this generation to live as the children of the world live, to enjoy life, and to deal with ordinary problems and concerns like all the people of the earth.

But, Qassam, despite all the efforts made, it was not successful, and we could not avoid the conflict with this brutal enemy, who is not yet mature enough for true peace, even at its minimum. We face an enemy with a vast appetite for plundering the land, settlement, occupation, and killing.

The peace process failed because Israel refused to commit to implementing the agreements despite their shortcomings, rejected acknowledging our people's inherent national rights, refused to fulfill the obligations of peace, and preferred occupation and settlement over peace, security, and coexistence. Despite all the efforts, Israeli society

was, and still is, not ready for true peace. The Palestinians made incredible concessions to reach peace, recognizing Israel's right to exist on 78% of the land of Palestine, and settling for 22% of the land in a transitional phase with harsh and humiliating conditions in many aspects. And yet, how did the Israelis respond?

They continued, in fact, they intensified the confiscation of land, the number of settlements, and the construction of settlement units. What the occupiers established between 1993 and 2000 was equivalent to what they had built from 1967 to 1993. They also continued their policy of isolating and Judaizing Jerusalem, building settlements within it, closing Palestinian institutions of all kinds, and imposing severe restrictions on its residents to force them to emigrate and empty the city.

The Israelis launched a comprehensive war in a race against time, seizing land, building settlements, and Judaizing Jerusalem. They also refused to release prisoners, leading to thousands remaining in prison, some of whom have now spent 30 years behind bars.

My dear son, despite all this, the Palestinians waited for what was called the final status negotiations, which were delayed for four years, hoping they would correct the course, resolve all issues, and move the Palestinians beyond partial and transitional solutions. The Camp David negotiations in July 2000 were a great disappointment and a shock to the Palestinians. The Israelis and Americans attempted to impose a humiliating settlement that amounted to little more than expanded self-rule, nothing more.

All of these developments and the Palestinians' experience over seven years of negotiations led them to the conclusion that the Israelis did not seek an acceptable settlement that met the minimum Palestinian demands, supported by international legitimacy and the international community.

It is important to remember that widespread disappointment affected a large portion of the Palestinians due to the poor performance of the Palestinian official negotiating, financial, administrative, security, and economic institutions. The spread of corruption among the elite in the Authority's institutions, the squandering and theft of public funds, and the rise of new "rich" individuals at the expense of the majority of the poor in society became glaringly apparent. Additionally, administrative laxity, security chaos, and authoritarian behavior by the security apparatuses were widespread. All of this came together at once, igniting the fire of the intifada, with Ariel Sharon's visit to the Al-Aqsa Mosque serving as the trigger or the match that set its flames ablaze.

My dear Qassam,

I have felt the pain due to the magnitude of the sacrifices our people have been forced to make because my dream of sparing you and your entire generation the horrors of the bloody conflict has not come true. The Palestinians had no choice but to bravely and valiantly fight for freedom and independence. And this is what our people did—they paid with the best of their sons, with martyrs, wounded, and prisoners, and they presented an unprecedented legend of steadfastness, practicing all forms of struggle without exception. Our people will inevitably triumph, and the first signs of victory are already visible with the withdrawal of the occupier from our beloved Gaza Strip. The intifada and resistance that forced the occupier to withdraw from Gaza will also force them to withdraw from the West Bank and Jerusalem.

Despite the heavy sacrifices, despite the poverty, deprivation, hunger, the oppression, siege, walls, separation, killings, assassinations, and arrests, our people remain steadfast and are capable of achieving victory. Nations and free peoples never hesitate to make sacrifices for their freedom, independence, dignity, and honor. Struggling and resisting is the highest form of national belonging, the highest form of human feeling, and the highest form of sacrifice and devotion.

I say to you, my dear, and to all the sons of your generation, who made the blessed intifada a reality, that the day of freedom is coming, and the end of the occupation is inevitable. No matter what methods they use, no matter how much they deceive, or how much force they employ, their fate will be to fall into the dustbin of history, alongside fascism, Nazism, terrorism, and racism. The day when our people, along with our nation and all the free people and friends of the world, will celebrate liberation, is not far off.

My dear, beloved friend, and my son whom I love and cherish, I miss you so much. I long for your eyes, your beautiful face, your smile, and the laughter I hear from afar in my cell. I remember every moment I spent with you; those moments are among the happiest of my life. It's the same feeling I have for Ruba, my beloved, and for Sharaf and Arab, who are with me every moment in my mind, heart, and soul. I remember each of your smiles and laughs, the teasing, playing, debating, and voting to decide whether to go to one place or another—our family democracy in action, because democracy is a behavior we practice from birth, growing as we grow, and a principle that should be instilled in every home, family, institution, and school.

My dear Qassam... I know you're living under harsh and difficult circumstances in prison. I know that the occupying enemy has denied you the opportunity to sit in university classrooms alongside your classmates who graduated with you from school. You are a young man at the beginning of your journey, eager to live, to laugh, to travel, to eat, to dress, to come and go with your friends. And I know that prison means deprivation and the stripping away of even the smallest forms of freedom, even the most basic aspects of it. Even sleep is controlled by the prison guard, let alone food, drink, clothing, and movement. Going to and from the bathroom is a form of enslavement, a humiliation of humanity itself.

However, our fate is to triumph over this prison guard and the occupier, armed with unwavering faith in God, and in our historical, national, religious, human, and legal right to this land.

I am confident that you are capable of enduring the harshness of prison, the darkness of the cell, the humiliation of the chains, the confinement of space, the stillness of time, the worries of the brothers and fellow prisoners, the pain of separation from your dear mother, father, siblings, family, and friends, and from the streets, home, and people you love. I am sure that you and your brothers, the youth who represent the eternal spring of our people and our land, are strong enough to pass the test of prison and the cell. I am deeply impressed by your steadfastness, your resilience, and your absolute refusal to confess to anything, no matter how small, and your determination to resist the interrogators.

I am proud of you because you have not written a single line, not given a single statement, not confessed to a single thing, and have never caused harm to any brother or individual. You confronted the weaknesses of some of your fellow prisoners with an unyielding will. This is the Qassam I know and expect.

My dear Qassam... my advise you to maintain the best of relationships with your fellow prisoners, to be patient and forgiving in the daily struggles and complexities of life. Rise above any friction or sensitivities that often arise among the prisoners, and ensure that your relationships with the brothers are excellent, regardless of their political or organizational affiliations. Everyone in prison belongs to one organization—Palestine—and one people, with one cause. They are all children of the resistance, regardless of their factional labels. National unity is the law of victory for liberation movements and oppressed peoples. It is the shield of the people and the shield of national achievements. There is no victory without unity, and there is no steadfastness without unity.

I hope you make the most of your time by building many honest and loyal friendships, gaining experiences and knowledge, spending time studying, reading novels and books on national history, and global experiences. Immerse yourself in all political, economic, and intellectual schools of thought, including Palestinian literature, and learn languages in addition to practicing daily physical exercises. Also, avoid smoking, and offer any help you can to any brother who asks for it, or even if they don't ask, if you know how or are able to assist.

My dear Qassam, I wish you and all the prisoners and detainees a swift release and freedom from the chains of prison and the darkness of the cells. I hope our homeland is liberated, and that our great, steadfast, patient people enjoy freedom, independence, and return. The occupation will fall—it is certain, and soon—because the freedom of the homeland and the people is the true freedom. Freedom has no taste for free people unless it is within a free homeland, a free people, and a people who are the masters of their own destiny.

In the end, I hope you know how much your mother loves you, how much she cherishes Qassam and dreams of him. Your arrest has affected her far more than mine. She is accustomed to my imprisonment, but with you, the shock has been much harder on her. Also, Ruba, Sharaf, and Arab love you dearly and are eagerly awaiting your release.

My greetings to all the brothers around you. This is resistance until freedom.

Your father and friend,  
Marwan Barghouti

## **Open-ended Hunger Strike**

Prisoners have long used the weapon of the open-ended hunger strike as a means of expressing and protesting the practices of the prison service and the occupying authorities, as well as to improve their living conditions while in captivity. Over the past four decades, since the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories in 1967, prisoners have carried out dozens of collective and partial open-ended hunger strikes.

Through these strikes, along with their endurance and struggle using various methods, prisoners have managed to change conditions inside the prisons, where life was harsh and bitter, resembling in many ways the nature of fascist concentration camps. Thousands of prisoners have been subjected to torture, beatings, deprivation, hunger, illness, and psychological trauma. Despite all these struggles over the decades, successive occupying governments have refused to recognize the prisoners as prisoners of war, or as members of a national liberation movement and fighters for freedom, and they have refused—and continue to refuse—to apply the Geneva Conventions and international humanitarian law to them.

Nevertheless, the prisoners have managed to achieve significant victories, such as securing family visits (albeit under harsh conditions), gaining access to hot water for bathing, the right to perform prayers, including group Friday prayers in the prison yards, and the ability to purchase various items from the prison canteen. They have also gained access to beds, reduced overcrowding, limited the violence and beatings against them, and achieved access to televisions, radios, and newspapers.

The prisoner movement, which enjoys a high level of unity and organization, has made numerous sacrifices to achieve some victories and improve living conditions inside the prisons. Over the past decades, more than two hundred prisoners have fallen as martyrs inside prisons, detention centers, and interrogation cells, with several of them dying during repeated and open-ended hunger strikes.

Following the widespread and unprecedented wave of arrests carried out by the occupying government after the military invasion of Palestinian Authority territories in late March 2002, which led to the detention of thousands of citizens, prisons became overcrowded again. At the onset of the Intifada, there were only about 1,500 prisoners, but within less than two years, this number rose to ten thousand. Alongside this, the occupying government and the prison service launched a fierce campaign to strip prisoners of their achievements and gains. This criminal assault by the Israeli government against our people, which began in 2000 with the start of the blessed Intifada, coincided with efforts to break the morale and resolve of the fighters of the Intifada and the detained activists by targeting them within the prisons.

The occupying government claimed that prisoners continued to carry out resistance operations, incite violence, and organize martyrdom operations from within the prisons, with one of the main focal points of this assault being mobile phones. In defense of the achievements and gains of the prisoner movement, and in response to the aggressive

campaign against prisoners that coincided with the broader assault on our people, the prisoner movement decided, after extensive discussions, dialogue, and communications between the prisons and the leadership of the prisoner movement, to launch an open-ended hunger strike. This strike aimed to preserve the dignity of the prisoners, reject humiliating strip searches, arbitrary isolation and transfers, poor food, the suspension of family visits, and to secure the right to study at local universities and access to phone calls, just as other prisoners are permitted, along with other demands.

The prisoner movement decided to announce an open-ended hunger strike in all central prisons under the administration of the prison service, except for the detention camps in the Negev, where approximately 2,500 prisoners are held, the Megiddo prison, which houses 1,500 prisoners, and Ofer prison, with 800 prisoners. This exception was made because these detention centers are overseen and managed by the Israeli army, and their living conditions differ from those in central prisons, with somewhat better conditions. However, it should be noted that recently, the Negev, Megiddo, and Ofer prisons were transferred from military control to the central prison service, making their living conditions harsher and more similar to those of central prisons.

Due to the isolation of prisoners in solitary confinement, the inability to communicate with them, and the lack of knowledge about the arrangements taking place, as well as the severe nature of solitary confinement and the prison administration's ability to control isolated prisoners, those held in solitary confinement are not included in the open-ended hunger strike. They are generally not coordinated with regarding the timing of the strike, its demands, or the conditions for ending it, and so on.

Because I was in solitary confinement, I learned about the hunger strike and heard about it, and I confirmed that it had begun on the second day of the strike. I decided to join the open-ended hunger strike the following day, on August 18, 2004, along with the strikers in the second phase. I was in Beersheba isolation at the time, and I indeed began the strike. It is important to note that the brothers in my section did not participate, though I advised them to join and explained that my strike was a gesture of solidarity and moral support. I kept this from them during the first three days. Immediately after the strike began, the prison authorities launched an unprecedented campaign in the history of the prisoner movement and hunger strikes, taking a series of arbitrary, provocative, and even criminal and immoral actions.

The prison authorities transferred a large number of prisoners to solitary confinement and launched a campaign of transfers from one prison to another, from one section to another, and from one cell to another, throughout the days of the hunger strike. This was done during a time when prisoners were already physically weak and exhausted, making movement difficult and burdensome. These transfers, accompanied by constant searches, long waits, and exhausting bus journeys, added to the suffering. Additionally, all personal belongings from the cells and prisons were confiscated, including electronic devices such as televisions, radios, and cassette players, as well as canteen items, which prisoners had typically taken out on the first day of the strike. Even their clothing was taken, leaving nothing behind in the cells, including salt.

Even worse, the prison administration carried out a barbecue campaign in the prison yards, intentionally making the smell of cooking meat reach the prisoners, provoking their hunger and causing psychological distress. This was a form of psychological warfare. Despite the fact that the prison service's regulations grant prisoners on hunger strike the right to a cup of milk daily, the authorities refused to provide it and even denied prisoners the salt they used to prevent their stomachs and intestines from becoming infected.

Hundreds of prisoners were subjected to threats and humiliation during this strike. Additionally, the prison authorities launched a smear campaign against the leaders of the prisoners and the hunger strike, a cheap and despicable campaign that exposed the mentality of the occupying Israeli authorities, revealing their intellectual bankruptcy and the misery of their thinking.

From the very first day, the Hebrew newspapers published that I was personally behind the hunger strike, organizing and arranging it, and that I was the spokesperson for the strikers. This information came from the security services in cooperation with the prison service and the occupying government, even though they knew that I was in solitary confinement and had no daily contact with the strike leadership, nor was I its spokesperson, or the one making decisions about its start or end.

In the early days of the strike, the occupation authorities released a photo of me in my cell eating, broadcasting it on Israeli TV channels and in Hebrew newspapers, distributing the image to the prisoners. The intent was to create the impression that the leader of the strike was eating while the prisoners were starving. This photo was taken by the permanent camera installed in my cell before the strike began. Despite this, I continued the hunger strike and only ended it three days after the prisoners in all the other prisons had concluded theirs. The prison service refused to treat me as a hunger striker, insisting on bringing me meals every day and placing them on the window ledge after I was shackled, only to retrieve them in the evening. They also conducted an initial medical examination after more than a week, with complete disregard for my health, and did not allow my lawyer to visit me for 24 days during the strike. However, they allowed the Red Cross representative to visit me after more than 11 days.

Naturally, their propaganda did not fool the prisoners, and no one paid attention to such cheap and despicable tactics. Prisoners in solitary confinement were generally excused from participating in the strike due to their difficult living conditions.

My insistence on continuing the hunger strike was both a challenge to the occupying government and the prison service, as well as an act of solidarity with the brothers and sisters on hunger strike, despite the enormous burden it entailed. The open-ended hunger strike, especially in solitary confinement, was unbearably painful, and this strike was one of the most difficult and harshest for me personally and for the prisoner movement.

Amid international preoccupations and under a domineering and terrorist Israeli government that declared it would use force to break the prisoners' hunger strike, one of its ministers, representing the government, arrogantly stated that he did not care if all the prisoners died in the strike. He further emphasized that this was the government's stance and the measures it had taken with the approval of then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, a terrorist himself, and his support. This statement was made by Tsachi Hanegbi, the Minister of Internal Security at the time.

Despite the harsh conditions resulting from the ongoing aggression, our great Palestinian people insisted on showing solidarity with the prisoners, which made every prisoner feel proud and honored to belong to this noble people who deserve to struggle, resist, sacrifice, and even martyr themselves for their freedom, independence, return, and dignity. The hunger strike contributed to halting the aggression carried out by the occupying government against the prisoners, reducing the arbitrary measures, and stopping the assaults on prisoners' achievements. It allowed many of them to improve their conditions, maintain their gains, and achieve some new accomplishments. However, there are still many fundamental issues that have not been addressed, and the occupying government continues to refuse to respond to them, despite being basic human rights for the prisoners.

Nonetheless, the prisoners are determined to preserve the gains of the prisoners' movement and their rights, which they achieved through their blood, sweat, martyrs, suffering, and hardships. Thousands of new prisoners have proven resilience and courage that deserve admiration and respect for engaging in this open hunger strike, providing a model to follow. This has brought relief to the older prisoners, who feared that the strike might impose a heavy burden on the new, younger prisoners who had not previously gone through this experience.

The results, however, surpassed all expectations. There are countless remarkable examples of prisoners, including the sick, the wounded, the young, and even some older individuals, who insisted on participating with their fellow prisoners despite their severe suffering. They rejected all the pressure from prisoner leaders who urged them not to join for fear of their lives. However, their national affiliation, belief in their cause, sense of responsibility, and commitment to the struggle drove them to take part. This unity shattered the hopes of the occupation government and the prison authorities that the strike and the prisoners' movement would break.

It is important to note that engaging in an open hunger strike is an arduous task, both physically, mentally, and emotionally. These are days when the activist lives in a state of bitterness, harshness, and self-challenge. It is a victory over oneself, over the desire for food, comfort, and the pleasures of hunger. It is a battle fought first within oneself and second against the enemy. Over the course of the strike, the activist fights hour by hour, minute by minute, writhing in pain, starving, remembering the blessings of food and its pleasures.

Any food, even a piece of bread, becomes a dream, something the striker imagines and wishes for. The struggle takes on a dominant role, along with symptoms such as vomiting during the first days, difficulty moving, and the unpleasant odor emanating from the stomach and intestines through the mouth. There is also the inability to urinate or relieve oneself, and even a lack of desire to drink water, which is the only thing available.

In these days, the memory takes the fighter back to his mother's bread, her food, and her table, or his wife's table. These are days of pain, hunger, struggle, physical weakness, and exhaustion, but they are also days of challenge and days to prove the greatness of belief in the national cause and the constant readiness to sacrifice for it and in its name. They are days of steadfastness and resilience, days to demonstrate the ability to support brothers, comrades, and fellow travelers in the struggle, and days to overcome desires and instincts.

They are days to renew the pledge to continue the struggle against the occupation, against pain and suffering, against the times of the Nakba, the setback, displacement, uprooting, tears, blood, destruction, siege, death, and misery. These days strengthen the fighter's resolve, faith, resilience, and readiness for sacrifice and martyrdom.

### **The Martyrdom of Yasser Arafat**

During the last two decades of President Yasser Arafat's life, I knew him to some extent, and I worked with him on many occasions, primarily in exile before the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, and then within the occupied territories after the Authority was established. Naturally, Yasser Arafat was a central figure in the history of Palestinian struggle and Palestinian politics. My generation saw him as the founder of the Palestinian revolution and its leader, the symbol of Palestinian struggle, and the leader of the Palestinian people. This generation considered him a fighter and a freedom fighter who carried the Palestinian cause and the pride of the Palestinian people with him.

I will not write or record here a summary of this relationship that spanned over two decades with all its details, but I will leave that for the future, as it is impossible to write about some important and essential details at this moment, especially given the circumstances. I have also undergone a painful investigation, a key part of which concerned Yasser Arafat, and I have no desire to discuss this now. After enduring oppression and suffering, I refused to speak about Yasser Arafat, about my relationship with him, or his relationship with the Intifada, and so on.

The moment I heard in my cell about President Yasser Arafat's illness, I thought to myself that the man had gone through many crises, assassination attempts, illness, and the plane crash, and he had survived them all. This time would not be any different. But when I heard about the deterioration of his condition day by day and understood the details, I realized that the occupying government had reached him this time, and had assassinated him in a new and slow manner, perhaps difficult to uncover or verify.

On the day President Arafat left for Paris, I understood, through the details I received from the lawyer and through the message my wife carried with him, that the situation was grave this time, and that the enemy had struck President Arafat. My wife had been in the Muqata'a just hours before his transfer to Paris, where she met him in a very difficult condition, and she conveyed her very bleak impressions in her message. Like many Palestinians, I remained in a state of anxiety, waiting for information from the press, television, or radio, until the moment came that was hard for me to believe. We had become addicted to Yasser Arafat; we had gotten used to him. Thus, it was hard to grasp the reality and understand his absence, as he was an essential part of the struggle's scene and the heart of Palestinian life.

When I heard the news of Yasser Arafat's martyrdom from one of the stations, I felt as though I was choking, and for the first time since my arrest, tears burst from my eyes. It was my decision to resist crying, even though it is a human need, especially in times of pain, suffering, interrogation, and solitary confinement. There were moments when I felt a strong need to cry, but I managed to keep my tears bottled up, despite the difficulty of the situation. I was determined not to let a single tear show in front of the prison guards, as I considered tears a sign of weakness in this context—and I succeeded in that. But when I heard the news of Abu Ammar's death, my tears flowed, and I choked up a little. Then I got up, washed my face, performed ablution, prayed, and read some chapters of the Quran. I tried to calm myself, hiding my tears and my sorrow from the prison authorities, who would pass by the section, sometimes stopping in front of the cell. Some of them attempted to speak with me, but I refused.

I began to reflect on a long sequence of memories and my constant work with the late President Yasser Arafat. He was truly deserving of the people's respect, and he was able to win their love, with people forgiving him many of his mistakes and missteps. I valued his spirit as a fighter, a warrior, a courageous politician, and a key national figure.

I knew Yasser Arafat closely as a person, experiencing his humanity and his concern for people's issues, individuals, and their needs. I knew him as a leader, a commander, a freedom fighter, and a politician. I knew him during difficult and harsh crises, as well as in more comfortable times and ordinary moments. I saw him in times of hardship and war, during danger, aggression, and threats, and how he would follow through and make decisions in all areas. I became familiar with many of his strengths and weaknesses, and I always respected him and loved him most of the time. I disagreed with him often, but I agreed with him on the major national issues. I criticized him strongly for his internal performance, his tendency to act unilaterally, his improvisation in decision-making, and his conservative mindset that resisted renewal and feared change. I frequently criticized his closeness to some corrupt and ineffective people with bad reputations, and his insistence on keeping old, ineffective, and backward teams. However, I always distinguished between his failures in internal development and his ability to perform in the national and political struggle. I admired his political and revolutionary courage, and sometimes his knightly qualities and his readiness for sacrifice.

I felt sorrow at his passing and despair because he left the Fatah movement in its worst state. He did not respond to the pressure, insistence, and pleas to convene the Sixth Congress and make the changes necessary to open the door for the younger generations, for a real partnership between the generations, and between the inside and the outside. I had always criticized him for not involving the leaders of the occupied territories and their cadres in the leadership structures of the movement and in the institutions of the Authority in general. He did not deeply believe in democracy, though he adopted some of its forms and aspects, but not its essence within the institutions, especially the elected legislative council, which should have been the nucleus of modern parliamentary and legislative life. He neglected it, marginalized it, and showed no regard for its decisions, laws, or its members. He did not give enough attention to the judiciary, nor did he believe in its independence. He did not work within the framework of a clear strategic plan, bounded by time, with a specific agenda, program, and tools.

Palestine was not just his concern; it resided in every part of his body and cells. He devoted his life to it since his youth and succeeded in founding Fatah and leading the revolution. He fought battles with courage, regardless of their significance or impact, and carried the Palestinian cause everywhere, making it one of the most prominent struggles for liberation and justice in the world. His international presence was an unprecedented force in the history of liberation and justice. His ability to maneuver on the international stage was immense; he had a deep understanding of the global landscape and its minefields, and he knew how to navigate most of these mines. However, he did fall into some of them, and they almost ended his role and leadership.

His pride in his Palestinian identity was like the pride of the prophets in their messages. Palestine inhabited his life, his heart, mind, and conscience. He was proud of his Arab identity and his belonging to the Arab nation, its heritage, and history. He deeply believed in his Islam and his faith, performing all religious duties in full, without omission, and taking great care in observing them. He memorized many parts of the Quran and always kept up with its recitation, especially during travel, Ramadan, and times of crisis.

Egypt held a special place in his heart, like that of a mother to her child or a homeland to the memory of a person. He believed in strength and understood its value and importance, but he also knew the limits of its use, its controls, and its boundaries. Jerusalem was his unit of measurement for both war and peace. Without it, there is defeat and brokenness; with its liberation, there is an unparalleled victory. To him, the state was a national necessity, but only if Jerusalem is its crown.

He believed in peace and the two-state solution, making concessions no one before him had made, and perhaps no one after him would make, to achieve peace. He recognized Israel on 78% of Palestinian land, agreed to the establishment of a state on 22%, and accepted further concessions during the Camp David and Taba negotiations in 2000 and beyond, demonstrating great flexibility and a willingness to take risks. He was somewhat surprised that the leaders of the occupying state were not ready for a true peace that would secure the minimum of Palestinian national rights.

He did not plan or lead the Intifada, nor did he establish the Al-Aqsa Brigades. He wanted the Intifada to continue until certain goals were achieved, seeing it as a tool to improve conditions, not to overturn the table. He tried his best to adapt to it, sometimes understanding it, and at other times doubting its ability to succeed. He was shocked by the stance of the new American administration towards him and attempted to change it without success. At that point, he took a firm stance in support of the Intifada and resistance, although he maintained reservations about some of its forms and methods. He did not seek an agreement with the Islamic and national forces on a unified strategy and plan.

He was deeply disappointed by the Arab countries and their leaders, and he always tried to hide his anger and disdain for some of them. After Ariel Sharon's election, especially the second time, he believed that the primary path was the Intifada and resistance, so he decided to support them. At this stage, he knew that a large number of those around him, including Palestinian leaders and officials, supported his removal. He continued to think of them as his channels to America, Israel, Europe, and some Arab countries, and he used them to serve his interests, content with their presence by his side.

He did not accumulate or save money for himself, living a very modest life in terms of clothing, food, drink, and housing. However, he strongly believed in the power of money and its influence over people, its ability to recruit supporters, followers, and allies. He also saved money for the dark days when he would be besieged by enemies, friends, and even brothers. Loyalty, for him, often took precedence over other qualities, and it did not always rely on competence. He disliked changing any official or status quo, believing he could influence regional and international equations, considering himself a key player in these dynamics.

He enjoyed attending conferences, traveling, and touring the world, and he took pleasure in receptions, believing that such moments were recognition of him and of the right to establish a Palestinian state.

He had a keen ability to distinguish people but generally preferred loyalty, especially from those who brought him news or secrets, and he favored those who agreed with his point of view.

My memory took me back to that moment in my cell, and I felt deep sorrow, not just for the loss of the great man, the eternal symbol, the faithful and brave fighter, but also for the legacy of Yasser Arafat and his passing under these circumstances, when our people need someone to unite them and continue leading them toward freedom and independence. The truth is, I was greatly surprised by the discussions that took place—Palestinian, Arab, and international—regarding the martyrdom of Yasser Arafat. This was because anyone, near or far, heard, knew, and understood that there had been a decision made by the Israeli government, with American approval and official Arab silence from some quarters, to assassinate President Yasser Arafat. The Chief of Staff

of the occupying state repeatedly expressed this, and some even openly stated that Arafat would not be with us in the coming year, that he would not be alive. This was said by Moshe Ya'alon, the Chief of Staff at the time, and Amos Gilad, the coordinator of the security and political file in Israel's Ministry of War, as well as by Sharon, who did not hide his desire. When U.S. President George Bush told him to "leave it to God," Sharon responded, "God sometimes needs help."

I have never had any doubt that Israeli intelligence assassinated Yasser Arafat, one way or another, and that they ultimately succeeded in removing the most significant leader and symbol of the Palestinian people in the last hundred years. His mistakes were many, and many of us disagreed with him on various issues, but this does not diminish or take away from the greatness of this leader, his symbolism, or his accomplishments. What is strange is that there are those who believe that the assassination of Yasser Arafat would remove an obstacle to the peace process, and open the door to resuming peace and finding a permanent solution in the region. What is even stranger is that some people actually believed the claims of the U.S., Israel, and some Arab officials that Yasser Arafat was an obstacle, and that the U.S. and Israel would move forward with the establishment of an independent Palestinian state once Yasser Arafat was gone.

The truth is, from the very first moment, I believed that Israel and America squandered the most important historical opportunity for peace, and that this opportunity was embodied in Yasser Arafat. I have always believed that Yasser Arafat was the real opportunity, and by assassinating him, Israel and America destroyed the chance for peace. This is what Sharon and his government, with American support, wanted, as they decided on a strategy of imposing the occupation's solution on the Palestinians unilaterally. To achieve this goal, Yasser Arafat had to be assassinated.



## Chapter Six

### The Guardian of My Dream

*(I raise my fist, shouting: There is no echo of my voice in this place... I hear the voices of my wife and children, and I hear the voice of my people resounding loudly, loudly.)*



## The Guardian of My Dream

If the Israeli jailer believes that solitary confinement of a prisoner's body will destroy him and turn him into rubble or a project of suicide, he is very mistaken. Although solitary confinement is the worst and harshest form of imprisonment, a gradual killing of all aspects of human life and the mind, the one who invented this type of punishment has a fascist and terrorist mindset. As I have mentioned before, I have planted within myself and my soul the will to resist and remain, along with all the components of steadfastness, so that this theory and its inhumane goals will fail. The jailer does not know that I am full of life, and in my inner world, there is much that he cannot comprehend, enough to keep me proud, patient, and enduring all forms of suffering.

It is true that I am alone here in this dark grave, but in reality, I am not alone, because I know that I carry with me all the sons of my people, all the free people and fighters. I know that I have loyal friends around me, living deep inside me, speaking to me, reinforcing my steadfastness, and increasing my determination and resolve to hold on to my national beliefs, and my noble goals of freedom, independence, popular sovereignty, and my homeland. The creators of prisons and solitary confinement sections were wrong, because none of the brave have ever begged or surrendered... on the contrary, they have only become more fiery, rebellious, and angry.

Those fascist jailers should have asked themselves: How can a person endure thirty years in prison, and still have the smile of life and the hope of freedom shining brightly on his face, in his behavior, and in his habits?

And here I am in these moments, surrounded only by jailers, walls, and the howling of a life sentence—five times over. I think of my children and my wife, the guardian of my dream. I miss them, imagine them, and their image becomes complete in my mind, filling me with a deep longing for them.

I reflect on some of the moments in my life with my wife and companion, who endured so many hardships and struggles on this painful journey toward freedom. She bore poverty, deprivation, and harsh, difficult circumstances, sharing with me every milestone in the struggle—socially, politically, and personally. She remained loyal and steadfast, a true embodiment of the Palestinian woman, symbolizing devotion, love, faithfulness, and sacrifice. She is the other source of strength that supports me during isolation and interrogation, for I know that my wife is more than capable of bearing the responsibility, and I need not worry about the children. She is the best mother and father they could have, even during the times when I was with her before my arrest.

For this reason, I am not alone.

My wife, Fadwa, has endured a long journey with me spanning over two decades, during which she faced repeated arrests in various forms, house arrest, persecution, deportation, assassination attempts, and now, a life sentence.

Yet, she has never complained except with the loving concern of someone who cherishes her beloved. She has never reproached me except with the gentle rebuke of a loyal wife. She is a woman I first met as a student in her beautiful green uniform, and I loved her as a wife, friend, companion, and fellow fighter.

I am not alone now. Rather, I feel a great sense of reassurance knowing that the family will not fall apart, that the pillars of our home remain strong and steady.

She is ready now to tell me: "You are not lost; you have not disappeared into the void. Your people are with you, and we are all doing well."

I recognized her fear, her care, and her devotion to her children to the point of worship. I worried about her because of her deep attachment to them and her attention to even the smallest, most superficial details of their lives—whether it was about their clothing, food, sleep, play, studies, daily relationships, or friends.

She was willing to dedicate her time, effort, and life to me and to them, while I, despite all my efforts, could not do the same. I had chosen, with deliberate intent and all the pain that only the person who experiences it can feel, to make my family the entirety of the great Palestinian people. I decided to dedicate my life's efforts to fulfilling the dream of the great martyrs and the noble people—the dream of freedom, return, and independence.

This was a decision I reached in agreement with my wife. Even so, during my entire period of isolation, I was unable to obtain a single family visit. I saw my wife and children only once. By circumventing the occupation and prison authorities, I managed to see my wife. They didn't know she was my wife; she entered under the guise of being a lawyer who wished to visit me, carrying all the necessary documents. However, they discovered her identity after that visit, which was never repeated.

The effort I invested in convincing and helping her to study law bore great fruit and benefited me immensely. After my arrest, she launched a campaign of activism on the local, Arab, and international levels. She became an exceptional ambassador for the prisoners' cause—not just for me.

Fadwa Barghouti traveled to more than forty countries, meeting with hundreds of officials and public figures. She exposed the crimes of the occupation, always emphasizing that the intifada and resistance are the independence movement of the Palestinian people. She asserted that the struggle against occupation and resistance by all means is a legitimate right and a sacred national duty...

The political, media, and activist performance of my wife, Fadwa Barghouti, has been remarkable. It amazed many people and exceeded all my expectations, despite my deep knowledge of her abilities and competence. She has proven herself to be the ideal mother, wife, and fighter. I am proud of her. She is a model of awareness and a shining

example of the genuine dedication of Palestinian women and their readiness for sacrifice.

I followed her activities through the very few editions of *Al-Quds* newspaper that occasionally reached me. On one occasion, I received several issues after a six-month delay, but I eagerly immersed myself in reading them, especially the sections covering developments and news about local affairs. I also kept track of her work through some local radio stations, whose broadcasts would occasionally reach us, or through satellite channels once I gained access to a television. Most importantly, I received updates from lawyers, particularly Elias Sabbagh and Khader Shqairat, who visited me almost regularly, as well as from Jawad Boulos during the early period of my detention.

The activities carried out by my wife strengthened my resilience, willpower, and faith, and constantly filled me with confidence, reassurance, and hope.

It is worth mentioning here that she played a crucial role in launching the popular campaign for my release and the release of all prisoners. This initiative was taken by a group of loyal friends and devoted individuals to this homeland. They formed a secretariat for the popular campaign, which continues to make significant efforts in support of thousands of prisoners in the occupation's jails.

These loyal friends provided assistance, including donating a dedicated headquarters for the campaign. The office is staffed by employees and volunteers who receive local and international solidarity delegations, issue statements and periodic bulletins, and monitor developments.

The campaign also oversees the organization of seminars and meetings, solidarity marches, and participation in all events that support and advocate for the prisoners' cause. Through the campaign's website, statements, periodic bulletins, press interviews, and all materials related to my case and the cause of the prisoners are published and shared.

All of this comes to mind as I sit in solitary confinement. Despite its harshness, this isolation has given me an opportunity and space for reflection—though at the cost of my freedom, my ability to embrace my children, play with them, and laugh with them. When the lawyer visits, my first and most pressing question is always about them, eager to hear the details of their lives to reassure myself of their well-being.

I had experienced the bitterness of separation from my children during the Intifada, to some extent, as I was pursued by the occupation forces. However, the true anguish and fire within me ignited during interrogation. Sitting in the interrogation chair, my hands and feet bound, I could not stop thoughts of my children, despite my efforts to avoid thinking about them too much. The interrogators deliberately heightened this torment, speaking on the phone with their own children, affectionately asking about their studies and needs.

This tactic undoubtedly stirred a storm of longing within me, which I buried deep inside. It was the sadistic cruelty of the interrogators, who left no weapon unused in their attempts to break the will of the resistance fighters.

One interrogator explicitly threatened to assassinate my son Qassam, claiming he was a "ticking time bomb." He told me, *"Your son has declared his willingness to carry out a martyrdom operation in Tel Aviv. This is dangerous. We also have information about his membership and activities with terrorist groups."*

At that time, Qassam was not yet sixteen years old. The interrogator continued, *"We'll send a missile to the car he's riding in with his friends and eliminate him early."*

The interrogator knew such threats were not easy for me to hear, but they did not shake my faith or unwavering convictions, even though they caused me deep pain. Understanding the sadistic intent behind these psychological pressures, I refused to give them any attention, no matter how strongly they resonated within me.

The Israeli *Shin Bet* frequently uses coercion during interrogations, offering cigarettes at one moment or proposing deals at another—promising detainees a chance to speak on the phone with their wives, mothers, sisters, or fathers in exchange for cooperation, confessions, or information. Sadly, they have sometimes succeeded, albeit on a very limited scale.

I felt the vast difference between being detained as a young, unmarried man with no family or economic responsibilities and being detained as a husband and father.

This sentiment is widespread among prisoners. Thousands of detainees have endured the pain and bitterness of being separated from their families and children. Some were arrested before reaching the age of twenty, and many have seen their children grow up and even join them in prison without ever having spent a single day together.

There are countless examples of this, such as the fighter Othman Musleh (Abu al-Naji), Abdul Latif al-Afou Shuqair, and Fakhri Barghouti (Abu Shadi), who was detained with me in 1978 and remains in prison to this day. His sons, Shadi, who was only a year and a half old at the time of his father's arrest, and Hadi, who was still in his mother's womb, both later joined him in prison.

In 2003, they joined their father in Ashkelon Prison, living with him in the same cell. For the first time in their lives, they met their father, shook his hand, embraced him, and held him in their arms—a scene that brought tears to the eyes of all the prisoners and broke their hearts.

The thoughts of a young, unmarried detainee toward his family differ in intensity of longing and concern from those of a husband and father, who constantly worries about his wife and children. I felt the pain of knowing my children were growing up while I was

far from them, unable to wake them up in the morning, kiss them, and send them off to school.

The joy of kissing one's children in the morning is unparalleled; nothing in the world compares to it. Playing and laughing with Ruba and Qassam filled me with indescribable hope and happiness, just as teasing Sharaf and Arab brought me boundless delight.

I have always thanked God for blessing me with such wonderful children. I would fall asleep and wake up with their images engraved in my mind, heart, and soul.

Everyone on this earth must understand that the sacrifice of being separated from family, loved ones, a spouse, children, a mother, a father, siblings, and friends is a sacrifice unmatched by anything—except martyrdom, which, in comparison, is far easier for the one who experiences it.

Thousands of prisoners hold their children's photos close, waking up and falling asleep to these images. They kiss them morning and evening, feeling a deep, indescribable pain with every visit. It is a torment beyond words or description.

My children, my wife, and my family occupy a significant space in my dreams, thoughts, and emotions. They are present even now in my isolation. For this reason, I have never been truly alone. The dearest people in my life, who fill me with determination to endure and persevere, reside within my soul, mind, and heart.

There is a life filled with love and noble emotions, jailer. Yes, a vibrant life that you do not know and cannot imprison. It lives here with me, in my blood and flesh, demanding that I remain strong so I can return to my family with my head held high, my fist raised, shouting aloud—though in this place, there is no echo to my voice.

But I hear the voices of my wife and children, and I hear the voice of my people roaring loudly, loudly, ever so loudly...



## **Chapter Seven**

### **Confrontation with the Israeli Intelligence Apparatus and Its Collaborators**

(Everything can be forgiven, no matter how grave, except for one thing:  
collaborating with the enemy.)



## **Confrontation with the Israeli Intelligence Apparatus and Its Collaborators**

### **The Shabak (Israeli Security Agency):**

The Shabak is the agency responsible for implementing the occupation's policies in the territories occupied since 1967. It leads the intelligence battle against the national movement, Palestinian factions, and any activities resisting the Zionist occupation. The Shabak is divided into five main divisions:

#### **1. The Interrogation and Torture Division:**

This division is headed by a senior leader in intelligence, usually holding the highest rank in the division, often a general. Officers in this division are deployed across various interrogation centers, both known and secret. They undergo two years of training, which includes learning and mastering the Arabic language, studying Palestinian society, customs, traditions, and culture, as well as the history, goals, and programs of Palestinian factions. Additionally, they receive specialized training in various interrogation techniques.

Each area of the Palestinian territories is assigned a specific Shabak team and center (southern, central, and northern West Bank, as well as Gaza). These officers often have field experience in Palestinian cities, villages, and camps, giving them a reasonable understanding of the Palestinian situation.

#### **2. The Field Network Division:**

This division appoints officers to oversee all areas, dividing each Palestinian governorate into sectors encompassing several villages and camps. A designated officer, known within the Shabak as a "Rikaz" (supervisor or central figure for the area), is responsible for studying the region, its files, key activists, families, organizations, and social dynamics.

This officer is tasked with recruiting a network of collaborators and spies and influencing the appointment of government officials. They gather intelligence, assist in arrests with the military, and provide case files and information to the interrogation division. These officers do not directly participate in interrogations; their role ends with the arrest and submission of files to the interrogation division.

These officers undergo six months to a year of field training by integrating into an Arab village under the guise of being a foreigner or journalist. Often, this occurs in villages within the Green Line, where the head of the host family is a Shabak collaborator. During this time, they participate in

daily activities such as farming, olive harvesting, and sharing meals and sleeping arrangements with the family.

They learn about Arab cuisine and its regional variations, master colloquial Arabic and regional dialects, and familiarize themselves with social customs, family dynamics, and tribal relationships. They also study traditions related to marriage, the sensitivities surrounding "honor and dignity," and other societal priorities. Special attention is given to Arabic proverbs, particularly the archaic, pessimistic, or divisive ones, which are abundant.

### **3. Protection and Security Division**

This division is responsible for protecting key leaders in the occupying state, such as the Prime Minister, the President, senior military leaders, workers in military industries, and those involved in sensitive military and governmental positions. It also provides protection for airports, airplanes, and carries out inspections. A designated officer is assigned to each plane, and special checks are conducted for each flight and passenger traveling to the occupying state from airports around the world. The occupying state is the only one with this privilege in international airports. This division also protects Israeli embassies, centers, interests, and Israeli figures traveling worldwide.

### **4. Jewish Terrorism Division**

A more recent division, it focuses on gathering information on extremist Jewish elements within the occupying state, particularly from far-right organizations and settlers. The division infiltrates these far-right extremist groups, arrests suspects, and interrogates them. The Shabak, and this division in particular, suffered a severe blow with the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

### **5. Information, Studies, and Development Division**

This division is responsible for consolidating information, conducting studies related to the Shabak's work, and developing its methods and techniques. Additionally, it oversees financial, administrative, and logistical operations.

It is worth mentioning that the new law for this agency allows the head of the Shabak to hold office for four years, which can be extended for an additional year only in urgent and necessary circumstances. The appointment of the Shabak's head is the sole prerogative of the Prime Minister, after consulting with the current head of the agency. The Shabak head also chooses his deputy.

The Prime Minister is the primary authority for the head of the Shabak, to whom the head directly submits reports and recommendations, and from whom the head receives instructions. The Shabak is the most influential in Palestinian affairs during discussions and decisions within the Israeli government. It is viewed by Israeli circles as having extensive experience and knowledge in combating Palestinians, and enjoys strong support, popularity, and influence among public opinion in the occupying state.

It is important to note that there are key independent agencies that often compete with the Shabak, especially the military, led by the Chief of Staff, who is considered by many Israelis as the second most important figure in the state. This is because the occupying state is unique in that while all countries have armies, Israel has an army that serves the state. There is also the Military Intelligence Directorate (Aman), which is part of the army and reports to the Chief of Staff, the Prime Minister, and the Minister of Defense. However, there are often conflicts in assessments and reports between Aman and the Shabak.

Additionally, there is the Mossad, which specializes in foreign intelligence work, with a network of agents, officers, and personnel stationed in many countries around the world. It gathers information on Israel's enemies, Jews, and Zionism. The Mossad occasionally carries out operations against these targets, particularly Palestinians, many of which are not publicly disclosed and remain classified for decades. The Mossad also competes with the Shabak.

It is also noted that there is a secret committee that oversees the security agencies, especially their covert operations, budgets, and issues. This committee is completely closed off from the media and the members of the Israeli Knesset, and its reports are not presented to the Cabinet. A minister heads this committee with representatives from all security agencies.

The Shabak was one of the tools used to enforce the Zionist occupation through military force, and one of the means to confront Palestinian resistance through various methods, including arrest, detention, interrogation, torture, conducting unjust, fascist, and sham military trials, and imprisoning hundreds of thousands of our people in Zionist jails and detention camps. Since the occupation in 1967, Israel has arrested more than 750,000 Palestinians, which is equivalent to 25% of the population of Palestine in the West Bank, Gaza, and Jerusalem, as well as hundreds of detainees from within the Green Line and Arabs who participated in resisting the occupation from outside Palestine.

Palestinian and Arab detainees have been subjected to various forms of torture, humiliation, degradation, and violations of their human and national dignity. The Zionist mentality came up with dozens of methods and techniques for interrogation, refining them year after year, and the interrogators excelled in torturing prisoners, humiliating them, and causing them harm over the years.

The first form of this torture, oppression, and humiliation was the occupation state's refusal to recognize Palestinian and Arab prisoners as prisoners of war or freedom fighters, and its failure to apply the Fourth Geneva Convention to them, despite international law and the Geneva Convention being fully in line with the Palestinian situation, where there is an occupying power. Israel also brought prisoners before military courts in accordance with emergency laws and Zionist amendments, and under the military orders issued by the occupying military government. These orders affected all aspects of Palestinian life and replaced the Egyptian and Jordanian laws that were in place before the occupation.

The military orders paved the way for the occupation to tighten its grip and control over all Palestinian sectors. The Zionist military courts lacked the minimum conditions for trials as stipulated by the Geneva Convention and international law. Military officers leading the courts issued unjust verdicts, sentencing prisoners to long prison terms in the absence of any meaningful legal defense. These verdicts were often issued at the discretion of the Zionist intelligence agency, Shabak. Many prisoners would hear their verdicts during interrogation, and interrogators would often bargain with detainees over their sentences based on the desires of the interrogators.

The prisoners were subjected to brutal torture, and dozens of martyrs fell in the interrogation rooms and cells. Additionally, tens of thousands of those who underwent interrogation developed chronic illnesses and permanent disabilities, leading to the death of some due to the effects of various forms of torture. The methods and techniques of interrogation changed from one era to another, and even recently, physical torture, beatings, shabeh (the stress position), hanging from chairs, walls, or in closets, and shaking were persistent and ongoing fascist practices.

I recall that during my interrogation in 1978, I was subjected to both physical and psychological torture, shabeh, beatings, humiliation, degradation, and threats. The interrogators insisted that I was a member of a Fatah cell that had carried out a series of operations, for which several members were sentenced to life imprisonment. Two of the oldest prisoners still in jail are Fakhri Barghouthi (Abu Shadi) and Nael Barghouthi (Abu Nour). Most of the detainees at the time were subjected to brutal torture in various forms. I don't believe I experienced the worst forms of torture, but I may have undergone moderate methods. One of the most notable forms I endured was shabeh, where I was made to stand, hands and feet bound to a wall, with a large, foul-smelling bag placed over my head, blocking my breathing and covering my face. It was long and immovable, leaving you in a state of complete darkness for days or weeks.

The interrogation was continuous and relentless. On one occasion, the interrogator, named Sami, insisted that I strip off all my clothes, including my underwear, and forced me to stand completely naked, which was difficult and painful for a young student who had never been exposed in such a manner except as a child. He insisted that I spread my legs as though... he said. After a few moments, he struck me violently on my genital area, causing me to faint from the intensity. When I regained consciousness, I found

myself lying on the floor with blood flowing from my head, where it had hit the rough wall, leaving a permanent scar on my forehead. I only regained consciousness after water was poured on my head and body. At that moment, the interrogator, Sami, said, "Now, I think you won't be able to have children, and you'll be deprived of the ability to procreate for life, because people like you will only give birth to saboteurs and killers."

## **Collaborationists**

It is well known that any occupying power or colonial state recruits local collaborators to assist in executing its plans, in order to infiltrate the ranks of the people and their resistance, and to gather information on the resisters. If we examine the experiences of many peoples, we find that colonial powers were able, in several countries, not only to recruit a network of collaborators, but in some countries, they even established puppet armies and governments. This is what Nazi Germany did when it invaded many countries, setting up puppet governments as in France, where they established the Vichy government led by General Pétain. Likewise, the Soviet invaders set up dependent and puppet governments in many countries they controlled. In the case of Algeria, French colonialism succeeded in recruiting tens of thousands of collaborators who fought in the French army against the Algerian revolution, and after French colonialism left, many of these collaborators fled with the French. A similar experience occurred when Israeli invaders occupied southern Lebanon, creating a security zone overseen by the so-called South Lebanon Army, led by the collaborator Saad Haddad, and later Antoine Lahad, who fled with the departure of the occupation and its defeat in the south in 2000, with thousands of members of this collaborator army fleeing into Israel.

In the Palestinian case, Israel attempted numerous times to create political and security alternatives but failed miserably. One of the most notable attempts was the "Village Leagues," which involved a handful of collaborators and a number of naïve people who supported them. However, these leagues quickly felt isolated and died off, meeting violent resistance from the Palestinian people and their fighters.

Since 1967, Israeli intelligence has been focused on creating a network of collaborators to help implement its colonial plans and confront Palestinian resistance. It has used dozens of methods and techniques to recruit collaborators, and has invented many ways, continuously developing them in every phase according to its needs. Israel used its absolute military control as an occupying power over all aspects of life in the Palestinian territories to recruit collaborators. At times, it merely sought to ensure that some Palestinians were kept away from engaging in national or resistance work.

As mentioned, there is a specialized department within Israeli intelligence dedicated to gathering information and directly overseeing various Palestinian areas. Each population center or neighborhood is assigned an intelligence officer responsible for overseeing it, including making contact with collaborators, receiving reports, running them, and recruiting more. Israel exploited its control over Palestinian life, resources, and sectors to infiltrate the ranks and recruit collaborators. For example, it controlled the

assignment of jobs for Palestinians wishing to work in the government sector, whether in education, health, taxes, local police, or other departments. The military governor and the education officer, for instance, would issue teacher appointments after receiving prior approval from the intelligence service. Similarly, many other permits were conditional on intelligence approval. These included driver's licenses, permits to leave the country, family reunification permits, permits for visitors from abroad, work permits in areas occupied since 1948, construction permits, and permits to establish factories, production facilities, farms, companies, or businesses.

Israeli intelligence did not hesitate to exploit the people's need for treatment in Israeli hospitals to recruit collaborators and pressure Palestinian citizens. Furthermore, intelligence often called in hundreds of citizens to recruit collaborators. Nothing was beyond Israeli control, even obtaining a sports club license, as the social affairs officer would issue the license only after intelligence approval for elections, and the elected body would only be considered legitimate after intelligence approval, with some names accepted and others rejected. Additionally, Israeli intelligence attempted to infiltrate the community and tribal structure through mukhtars, local leaders, mosque imams, and religious figures.

Despite all of this, the vast majority of Palestinians categorically rejected cooperating with Israeli intelligence, despite the pressures and threats of cutting off their livelihoods, dismissing them from their jobs, and firing them from their positions. The masses of our people stood firm with pride and national dignity, resisting the occupation and its collaborators. The occupation was only able to penetrate the ranks of those with weak souls, the misguided and sometimes fallen individuals, as well as the failed and miserable ones who suffered from social problems or crises in their work and lives. It is worth mentioning that Israeli intelligence offered only limited sums to these individuals, and sometimes used them as intermediaries with the public to obtain various permits for citizens in exchange for financial payments, which were given to these collaborators, sometimes shared with intelligence officers as well. The vast majority of these collaborators were those who failed in their academic studies, dropped out of school early, joined the Israeli labor market, or faced moral or social problems in their communities. Israeli intelligence exploited them, offering help in exchange for cooperation.

Most of these individuals lacked knowledge and culture, and their educational level was very low. They were often people who did not progress beyond elementary or middle school grades. A significant portion of them had become involved in problems and deviations, were rejected by society, and were picked up by intelligence.

Additionally, Israeli intelligence sometimes exploited family disputes that were common in certain population centers, playing on the tensions of these conflicts and offering assistance to one side or another, thereby helping both parties and recruiting from among them. Furthermore, they took advantage of individuals involved in public law cases, whom the police had arrested, and recruited collaborators from among them in exchange for helping close their cases and employing them.

The main tasks that Israeli intelligence assigned to their collaborators were numerous and varied, differing from one stage to another according to changing priorities over time. Intelligence worked to distribute its collaborators across the Palestinian factions, with an initial focus on the organization that practiced armed struggle and guerrilla warfare. This was the top priority for intelligence, aiming to expose cells in their early stages before they could carry out operations. If this was not possible, then the focus was on uncovering them after their operations had been executed. Intelligence also aimed to cover all population centers through collaborators to ensure full geographic coverage.

Second, their focus was on the main armed factions, thirdly on the sectors, and fourthly on specific age groups, preparing early files on their tendencies and activities. This was made easier by the high level of negligence among Palestinians, with much of this information being public, especially during the last quarter of the last century and the beginning of the new millennium. Families were often known for their loyalty, identifying which organization they belonged to, supported, or endorsed, who participated in demonstrations, who led the marches, who was most active in school, university, and club activities, as well as in villages, refugee camps, cities, institutions, unions, and federations. Intelligence would track who owned weapons, who was undergoing training, who could manufacture explosives, and who frequented mosques and incited others, among other things. Most of this was basic and preliminary information that was continuously added to files. Intelligence also took advantage of what was widely published in local media, including radio, television, newspapers, bulletins, and magazines, and special statements, especially during the era of satellite channels, particularly in the last fifteen years.

One of the important and vital sources for recruiting collaborators is among the prisoners and detainees, particularly in the initial stages of detention, during the interrogation phase. Detainees are a very significant and direct source of information for Israeli intelligence.

If we consider that Israel has detained around 750,000 citizens over the past four decades, with arrests continuing to this day, we can understand the extent of the information it obtains from the majority of these detainees. This is either through pressure and force, or due to ignorance, lack of experience, and knowledge, and because the factions and organizations have not trained their members in interrogation and torture methods. Sometimes intelligence receives general information from detainees during interrogations that is unrelated to the case at hand, and providing this information does not result in any judgments or burdens. The detainee often speaks about it as general knowledge that is not considered sensitive. If a large number of his friends, people, or activists in his community know it, there is no harm in discussing it.

Intelligence exploits the interrogation environment and the atmosphere of fear that detainees, especially those detained for the first time, experience due to torture and intimidation. Under psychological and physical pressure, some fall into the trap set by

intelligence, where they are compromised in exchange for the closing of their case if it is simple, or a reduced sentence, or in exchange for money and future privileges, or a promise of release if a prisoner swap occurs, even though most of the time they do not honor these promises for fear that the released detainee may backtrack on his agreement.

Therefore, in the vast majority of cases, intelligence offers a promise to reduce the sentence, assigns detainees certain tasks inside the prison, and tests their willingness and commitment to ensure that they become involved. Sometimes, intelligence arrests certain collaborators with an agreement, issues sentences, and tasks them with working within an organization, where they are planted in its ranks to carry out specific missions. Generally, the most dangerous collaborators are those who receive national cover, are arrested on national grounds, and many of them are members of cells and groups affiliated with the factions. They initially joined with a national background, but some weaken during interrogation and become entangled.

The danger of these individuals lies in the fact that their colleagues think highly of them, and they gain experience and expertise in detention. They may also rise to positions of responsibility within their organizations and advance in their roles. Therefore, they pose a threat after their release due to their ability to occupy sensitive positions at times.

## **Rooms of Shame**

During the last two decades or so, following the ability of factions inside the prisons to expose collaborators within their ranks, and after accumulating experience in detention and establishing security cells that managed to uncover some of these collaborators, and after their exposure and escape from among the fighters, the intelligence agencies developed a special role for them within the prisons, cells, and interrogation rooms. They trained these collaborators to lure new detainees into the cells and speak with them in order to uncover information that had been concealed during interrogations. They present themselves as detainees just like the others, and the intelligence services inform them about the type of detainee from whom they wish to extract information, giving them false names linked to families from an area unknown to the detainee. Hundreds, even thousands, of fighters fell victim to these tactics. The collaborators are equipped with recording devices provided by the intelligence agencies, or they are placed in special cells where wiretapping devices are installed, which lead directly to the interrogation rooms where conversations and discussions are recorded. The collaborator brings questions from the intelligence agency, attempting to lure the prisoner into providing as much information as possible.

Due to the great success of this method, and the many who fell into this trap, the intelligence agencies established new sections within the prisons specifically for collaborators. These sections operate as if they were just like the other detainees—fighters and activists. When intelligence fails to blackmail or force a detainee into confessing or providing information during an interrogation, they are sent to these sections, also known as the “rooms of shame” or “the sparrows,” as they are colloquially

called in the prisons. The detainee is led to believe that the interrogation is over, and now he is going to the prison section with his fellow fighters and comrades. Once he enters the "room of shame," the collaborators greet him warmly and provide him with services like food, which he has not seen throughout the interrogation period. They offer him a peaceful environment for sleeping, invite him to group prayers, recite the Quran, and hold organizational meetings.

The collaborators in the rooms of shame are divided among Fatah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and the Popular Front factions. They meet with them as representatives of these factions. Leadership members of the factions sit with them, introducing themselves under false identities of well-known fighters the detainee has never met. They ask the detainee to tell them what happened during the interrogation and stress the importance of informing them of any critical and dangerous information concerning their group outside, so that, as supposed leaders within the prison, they can relay this information to their brothers, or under the pretense that the organization in prison needs to know everything.

The detainee may spend a whole month or more without knowing that they are living in the "rooms of shame," as these are the rooms of collaborators and "sparrows." Once the detainee provides information, the intelligence services immediately call them back for further interrogation, where they hear what they have confessed, either recorded or written by their own hand, ensuring their guilt is definitive and they can no longer deny or avoid it. It can be said that more than sixty percent of prisoners and detainees in the last two decades withstood interrogation by the intelligence agencies, but they fell into the trap of collaborators in the rooms of shame and the sparrows' rooms. These victims continue to fall into these traps up to this day, and all efforts to expose this phenomenon have failed. Whenever this issue is brought up and exposed, the intelligence agencies and their collaborators come up with new methods and tactics.

Collaborators have played a destructive role, causing significant damage to the Palestinian national struggle throughout the past decades and up until now. The Palestinian factions, since the beginning of the Palestinian revolution, have fought this phenomenon with all available means. They established security agencies to track and eliminate them, protect the revolution and its leaders, and combat espionage. Over the decades, many collaborators have been arrested, and hundreds have been liquidated. The peak of the fight against collaborators occurred during the first popular intifada, when a war was declared on collaborators, and they were pursued everywhere. At the same time, a wise decision was made to open the doors for repentance and retreat, provided that it was done publicly. Indeed, hundreds of collaborators publicly announced their repentance, and some joined the ranks of the intifada, becoming targets for pursuit and prosecution by the occupying forces' intelligence. Some of these individuals even carried out heroic resistance operations, including the assassination of Israeli intelligence officers responsible for them.

During the first intifada, the factions in the occupied territories lacked security institutions, which led to a number of mistakes being made. Several citizens were killed

and eliminated, only to later be found innocent victims of social and familial conflicts and tensions. Some also exploited this situation to make false accusations here and there. As a result, an official national committee was formed within the PLO to review the cases, and dozens of individuals were classified as innocent people falsely accused. Financial compensation was provided to the families of those mistakenly executed. Nevertheless, it can be said that the first intifada dealt a severe blow to the network of collaborators, and the Israeli intelligence services experienced significant confusion as a result. It took them a long time to recover from the collapse of their collaborator network and rebuild it.

It was clear that as the Palestinian national movement and resistance grew stronger, the Israeli intelligence efforts to recruit collaborators also intensified. After the signing of the Oslo Agreement between the Israeli government and the PLO on September 13, 1993, and the mutual recognition and establishment of the Palestinian National Authority in the summer of 1994, along with Israel's withdrawal from the population centers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Israel worked to compensate for the loss of some of its sources. It increased its capacity to organize collaborators compared to the previous period.

While Palestinians expected the Palestinian security services to pursue, arrest, and try collaborators, the results were disappointing. The pursuit, if it happened at all, was limited to a small number of individuals. In fact, during this period, Israeli intelligence worked actively to recruit collaborators without facing any significant interference or scrutiny from the Palestinian Authority's security services. While the Authority called for addressing this issue through its official agencies, the factions responded to this call and distanced themselves from tackling the problem, believing that the Authority's agencies would take on this responsibility. In reality, the Authority's agencies did not follow up on this issue with any meaningful interest or effectiveness, which allowed Israeli intelligence to operate freely in the areas under the Authority's control, with its collaborators working without hindrance or pursuit.

It can be said that Israeli intelligence focused on recruiting collaborators from among the workers in the Palestinian National Authority's agencies. Israel never trusted security cooperation with the Authority's agencies and only relied on it minimally. For Israeli intelligence, recruiting employees from these agencies was a valuable source of information due to their ability, by virtue of their work and positions, to access the information intelligence services sought, all under the official cover of their roles and activities.

The danger posed by collaborators reached unprecedented levels since the beginning of the Al-Aqsa Intifada, the second intifada, where they played the most dangerous role since the establishment of Israel's collaborator network after the 1967 occupation. While the role of collaborators previously focused primarily on gathering information, uncovering cells and groups before executing operations, and providing information about the activities of leaders and cadres, this role reached its peak during the Al-Aqsa Intifada—the intifada of freedom, return, and independence.

Despite Israeli intelligence's development of new working methods and its heavy reliance on intelligence technology, the human element remains the primary player in intelligence operations in general.

It is true that Israeli intelligence has greatly benefited from its experience over the past decades in controlling the lives of Palestinians, yet the presence of the Palestinian Authority has not been able to limit the role, operations, and activities of Israeli intelligence. Israel relies on a wide range of intelligence sources in the occupied territories, among the most significant of which is continuous aerial surveillance, which provides Israeli computers with any slight change that might occur in the geographic structure, as well as modifications to infrastructure, roads, or buildings. These images can clearly show even the addition of a bathroom or room here or there in any building, or the construction of a wall or any other alteration.

Another important source is the information provided by wiretapping the landline and mobile communication networks, which may be the largest espionage tool that plays a significant role for Israeli intelligence and provides an endless amount of information. The third source is the information gathered directly on the ground by the occupying army and its agencies and institutions within the occupied territories. In addition, the network of collaborators, which depends on human resources, remains perhaps the most decisive and crucial source.

The scale of arrests and assassinations carried out by Israeli intelligence during the Al-Aqsa Intifada demonstrated its ability to extract as much information as possible. The events revealed that Israeli intelligence had strong sources of information, including its network of collaborators, which enabled it to a great extent to counter the intifada and resistance movements and deliver significant blows against them.

The Israelis do not live in the cities, camps, and villages of Palestine among the people, nor are they part of the Palestinian factions, so how can they obtain very accurate information at times without a network of collaborators? Israeli intelligence has exhausted all its energy, resources, and the network of previous and subsequent collaborators and has reactivated them effectively to confront the intifada and resistance operations. It should be noted that almost all the assassinations would not have taken place without the network of collaborators, and the precise information they provided at the right time and moment. Most of the assassinations were carried out using missiles that would not have hit their targets or known locations without the precise guidance based on human intelligence provided by these criminals.

At times, the collaborators went beyond merely providing information to directly participating in assassination operations by planting explosive devices in cars, or by bringing in car bombs prepared by Israeli intelligence, or by remotely detonating bombs through mobile phones, as in the case of the martyr leader Engineer Yahya Ayyash. Similarly, the martyr leader and symbol, President Yasser Arafat, was assassinated by poison, which was certainly administered by a collaborator. The plane – or technology – would not have been able to precisely target or even identify Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, the

jihadist leader, as he exited the mosque without the help of collaborators. The same applies to the hundreds of martyrs, including leaders, cadres, and fighters.

Israel has invented various means of infiltration and has recruited collaborators in all areas. The focus has not only been on gathering information about military and armed activities, but it has also extended to eavesdropping on political decisions and their leaders. One prominent example is the discovery of wiretapping devices in President Mahmoud Abbas's office and chair during his time in Tunisia before the Oslo Agreement. This was done through Adnan Yassin, a member of the Palestinian embassy staff in Tunisia, whom Israeli intelligence recruited and tasked with planting listening devices and carrying out other activities.

Intelligence agencies use all forms of intelligence deception in their operations. For example, when they were unable to recruit agents from a particular faction, they would send some agents to join this faction or that one. If they were unable to recruit individuals from a specific camp, they would try to send an agent to enlist for that task. It happened that after the intelligence services arrested some messengers between a faction's leadership abroad and a cell inside, they would recruit the messenger, task them with completing the mission, and, for example, photograph the message, then seal it as it was, and receive responses to have the correspondence under control.

When a cell was trained and tasked with carrying out some guerrilla operations using explosive devices, which were widespread in the 1970s and 1980s, if the occupation succeeded in arresting a member of the cell, they would try to win them over. If they succeeded in recruiting them, they would ask them to complete the mission and place the explosive device in the agreed-upon location. They would then announce the explosion in the media, so that the cell's leadership would remain confident in the recruited member, even increasing their trust in them and assigning new tasks. Sometimes, they would reveal arms sources and information about working with other cells because the agent had become trusted.

We are not aiming to expand on this matter, but rather to provide an example and reference.

The most important point I want to emphasize here is that the phenomenon of espionage is linked to colonialism and occupation, and it is widespread in all societies to varying degrees. It takes many forms and different fields that are countless. In the Palestinian case, despite the Israeli intelligence's success in recruiting a highly dangerous network of agents, they completely failed to establish or create a political body loyal to them, representing their interests. They also failed to infiltrate the Palestinian society and create a current or followers at any level. Furthermore, they failed to infiltrate the leadership structure of the resistance factions. Despite their efforts, the network of agents could not prevent the execution of thousands of successful and heroic guerrilla operations, nor could they prevent their handlers. The vast majority of those arrested or even assassinated face this after carrying out operations, not before. This means that Israel failed in its infiltration efforts to the point of preventing resistance

operations, as evidenced by the continued resistance, its escalation, growth, and enhancement of its capabilities and structure.

This is thanks to the overwhelming majority of the Palestinian people who resist and reject this criminal phenomenon. These collaborators will remain, in the eyes of their people, a very small and degraded group, victims of the criminal occupation. The elimination of this phenomenon is tied to the ultimate end of the occupation. However, to confront this phenomenon, the Palestinian Authority and its security, judicial, media, and educational bodies must play a larger role in exposing this crime, rejecting it, and educating the Palestinian community about it in a deeper, more comprehensive, and more accurate manner. The security agencies must also fulfill their national duty to pursue, arrest, and prosecute collaborators, and establish strong and resistant departments to combat espionage, without any leniency towards these crimes.

All factions must increase the awareness of their members and include security culture in their framing, organizing, and training efforts to confront intelligence methods and techniques. They should expose and familiarize all fighters with intelligence practices, provide experience and knowledge, reveal the methods of recruiting collaborators, and warn against them. They should also expose the tactics used by intelligence during interrogation and the false promises given, as well as warn about the traps of collaborators in the cells and the "rooms of shame." It should be emphasized to all fighters that they should not provide information to anyone, because the organization inside the prison does not ask anyone about the information they hold, nor is it their right to do so. Writing reports or talking to anyone about matters that were not disclosed during the interrogation by the intelligence service is not permitted. No detainee should give up any information they hold and are trusted with, as it is not their right to provide it to the intelligence or their agents. They must understand that this is a sacred trust that cannot be violated, no matter how small or limited.

It is important to note that Israeli intelligence is not willing to do anything to save its collaborators or those who have provided services to it. We all remember how they dealt with collaborators fleeing from the first popular uprising. They refused to provide them with Israeli identity or citizenship, offering them very limited assistance, pushing them and their families onto the streets, housing them in miserable and degrading conditions, depriving their children and families of basic humanitarian services, and pushing some of them to live in Palestinian villages inside the Green Line in the Galilee, Triangle, and Negev. However, our people there rejected these collaborators, refused to host them, and imposed a social, economic, and service boycott on them.

After the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, and the escape of some collaborators to Israel to flee from their people, the intelligence service treated them with contempt and humiliation, to say the least. I would not call it treating them like dogs, as Israelis treat their dogs far better than they treat these criminal collaborators and victims of occupation alike. Moreover, the intelligence service deliberately exposed some of the relatively "burned" collaborators and facilitated their elimination for its own goals and interests.

It is worth mentioning that hundreds of collaborators, whom Israel had ensnared over the past decades during their arrest and interrogation, were promised reduced sentences and their release in exchange for their collaboration. However, Israel deceived them, destroyed their lives, and kept them in its prisons to serve its purposes.

We must understand that intelligence services cannot trust those who betray their people or respect them. No one in this world has or will ever respect someone who betrays their people, their own kind, their nation, and their comrades. This requires, once again, that every Palestinian fighter and citizen understands that their fate is tied to the fate of their people, and the fate of their people's great struggle, resistance, and jihad. Weakness at a specific moment must be overcome.

This calls on all fighters to remain vigilant, always alert, and to avoid gossiping or giving out information—even to friends, relatives, or trusted individuals. A fighter's information is a trust, and they must protect it as they would protect everything sacred and beautiful in their lives.

Increased awareness, education, and mobilization will form a strong shield against infiltration, and this is something that governmental and popular institutions, factions, and society as a whole must focus on—on the family level, in homes, schools, universities, workplaces, clubs, and gatherings. The dangers of this affliction must be highlighted and considered a crime and betrayal with no mercy in confronting and eradicating it. It is unacceptable for this phenomenon to persist among a great people who have set an example of sacrifice, steadfastness, and devotion—a people who are legendary for their resistance, courage, resilience, and perseverance, and whose sons have set an example of sacrifice, martyrdom, and selflessness.

It is important to reiterate the significance of factions educating their members, supporters, and fighters, raising their awareness, and providing them with knowledge about the methods and techniques of interrogation and torture in the occupation's prisons. Every fighter must understand that national work is a sacrifice and dedication for the homeland and the people; these are two supreme values above all else. The struggle and fight for the freedom of the people, the homeland, the return of the displaced, and the independence of the country are among the highest and most noble forms of human feeling. Fighters, militants, and resistance members must realize that our great people have been making sacrifices for the sacred homeland for over a hundred years without stopping or hesitating. The struggle and jihad for the homeland and its freedom are a sacred national, pan-Arab, religious, and humanitarian duty.

## History Witnesses

Prison has only increased my faith in the justice of my people's cause. The solitary confinement cells did not break my will, determination, conviction, or principles. I remain steadfast in my belief in everything I said in the illegitimate court in Tel Aviv on September 29, 2003:

I want to emphasize my rejection of the court, my refusal to appear before it, and my non-recognition of its legitimacy. It is an inseparable part of the Israeli occupation, and it serves its interests. I am a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, an elected Palestinian leader, representing my Palestinian people. I have fulfilled my duty in this intifada, and Israel has no right to kidnap, try, or interrogate me. I reject this court entirely, refuse to cooperate with it or recognize it, and I reject any lawyer defending me and any discussion of the invalid indictment.

For the record, I present my defense, which is not related to the indictment, and everything issued by this court is void, just like the occupation itself.

I presented an extensive defense before history, not before a court that should be on trial itself, not the one doing the trial. I aimed to explain in detail to the public the truth of what happened during the years of occupation, how Israel has falsified both history and geography, how it has abandoned all of its agreements and commitments, leading the Palestinians to the conclusion that Israel does not want peace with them, that it insists on continuing its aggression and genocidal war, and that there is no partner for peace in Israel. It is essential for the Palestinian people to resist the occupation.

The Palestinians have the full right to resist the occupation, its brutality, and its crimes. This is a right guaranteed by divine laws and international covenants. Isn't it the right of the Palestinian people, who suffer under occupation, torture, and persecution, to resist??? Indeed, it is their duty to resist the occupation.

The resistance represented by the intifada is an expression of the Palestinian people's will for freedom and independence. The Israelis are mistaken if they believe their tanks and planes can break the will of a people striving for freedom, independence, and the dignity of sovereignty. Israel may defeat an army, a government, a regime, a party, or an organization, but to subdue or defeat the Palestinian people is nothing but an illusion.

The practice of struggle and resistance is an expression of our humanity. The struggle is the exercise of freedom. The intifada is a movement for the independence of the Palestinian people.

My arrest, the brutal interrogation I underwent at the hands of Israeli interrogators, and my trial are nothing but an attempt to humiliate the Palestinian people because I am an elected leader who represents the will of a people yearning for freedom and independence.

My participation in the Palestinian intifada is an exercise of a national duty that stems from my duty as a citizen, as an elected representative, and as a leader who takes responsibility for his people. The intifada is a movement for the independence of the Palestinian people, representing the conscience and will of the Palestinian people for freedom and independence.

Resistance to occupation is an exercise of freedom and part of practicing human sensibility and emotions. It is a clear and explicit declaration of rejection of the occupation and its crimes. It is a clear declaration of rejection of the master-slave dynamic. The intifada is the Palestinian people's movement for independence, so that we may be masters in our land and country and exercise our freedom within the framework of our fully sovereign Palestinian state.

The end.