

MEMOIRS OF A PRISONER

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Preface	5
Chapter I: The Arrest	7
Chapter II: The First Days in Prison	17
Chapter III: Sarafand—The Torture Camp	25
Chapter IV: Political Interrogation	35
Chapter V: My Last Days at the Jerusalem Prison	57
Chapter VI: The Central Prison in Ramleh	63
Chapter VII: To Sarafand Again	73
Chapter VIII: The Prison in Ramallah	93
Chapter IX: Torture	109
Chapter X: The Trial	119
Chapter XI: Departure	137

P R E F A C E

The first thing that As'ad Abdul-Rahman told me a few minutes after his arrival in Beirut, following an imprisonment in occupied Palestine which lasted ten months, was the following: "I prepared a new study for the Research Center while I was in prison." It was as if he was trying to make up for having 'abandoned' his work at the Center. As'ad had been one of the researchers at the Center from the date of its establishment until the morning of June 5, 1967, when he left us in order to join one of the national resistance groups hoping to participate substantially in the field of practical resistance after he had participated so fully in scientific research.

Everyone of us at the Center had been thinking of As'ad all the time he was away, a total of seventeen months, two thirds of which had been spent in enemy prisons. Throughout this period, we were looking forward to the time of his release, as were our readers. Probably, we expected As'ad's first project to be a study on his imprisonment, the first hand story of an eye witness about life in the Israeli detention camps.

Compared to the fifty studies that the Center has already published in this series, this book might seem lacking in footnotes, charts, statistics and citations that the previous publications have abounded in and which have come to occupy a

special standing in contemporary Arab political and intellectual publications. The fact is that both the author and the Center intended that the book be free from any of these explanatory methods with the full understanding that such a deletion does not make the book less scientific. The author has expressly aimed at being as truthful and exact as when undergoing any other scientific research.

In truth, the benefits yielded from this book as a scientific study began even before it was sent to the printer's as the Center condensed and presented it in Arabic, English and French, along with several other studies, at the Arab Regional Conference on Human Rights that was held in Beirut in the early part of December, 1968. Likewise, the Center allowed the author to exhibit parts of the book and publish excerpts from it in a number of Lebanese newspapers, as well as at a press conference for Arabs and foreign journalists. Actually, the excerpts published received a lot of attention, especially in foreign press circles, many of whom published parts of the book in their papers.

The Center is publishing the English version of the book after it published the Arabic original last month.

It is to be hoped that the French translation will also be published by the end of Spring.

Anis Sayegh
General Director
of
The Research Center

CHAPTER I

THE ARREST

Not too long ago, I was an Israeli prisoner and from then on stories of atrocities, inhuman treatment, war prisons—all of these and more—became part of my experience. I could have been one of the victims in any of the German war camps or a war prisoner in Vietnam, but here was I, an Arab in the hands of the Israelis: no longer a man but an object for ridicule and torture.

The story began in one of the districts in the old city of Jerusalem one winter's day, December 21, 1967. As I was opening the door of my house, for a friend, we were suddenly arrested and shackles placed around our wrists. How, when, or where—I do not know, but I do know that we were taken in a police car to the prison in the new sector of Jerusalem.

We went out of the car and down a few steps to the labyrinth of underground cells that imprison all crimes and criminals. The handcuffs were taken off my accompanying Israeli soldier and both my hands became fettered as I was thrown into a cell that seemed to me to be a refrigerated room.

I began to wonder what was going to happen next when

the door of my cell was opened and I was taken to a room occupied by a commanding officer, sitting behind a table with four of his aides behind him. He turned out to be a Moroccan Jew called Sapir. They motioned to me to sit on a chair between them.

— Your name?

★ Asaad Muhammad Abdel Rahman.

— Why did you come here?

★ I came to visit a friend of mine.

— What is the name of your friend?

★ Muhammad Youssef Hassan.

— Fine. Don't you feel hot? Take off your clothes.

I stood up and took off my coat.

— What only this? Undress!

I stood up and took off my jacket but as I was trying to sit down Sapir began shouting, "Take off your clothes—all."

I suddenly realized rather forcefully that the delicate hour had come and rather quickly, so I asked, "Why?"

But the word "why" was taboo in my gaolers' language and no sooner had I asked my question when the four men jumped at me; a blow from one, a shove from the other; from the right; from the left; from the front; from the back.

My God, from every place until I sank to the floor. Up they pulled me and gave me the works again until I could no longer reckon what was going on. The wound in my stomach was aching—my body was being pushed and shoved by hands and feet. I could hear nothing but my cries and their swearing as the world reeled around me. I cried for water and after an interminable period of more cursing and more shoving, I was offered some water.

Slowly my consciousness started to return as I heard Sapir crying, "You asked for that!" He came up to me holding the identity card of Tayseer Koubaa, the vice president of the Palestinian Student Union and said, "We have him. We arrested him at the house yesterday and waited to see who of you would come. Is this your friend Muhammad Youssef Hassan?" "Yes, it is he," I answered.

"You——, don't you understand?" He shouted. "Why didn't you give the whole name? This is Muhammad Youssef Hassan Koubaa. Say Koubaa. Say it."

★ So that was what all the beating was for—why didn't you ask me whether his full surname was Koubaa or not?

— We don't ask You talk and we listen.

★ My name is Asaad Abdel Rahman and I came to visit Tayseer. What do you want other than this?

— I told you before we need more information.

★ Ask I have nothing else.

— Then help him to speak.

It was as if a pair of shears had cut my neck—two more shoves in the back and a new question.

— Why did you and Tayseer come over here?

★ We came to visit our families on the occasion of Ramadan. Tayseer wanted to put his mind at ease about his family since his brother died during the war and I want to see my family before I leave for the United States in order to pursue my doctoral studies.

— How innocent!

With a nod of his head, they started giving me the treatment in order that I might talk. More questions:

— What is the name of this terrorist organization that you belong to and what are your goals? I know your type—students! You are at the root of all this; you want to bring about trouble, don't you?

★ All we want is to study the situation of the students and try to help them.

— Very good but what is your nickname in this organization?

★ I do not belong to any organization.

— I repeat, what is your nickname?

★ What do you mean?

— How do others call you?

★ At the university, they call me by my family name.

— At which university?

★ At the American University of Beirut.

— And your family—where is your family?

★ In Nablus.

— Do they know you're here?

★ No, they don't and I haven't attempted to see them.

— We will make sure of that!

★ You surely can. I told you before that they are in Nablus.

Sapir then lifted the telephone receiver and started talking. I could hear my name and Tayseer Koubaa's being repeated. After a while, Sapir got up and asked someone else to take over.

They took me to another room where another officer was sitting looking through my student handbook from the American University of Beirut. He was carrying a small cudgel and beside him was a man recording what I was to say.

— Who is Assem el Kawakji?

★ I don't know a person with such a name.

Down came the stick on my head and the question was asked again. I answered that I knew of no such person.

— You swine! Look.

So I looked at the paper he was holding and there I saw the name of a friend of mine in Beirut called Issam Arakji.

★ This is a Lebanese friend of mine and his name is Issam Arakji and not Assem el Kawakji!

Several questions were then asked me about different people I had known at the American University of Beirut and each time the blow from his truncheon was heavier on my head until I felt even the bones of my neck begin to crumble.

Suddenly, as if the man had discovered the earth's treasure, he said:

— You——, why did you tear out some pages from your identity card?

★ They just fell out because my identity card is old.

— Why don't you say that you took them out so that we will not see what is written on them!

★ They fell out because my card was old.

— A liar and a cheeky one too?

He could not find anything else to question me about so they took me back to the first room. A man carrying a black briefcase entered, I learned later that he was a Jerusalem Jew called Major Youssef and it was evident that he had a higher rank than Sapir. Major Youssef sat in on part of the inquest but left after a short while. Unexpectedly, Sapir entered fuming and shouting:

— Where is Tayseer's moustache?

★ You have Tayseer so how can I know where his moustache is?

— He did shave his moustache as a means of disguise didn't he?

Sapir was silent for a moment when yet another person came in and shouted at me:

— You——, you said you have told us everything?

★ Yes, I did.

— What about the method you used in order to enter the Western Bank. How did you manage to cross the borders?

Before I had a chance to answer, my new investigator fired another question:

— What kind of weapons were you carrying?

★ We carried no arms.

— What do you know —— who was your guide? Confess.

More blows and shoves accompanied the investigator's next question:

— Your friends say your guide's name is Ibrahim. Is this true?

All the tricks and traps of inquiry crossed my mind when Sapir entered.

He was angrier than before and his language was filthier than ever.

— You — You — You — What is your real name?

★ My name is Asaad Muhammad Abdel Rahman.

The beating started anew until I shouted loudly, "Tell me what you want from me!"

— We want your real name.

★ Asaad Muhammad Asaad Abdel Rahman.

More blows and then Sapir's voice came to me.

— This is your name on the identity card but what is your real name?

I realized then what he meant. The ones who had been captured before me all had borrowed Israeli identity cards from people who had left the occupied land for good. Yet, my card had been obtained in a different way. I got it in Amman, a blank card, and the man who gave it to me wrote in my name with the special kind of ink the Israelis used.

When I realized this, I quickly said: "My name is Asaad Muhammad Abdel Rahman and you can check this by asking my family in Nablus."

The beating stopped and Sapir said:

— So who was the person who gave you this card and who

wrote your name on it? It is a fake. Was it the United Arab Republic or Syrian Government?

★ As far as I know this paper is not a fake.

— Then who gave it to you?

★ I do not know the name of the person!

Blows again and after:

— Who was this person?

I realized then that I would have to give the name, any name. So I mentioned the first name that crossed my mind (later I discovered that it was the name of one of the members of the Jordanian Government). Then I started to describe the man as ideas came to my mind; I also told them that he was a coffee boy.

After many formal questions, I was led handcuffed to the prison building having had everything on me taken away by the soldiers.

It was two thirty in the afternoon when they put me in a corridor leading to the storeroom and this corridor was regarded as room No. 4 in the prison. My face had already become swollen and in spite of all the rain and bitter cold I felt as if I was a ball of fire. They gave me what could be called half a mattress and two worn out blankets that let out the most obnoxious odor. Then the door was closed upon me. I was put with a man from Gaza. Fate had it that we

were to be thrown in together into more than one prison and we even faced trial together; nevertheless, he is still imprisoned as he was sentenced for five years.

Our condition was such those first moments that we could not even converse; I was busy tending my bruises and thinking all the time that man is really a descendant of Cain the murderer.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST DAYS IN PRISON

The night of December 22 was a detestable one. The cold was bitter, wracking our very bones; the worry about what might happen was insupportable. I was sure that the instant my family would know of my arrest, torture would grip their hearts and the result: eyes that would not close in sleep and minds that would tire from constant thinking.

Dawn was breaking, heralding a black day. My stomach was ulcerated, churning on emptiness as what little I had been given to eat as 'dinner' was at four o'clock the previous day. Cigarettes were only a memory—a distant one.

The prison I was now in had been used as a prison since the Ottoman rule. Now there were Jewish prisoners in it also but these were thieves, drug addicts and peddlers, and murderers. These people used to parade in front of our cell during their daily exercise in the prison yard and look at us from behind the iron bars. Their looks were a mixture of fear, defiance, and gloating. They would curse us, spit at us and look at us as if we were puppets put into iron cages for anyone to come and look at. It was as if we had come to bring them death though they had forgotten the death they had dealt us with all these bitter years.

Breakfast came: a platter with two pieces of margarine, half a teaspoon of jam, some tepid liquid supposed to be tea and two pieces of bread.

At noon, we were brought two tablespoonfuls of rice and a piece of sausage with a piece of bread for each of us.

At five o'clock dinner was brought. It consisted of an egg and a piece of bread, a half of which I hid for the long hours of the night.

All the time we kept wondering what was going to happen next and when. Every second seemed an hour and the few times sleep overpowered me, I would wake up in the throes of terrifying nightmares, only to find myself still alone amidst the darkness and cold.

On the third day, we were able to breathe more freely since we were informed that it was the Sabbath. After dinner, however, we were taken to Cell No. 1 where we found three other prisoners accused of political and military crimes. One of them had been detained because the authorities wanted his brother. They had told him:

—When your brother comes, we will set you free.

Sunday December 24, came and the war of nerves started again after the Sabbath, a day of rest. One of my cell mates who was called for interrogation was brought back after two hours shuffling along with blood stains all over his shirt. We

tried to take care of him as well as we could knowing all the time that in an hour or two, we would be the next victims.

After half an hour, I was called. They took me to a small room where I met two officers; Major Youssef, the Jerusalem Jew, in his military uniform, and another person called Tolinsky. I was to know later that these names were not real and that Tolinsky was in fact the second in command of the Intelligence Service.

As I drew near, Major Youssef hailed me mockingly, "Welcome, Azzam." I was surprised at this for this was my nickname. I quickly turned to see if he was calling someone else in order to hide my surprise. Both of them started laughing and the major ordered me to sit down. "We know many things about you, Azzam," he said.

★ My name is Asaad and I don't know anything about Azzam.

At that moment, Tolinsky began to speak to me in Arabic in the Nablus dialect.

— If you want me to speak to you in any dialect, I am ready. I am ready to speak in any dialect that will make you talk. I have men whose sticks can speak to you in the dialect you want. Now, proceed.

★ My name is Asaad.

— We know that. But your pseudonym is Azzam.

★ I have no pseudonym. The others at the university call me by my family name. I have already said this to the other investigators.

— That is where you made your mistake. I am not like the others. Get this quickly.

★ I have no nickname.

— What if I tell you that X told us about your nickname.

They showed me the man's statement.

★ Then bring X so that he will tell me in my face.

— Are you trying to teach us to run our investigation?

★ If he has told you so, then bring him here so that I will prove to you that he is wrong.

— We know from other people that you used to meet military people and others in Amman and that you used to give them arms and means to get to the Western Bank.

★ This is not true.

— Well, don't you know Y—

★ No, I don't.

— May be you don't know him by his real name but don't you know him by his nickname ———?

★ No, I don't.

— You ——— what does the following number in hotel ——— in Amman mean to you?

★ Nothing.

— So and so said that he knows you.

★ Well, bring him here then.

— So, you are determined on teaching us how to carry the investigation?

★ Never.

— Listen, we are sure of our information. Why is it that out of all the thousands we have exact information about you?

Then I heard Tolinsky's voice.

— We have ways and means for torture. Your family—father, mother, sister, relatives—all will not be safe—so speak. Speak!

So I made my decision.

★ All right. My nickname is Azzam. But believe me, it is only the name I use in the Federation of Palestinian Students for which I am responsible in Beirut. During my stay in Amman where I went to sit for the examinations for a doctoral scholarship, I was afraid to lose touch with news from the federation of which I was still president. So I asked the committee in Beirut to get in touch with me under the name of Azzam through a friend in Amman. It was only for the purpose of making it easier for us to keep in touch, and as a precautionary measure, nothing else. What you accuse me of is not true.

The officers were silent for a long while. I felt that they

were not convinced wholly. As a matter of fact I was to make sure that they actually had not been convinced.

They took me back to my cell and I spent the night breathing heavy air that was full of tension. I would start talking with the other prisoners only to find that my mind was somewhere else, always wondering what the next moment would bring so much so that the word 'future' held only fear and terror.

The next day, Monday December 25, the same procedures took place except for two new facts; a real feeling of hunger and a clash with the Israeli guards.

My first clash with the guards was as follows:

One day two guards one of whom was called Jacob came into our cell while on their round, a procedure carried out three times per day, morning, noon and night. These two came in while we were seated so Jacob snarled, "Get up, swine, when an Israeli officer enters, you Arabs must stand up."

That was a more serious insult than any we had thus far encountered. It is true that we had been beaten up, sworn at and humiliated in every sense of the word but this . . . this was prejudice; this was anti-semitism, this was melevolence against a nation and a race.

None of us stood.

This enraged the officer since he regarded that a kind of defiance and he struck hard at one of our friends. We stood up immediately but he and his friend hurried away to return after a few minutes with a prison official who rebuked us for not obeying orders. We explained what the reason was but he insisted on keeping his stand.

As a result of the incident, we were moved to cell No. 8. It was large in comparison, with a barrier of bars that divided the room into two. There was a small window overlooking the prison yard but no sun reached through the aperture. Outside the barrier were a bucket for dirty water and the urinal.

We were now regarded as rebels and so our humiliation was stronger, especially by the other Israeli inmates who hurled their insults through that small window into our cell.

On Tuesday December 26, two more men were brought in from the prison in Ramleh and they were placed with us. One of them had severe diarrhoea and he had been left without medical care. What was worse was that the urinal and bucket had been placed outside the iron bars.

On Wednesday, a third person was brought in. He was a bedouin from Gaza, arrested for smuggling arms and had been at the military concentration camp. The wretched man could not walk; every organ in his body was swollen and his face as well as other parts were full of bruises. Day and night we could not rest because of his moaning. We had to help him even when he wanted to urinate, which had become a most difficult and painful process for him.

Thus, our nerves became frayed, the air seemed to be heavy and the moaning was endless.

Two days passed during which we were torn with despair, wondering when the interrogations would start and listening to the tales of horror our friend had brought from the concentration camp—the torture prison.

Friday morning passed and we were thankful that soon Sabbath would set in. However, around 3:00 p.m. one of our friends began shouting: "They've come. They have come to take me back to that prison again." They had come it was true but this time it was for me.

A guard accompanied by two military policemen carrying a paper covered with names arrived. The guard looked at the paper and demanded:

— Who of you is Asaad Abdel Rahman?

★ Yes

— Prepare yourself. Who is Khalil Bakis?

Another voice answered.

— Prepare yourself also and both of you come with us.

As for me, I just said one thing to myself in that brief instant of preparation:

★ Whatever will be, will be. Death is my privilege.

CHAPTER III

SARAFAND - THE TORTURE CAMP

They put the fetters back on my hands and feet; they blind folded me and drove me and the other prisoner to what we knew would be the torture prison we had heard so much about in Sarafand. They asked me to hold the clothes of my friend from the back. We crossed the yard, went up a few steps and up on a lorry truck, after they had fastened us securely to the floor of the truck with a thick chain.

There was a third person with us whom I guessed was from el-Khalil district. Every now and then, he would raise his voice in prayer as he quoted sayings from the Koran. This reminded me of a funeral procession—our procession!

After what seemed to be an hour, we arrived at our destination. Our chains were unfastened and we were taken down one after the other and led to a place fifteen kilometers far. I felt a hand placed on my shoulder and a voice whispering: "You are now No. 293. Do you understand?"

I shook my head in assent and felt as I was doing so a hand writing something on my back.

A few minutes later, someone came and asked me whether I spoke English or not. I answered him that I did. He continued his inquiry:

— What is your name?

★ Asaad Abdel Rahman.

— Then you are Tayseer Koubaa's friend.

★ I am.

Sarcastically, he continued his interrogation:

— You came to kill us and throw us into the sea, isn't that right?

★ We don't want to throw anyone into the sea. We only have rights that we want to claim.

— Then why did you come to Israel?

★ I came to the West Bank in order to visit my family.

— Only so — are you sure?

★ And to study the situation of the Arab students.

— Are you also sure of that?

★ Yes, I am.

— We, we shall see!

Numbers were being called 290 . . . , 291 A blast of bullets and a shriek that tore through the evening sky. Whether the man had been shot or it was just a sham, my nerves had been shaken.

After that, a soldier came to take me. He warned me to beware of the ditches but he led me directly into those muddy

holes. This apparently was amusing to the other soldiers and their laughter mixed with curses reached me loudly and clearly.

I was taken to a place and told to sit down. I asked the soldier if I could remove the blindfold but he shouted, "Never do that. I see you always. Never lift it."

I heard the door close as I sat on the floor. A bad odor nearly stifled me. I tried to stretch my legs but Oh God! Where was I? I turned my head in a circular motion and realized as I did so that I was in the smallest of cells. On the floor, I could feel the dirt that had overflowed from a bucket nearby.

Food was thrown to me through the bars. I was told to move the fold on my eyes. Before I began to eat, I examined my cell which I calculated was 80 cms. long and 60 cms. wide. On top of that, there were two buckets in the middle of the room, one of which was overflowing and the other half full of urine and stools. At one end was a window and this made me glad until night came and with it an unending current of ice-cold air streaming through it.

All of a sudden, I heard someone whispering:

— Who are you, brother?

I held my breath for a while trying to make sure it was not a hallucination. But the question was repeated. So I gave my name.

— Welcome, brother. Be patient and do not be afraid. I am in the next cell, a somewhat larger room than yours and I have been here for ten days so that the pressure on me is less.

I then thought that this was a trick from the Israelis to let me talk. Sensing my hesitation, my new friend said:

— Look at me from under the door.

Doing so, I was shocked at the sight of a face covered with hair and white with fatigue. I remembered then that I had not shaved nor washed for ten days either. I asked:

★ Do I have to keep the band on my eyes?

— Move it a little but whenever you hear footsteps put it back in its place.

Footsteps sounded then and the outer door was opened. A voice demanded:

— Have you finished eating?

★ Yes, I have.

— Push the plate in my direction, then.

The footsteps receded and I realized that they had taken my neighbour to wash the dishes.

I crouched in the corner of the cell. The smell was obnoxious and the icy wind blowing from the window made me wish that I had only one blanket—one single blanket!

It seemed that I had dozed off for I woke up to the sound of soft knocking on the bars of my cell.

★ Who's that? I asked.

— It is I! Did you hear the shouting?

★ No!

A shriek tore through our very depths.

★ What's that?

— They're torturing one of our brothers.

The noise continued mixed with interrogation and cursing for another 15 minutes when I heard my neighbour say:

— It might be your turn next. Keep up your courage. I wanted to wake you up so that they would not take you while you were still drowsy.

He had barely finished his last word when the outer door was opened and footsteps approached my cell.

— Your number.

★ 293.

— Isn't it 295?

★ No.

The footsteps receded as I was sworn at and my fears grew.

I was 293 and someone else was 295. A sentence that I had read some time ago came to my mind. "How difficult it is for a human being to become merely a number."

Some more screaming. Which is more difficult—to be the one screaming or to listen to the screams as you're waiting for your turn.

I then heard the voice of my neighbour again.

— They will take you tomorrow to see the tombs out of which will suddenly appear imaginary limbs; they will tell you that these tombs are your friends' and the empty one will be yours if you don't speak. So beware of their methods.

★ Don't worry.

Morning finally came but I had not slept a wink. It was Saturday, a holiday for us. A soldier came early and took my neighbour while I stayed all alone throughout the day, minute by minute, hour by hour. At night, I tried to sleep for a little while only to be awakened by streams of cold air or gripping nightmares. Suddenly, I remembered that it was New Year's Eve. "Happy New Year," "Joyous New Year"—words, empty words that held nothing but terror for me.

**

Monday, January 1, 1968, passed very slowly. I was still crouched in my little corner, not able to stretch a leg. It was as if I were lying in a mould that had no air left in it and where breathing was impossible. The walls of the cell seemed

to be shrinking and it took all my self control to stop myself from yelling or getting up to beat on the bars of the cell before the whole room enveloped and closed in on me. Was this the beginning of madness? These were actually the hardest moments I had ever experienced. I began wishing that they would start torturing me, just so that I would see a human being no matter who he might be, even Frankenstein, or hear a voice, any voice even that of the Israeli interrogator!

On Tuesday, a soldier came for me. After making sure that I was No. 293 he led me out of the cell. I was surprised when he stopped beside a tree and knocked my head on its trunk several times, cursing me all the time. He then took me to a room where Tolinsky and two others were waiting for me. Tolinsky met me with a question:

— What shall I say to you: sit down Azzam or sit down Asaad?

★ My name is Asaad.

— You no doubt know where you are.

A shriek pierced the air—it was from a prisoner being tortured. Tolinsky continued:

— I am very busy indeed and I have no time. All I want to know is whether you are willing to confess. I can leave you here in the hands of the wardens of this prison and only return to read what they manage to squeeze out of you. Are you ready to speak?

★ What I have to say I have already said in Jerusalem.

— I want more. Do you want me to ask you questions or would you rather write out your confession?

I opted for the latter course and was supplied with paper and a pen. I was left alone. I started writing my life history and all that I had already said but this was not much. I was sure Tolinsky would not like it. After two hours they all returned and asked me if I had finished. I held up the pages but he took one look at them and demanded angrily:

— Is this all you've written?

★ Yes.

— It seems you are stubborn and want us to use other methods with you.

★ If torture is your aim, then torture let it be, but if you want more information, this is all you are going to get.

— Very well. Although I can read Arabic, I still would like you to read this statement yourself.

I began reading but he stopped me many times trying to get certain meanings of some classical Arabic words. I became certain then that although he would converse in Arabic, he could not read it. When I had finished, he announced that he was not satisfied and added:

— At any rate, your arrest has caused a fuss outside.

I did not answer. He continued in English (and from then on all the interrogation was held in English):

— If we gave you the chance to write your opinion, no matter what it is, in our papers, would you accept?

★ No, I can't.

★ Because I am against writing in your papers as a matter of principle.

— Do you know that we have decided not to torture you. What we will do in the next few days is to take you to the bridge and give you the chance to cross the Eastern border. Everyone knows we have arrested you and they would surely kill you if we set you free in such a fashion. As a matter of fact, even if they did not kill you, they would consider you a traitor and stop listening to you. Thus, you will be unable to continue your political career.

I was astounded at such meanness but I managed to hide my emotions as I answered him that my friends knew me and they would understand why I had been set free.

Since that moment, a new chapter in my arrest was begun—that of political interrogation.

CHAPTER IV

POLITICAL INTERROGATION

With my written statement, the period of formal interrogation ended and that of political interrogation started. This phase was given noticeable importance, maybe because we were among the first educated prisoners in the Western Bank after the June war and they wanted to know the motives that led the educated elite to join in the resistance; it was also important for them to know whether this was an individual movement or the expression of a general awakening in the ranks of the Palestinian nation.

During the last interview I referred to in the previous chapter, Tolinsky asked me the first political question.

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The first round

Tolinsky's question was the following:

— I just want to know why you do not want Israel to survive.

★ What is the value of the answer of a political prisoner in a concentration camp to such a question!

Here, one of the other interrogators interrupted us by saying:

— Just suppose that we are now sitting on the Champs Elysées in Paris and say what you like.

★ But do I have any guarantee that you will not use my point of view as a basis for my arrest?

— You can be assured that no such arrest will happen. Don't forget that you are in a democratic country!

Very calmly and deliberately, I put forth my opinion, trying all the time to read the expression on the faces of my interrogators:

★ My opinion can be summed up in three statements. First, the existence of the State of Israel represents the most dangerous type of colonialism and imperialism possible. Second, Israel represents an expansionist entity, both ideologically and practically. Third, Israel practices racial discrimination against the Arabs and the Oriental Jews.

They all stared at me in surprise. Finally one of them said:

— These are the charges that you keep on recounting against us!

★ I am ready to prove to you in detail and from sources in the Zionist archives in the Jerusalem Library that what I am saying is true.

Then I proceeded for the next hour to defend my stand-

point, using the writings of Herzl, Weizmann, Ben Gurion, and others as references. There was complete astonishment on their part and growing self confidence on mine.

Tolinsky then turned to the guard who had accompanied me and spoke to him in Hebrew. I was able to gather that he was telling him to move me from my cell to a better one. After that he asked me whether I had any cigarettes. I said that I did and at his request showed him the two cigarettes I had brought from the prison in Jerusalem. He then offered me a packet of cigarettes which I refused to take. The reason I told him was that they did not have the habit of offering cigarettes in this prison and I did not want to be treated differently.

— Do you realize that your socialism does not exist in the Kremlin itself? Take this packet.

★ I cannot. Moreover, I have cigarettes.

— Will you promise to ask for cigarettes when you run out of yours?

★ I will.

This is where our conversation ended. I was blindfolded again and shuffled back to my cell. Again, on the way back, my guard stopped to beat my head against the wall. When I was left alone in my cell, I removed the band a little and saw that I was in a comparatively larger room, part of which was divided into two small cells. One of these cells had been mine before, so I gathered that this larger one must have been the one my neighbour had when they first brought me in.

My new cell was three meters long and two and a half meters wide, approximately. There was a long canal at one end which the prisoner was supposed to use as his toilet. In the middle of the room, there was a mattress and a blanket. For all its filthy odor, this was comparatively heaven to me.

That night I spent in my new surroundings was the best so far. It was the first time I was able to sleep even though I was surprisingly disturbed because of my long beard and body odor; twelve days had passed without my having shaved or washed, in spite of the dirty places I had been placed in.

During that night also, a lieutenant from the military police came in and asked me my name and why I had come. He was surprised at how fluent my English was so I told him that I had received my master's degree from the American University of Beirut. This man's name was Youssef or commonly called Yousse.

The next day I was taken again for interrogation and always on the way back and forth, my guard would stop either to beat my head somewhere or to slap me, I do not know why. When we arrived at the room and my blind fold was removed, I saw myself in front of a young army officer who asked the guard to remove my handcuffs. Then he shook hands with me very congenially saying with an American accent.

— My name is Eli. I am a graduate student at the Hebrew University and I am a military officer at the same time.

I did not know what to answer him so he continued by saying:

— Yousse has told me about you. He said that we had a person in this camp he wants me to see—mainly you. I have a few questions that I want you to answer in writing.

He gave me the list of questions, some paper, and a pen and left me, saying jokingly:

— I am going to leave you now and I don't need to remind you that this isn't an exam at the university!

I still remember the most important questions. These were:

1. What is your opinion about the setting up of the State of Palestine?

Answer: This depends on what is meant by the question. A state with which borders—from the sea to the river or including the Eastern Bank. Next what would the constitutional and executory forms of such a state be—the Yugoslav, the Lebanese or which? Most important of all, would such a state be Arab or Zionist?

2. What in your opinion are the possibilities for an Arab—Israeli struggle?

Answer: Either the U.S.A. and other countries will put pressure on Israel to dissuade it from its present position and this is a slim possibility or else that Israel will change its

point of view and that is virtually an impossibility. The third alternative is a new war whereby the Arabs will try to regain their rights.

3. Why do you fight Israel?

Answer: Because it is colonialistic at the expense of the people of Palestine and imperialistic at the same time. Furthermore, its existence is based on expansionistic aims and it also practices racial discrimination against the Arabs and Oriental Jews.

4. What is your opinion about the solution of the refugee problem?

Answer: Putting into effect the United Nations resolution No. 194 taken in 1948, mainly allowing all those who wish to return to their country to do so and compensating to those who do not want to return.

After a while, Investigator Eli returned and started reading my answers. When I saw him pursing his lips I reminded him that he had told me not to consider this a college exam. I also added:

★ If I were indeed sitting for an exam and you happened to be the one correcting my paper, you would have given me a zero, isn't that right?

He answered me very slowly:

— We listen to all points of view!

**

I was taken back to my cell. After a short while, I was called back again, this time to find myself facing Tolinsky and two others, one of whom seemed to be a journalist. Tolinsky asked me whether I had even been beaten. I answered him:

★ Quite severely.

— Where?

★ In Jerusalem.

— You must have lied or else they would not have beaten you. In any case, were you tortured?

★ This is a relative problem; from the psychological angle, yes but from the physical angle, not yet.

— Not yet? So you expect to be tortured? If you didn't deserve torture, then you wouldn't expect it!

★ Not necessarily. I am in a place where torture is the standard procedure. I can hear the cries of my fellow prisoners being tortured nightly.

— These are only nightmares!

At that moment, the officer with Tolinsky started asking political questions such as why we didn't accept the partition of 1947 and what my opinion of Israel was. I repeated my viewpoints while the third man listened on.

Tolinsky intervened by asking:

— A small question only. What is your relationship with Ahmad Khalifeh?

★ I met him in Beirut in 1965 and I saw him once at the Sahira Gate to give him a personal message from his brother in Amman.

— Haven't you seen him since?

★ Not at all.



I was taken to my room once more. In the afternoon, I was called for interrogation. This time there was an officer called Haim who with some others was responsible for the torture tactics in the prison.

No sooner had the fold been removed from my eyes than I was startled by his long stick being waved in front of my eyes. He said:

— If you speak, you will be saved from this stick but if you don't, I will show you that I am different from the others.

★ What do you want me to say?

— How is the Arab Resistance Movement set up?

★ How should I know? It is a secret organization and only its members know about such matters.

— Then what have you heard?

★ In some countries, it has a secret organization and of this I have not heard anything; in some other countries, they sometimes work in the form of clubs, student federations and others.

— Is the leadership carried out by a group?

★ I think so since each person has specific responsibilities.

— Then the organization resembles that of our Mapai.

★ I think so.

I was surprised when he began to explain to me how the Hebrew University was organized. He also told me that he had begun writing his graduate thesis about a certain topic and that before he graduated he had written a report about Abdel Karim Qasem. He spoke for a long time in poor English, then he called the guard and asked him to take me back telling me that one day he was going to discuss with me two subjects, Karl Marx and the curriculum at the American University of Beirut.



On the morning of Thursday January 4, 1968, I was called to see Lieutenant Eli. He began to speak but I felt he was not telling me the real reason why he had come. After a while, he said.

— You bet on time and you say that it is to your advantage but I do not think so. For example, let us look at the news in the *Jerusalem Post*. This item of news is for our good; this one is not to anyone's advantage; this is for our side; that is for yours, etc...

Then read this item about Ahmad Khalifeh, your friend whom we arrested a few days ago.

I began reading the headlines: Arrest of Terrorist Chief in Jerusalem. The article went on to say that Ahmad Khalifeh had been arrested a few days before after many months of chasing. Ahmad, short and slim, uses eyeglasses that lend him a professional look. Officials believe that because of his journey to Damascus in 1948, he has wide connections and dealings with the planning and organizing of the terrorist movement in the Western Bank. Lieutenant Eli then asked me:

— What is your opinion?

★ You will realize after sometime whether what you say is true or not.

As we were talking, a group of officers entered and sat in a semi circular fashion in front of me. They listened to my political views. I was able to quote widely from Zionist sources. This was due to the work I had done in Beirut at the Research Center and it was also due to my graduate thesis which dealt with fifty years of the Zionist Movement.

During the course of the discussion, an Iraqi Jew interrupted me and started giving his opinion. In order to be able to answer him, I tried to count the number of subjects he was touching on—they were seven. Unexpectedly, he stopped and asked me what I thought.

★ This discussion is quite moving. I have just calculated that you have discussed seven topics and I don't know which one I should answer first.

— Then we will have to meet again, what do you think?

★ My opinion is that I am here and I don't think that I have any pressing appointments in the meanwhile.

Everyone laughed and we continued our previous discussion after the Iraqi officer had left.

Noon came and lunch was brought for me while the discussion went on. A new group of officers came; supertime came; still another batch of officers until finally I was returned to my room at nine o'clock at night.

♦♦

Brainwashing procedures.

The second day was like the previous one. The only new event was that towards the evening, while I was explaining my points of view to a group of officers, a man in his late thirties came in wearing civilian clothes. He listened for a while to the conversation; then all of a sudden, he put up his foot on the bench and told me in a snarling tone and in excellent American English:

— This is how you always are. Heroes before we arrest you and cowards in front of us.

I was taken aback at what he had said and how he said it, so I told him fleetingly:

★ I am surprised at your words. I only wish you had given

yourself the chance to listen to what I was saying, which was just the opposite of what you have so quickly deduced!

But he answered me in the same insolent manner:

— The minute you are arrested, you go back one hundred per cent on all that you believe in and say that you have come here for the fifteen dinars you are being paid.

It was the first time since my arrest that I got angry and said:

★ Before you say such things go and read the statement in which I explained my standpoint from the moment that I was arrested. From the first time a question on politics was asked me I asked what value my political views bore considering my being a political prisoner in such a camp and the answer was that I was to suppose myself in Paris and speak freely. So when I laid down my opinion, it wasn't in lieu of my present status nor do I intend to go on with the discussion under such circumstances.

The air became tense when that same man asked that my folio be given him. I could detect then from the tone of his voice that he was a very important man indeed. He flipped through some pages when he burst shouting:

— You mean here that you want more blood and tears. You leave no chance except for another war.

★ At least, this should erase your impression that we become cowards when you arrest us!

In a very dramatic way, he began to play with his hair and for the first time, he sat down in front of me. Then very quickly he asked me:

— Are you married?

★ I was about to get married before the June war.

— Do you have a brother?

★ Yes, he is eighteen years old.

— What would your feelings be if the terrorist organization headquarters were to send him to kill while they are living in Amman or some other place living in all luxury?

★ My brother is one of the sons in this Western Bank and whatever happens to the others, will happen to him. Moreover, I am sure that the leaders of such organizations will never fall into this disparity between their beliefs and their practices. They themselves will also come here undoubtedly like everyone else!

— I am going to tell you something, something personal that happened to me and my family. My father had leftist inclinations. His idealism drove him from Palestine at a time when we needed him most as we were fighting our war of "liberation." He went to join the fight with his comrades in Spain and we lost trace of him for several years. I felt a grudge against him all the time I was growing up. I hated him and considered him a traitor to his country. I became an extreme rightist as a reaction. Suddenly, after a long time, I received a letter from my father apologizing for his behaviour and proposing that we begin anew in the service of our country.

I forgave him and he came back to Israel. Now we are friends. His idealism destroyed his life and he only discovered this after several long and bitter years. I am telling you this story because your ideals have begun to destroy your life. So, learn from the tragedy of my father although I am afraid the time as far as you are concerned has passed.

Here I was faced with the brainwashing procedures. This man was an artist and a genius, no doubt. So I answered him: ✪ In my opinion, the problem is relative. What appears to be empty ideals seem to us to be real practical ideas. At any rate, as far as I am concerned, as you have already said, it is too late. Nevertheless, time will show which ideas are fanciful and which are realistic.

On Friday, January 5, 1968, I was called by the Iraqi Jew.

— I want to answer a few of your questions about Israel, its colonialism, its Western imperialism, its expansionist plans and its racial segregation. The holy books and historical studies prove that Palestine is for the Jews. You have your own views but if we didn't have any right, God wouldn't have helped us to get to where we are now.

"As far as our relationship with the U.S.A. stands, we, as all other nations, build our relationships on the basis of need. At one time we formed a friendship with Britain; then we fought our war for freedom against it. Now we feel the need of forming an alliance with the U.S.A. because this is to our advantage. In the future we might have to form an alliance with the Soviet Union if need arises. The question

is one of advantage, not that we are a base or a state of the U.S.A.

"As for Israel's expansionist program, this is how we look at it:

"On the fifth June, 1967, we saw in front of us a lion trying to eat us up, on our right a tiger waiting to destroy us and on our left a large snake wanting to wound herself around us. So we had to climb a tree only to find a group of bees that had run away from its hive. So we were obliged to eat the honey that we found.

"Now what concerns racial segregation I can only say that the Arabs in Israel are a minority group and they suffer what every minority group suffers in any society. At the same time, we, in our turn, always try to forget the possibility of these Arabs collaborating with the Pan Arab world outside, that forms a formidable enemy for us, and attempt at improving their conditions. We have actually succeeded in this. As for the discrimination against the Oriental Jews, I would like to remind you of the great cultural difference between the Oriental Jews and the Western Jews; so it is natural for us to find that the command is in the hands of the Western Jews. Nonetheless, steps are being taken to erase these differences and I say this since I am an Oriental Jew from Iraq."

My answer to this Jew was this:

✪ First, I do not think any holy book or historical book proves your point of view more than it does ours. This is a long sub-

ject. If you say that God and history have stood by you because you are more right, let me ask you this: Did God and history continue to stand with Hitler, who nearly reached the apex of ruling the world? Did God and history stand by the French colonials in Algeria? Last but not least, did God and history stand by Batista in Cuba?

"In relation to your expansionist program, I have already proven to you that theoretically and practically, this is your goal and your allegory poses the following questions: do you blame us bees for trying to get back our honey or do you blame us if we were to put for you in this honey some element that would make it impossible for you to digest it—through the commando movement?

"Lastly, in answer to your treatment of Arabs and Oriental Jews, I have already explained to you in detail the sources I have used to support my point of view. If you are to look at the question of minority groups why should you consider yourself more humane than the Arabs when you yourselves have refused and still refuse to form a minority group in an Arab existence? This is from one side and from another side, which minority group, other than the negroes in the U.S.A. and the minority groups in the Fascist countries has lived eighteen years under such difficult circumstances and strict military rule? I would like to refer you here to a book written about this subject by an Arab living in the occupied territory, *The Arabs in Israel* by Sabri Jiryas.

"As for differentiating between the Western and Oriental Jews, I keep on asking myself if what you say is true, what

have you done in these twenty years to overcome these cultural differences? Then you, as an Oriental Jew, represent an exception since all those I have met in this camp, other than the Yemeni waiter and you, have been all Western Jews in responsible positions."

After that, he started talking about the alliance between Haj Amin el Hussaini and the Nazis and the declarations of Ahmad Shukairi, specially the statement he made about throwing the Jews into the sea and sending the rest to their real countries. Then, he also told me about a brother of his who got killed in 1948 and how he had wanted to revenge this death in 1967 but when he had the chance, his hand would not obey him!

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Saturday, January 6, 1968 was a holiday.

Sunday, January 7, 1968, I was again called for investigation by a group of army officers. This went on most of the day.

Monday, January 8, 1968 was like the previous day. However, at around midnight, while I was talking to Investigator Eli, a telephone call asking for my transference to the prison in Jerusalem came. They also told me that I could write to my family and gave me paper and a pen. I was returned to my room at 12:30 p.m.

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I placed the sheet of paper in front of me and took the

pen. I decided that I would write a letter that was merry and light because I knew if I were to say such things as "I am all right" or "Don't worry," they would think that I was trying to bluff them.

So I began with Dear Mother and Dear Father . . . I don't know what happened to me then! I, who have never cried, except on three occasions in the Syrian coup in 1961, when one of my dearest friends was killed in 1963, and when another friend of mine was killed in the occupied territory, felt my eyes brimming with tears. For all my self-control, two tears dropped down, tears of love that a son had for his father and mother.

**

When I finished writing my letter, a soldier came to take it and I settled down for what was left of the night. No sooner had the soldier gone than he came back ordering me to get ready for interrogation. My God! What had I done? What new information had they come across?

Blindfolded, I was led to a room where Investigator Eli was sitting with another man well-known for being an expert in torture. With a long, thick stick, he pointed to a chair and said in Arabic: "Sit down." I sat down and saw him waving my letter. "What is this?" he demanded.

— A letter to my parents.

— It is a letter but not to your parents! This is in code to the Organization.

— What organization? I tell you it is to my parents.

— Who are Jumana and Bana to whom you send your love?

— They are my sisters.

— Do you think we're fools? Why didn't you mention the word sisters before their names as you did with your brother Saad?

— You can ask my family whether I have sisters bearing such names or not.

— Who told you we haven't done that? Here, take the letter and read it in a loud voice. I can read it since I am well informed about Islamic history but I want you to read it. Go ahead and read.

So I began to read but he stopped me when I came to the expression "my dear friend" that I had used in addressing my father.

— Don't you see—this expression is not for your father!

★ How is that?

— I have told you that I know exactly about the relationship between the different members of a Moslem family. You are a Moslem and therefore you cannot address your father in such a manner as friend. You still kiss your father's hand, you don't smoke in front of your father, etc.

★ But this is not the case with all families!

— Do you want to teach me? My major is Islamic history!

What a catastrophe! Is this all he had learned from Islamic history? I spent the next twenty minutes trying to explain to him that it was not sacrilege to address our fathers as friends.

I went back to reading the letter only to be stopped a second time when I read the expression: "My personal desire . . ."

— What do you mean by this expression?

I tried to explain to him both in English and Arabic what I meant but he remained adamant. If I had been innocent, he said, I would have written "my personal wish." As a final resort, I told him I would substitute wish for desire; still, he refused.

One whole hour passed until he was convinced that the letter contained nothing important. He promised to send it to my parents, a thing which he never did as the letter was kept in my file.



Tuesday, January 9, 1968, a soldier came with a shaving kit. He took me to a basin and ordered me to shave. I looked at myself in the mirror and was aghast—there was nothing evident in my face but hair and dirt. I had lived twenty-one days without any semblance to human living. What was this change for? I was to be taken back from the military prison to the Jerusalem prison. Nevertheless, before they took me I

was obliged to sign a paper that I had been well treated. Having been tied securely with another prisoner in the truck, one of the lady officers came out; she gave a rose to my friend so that he would give it to the prison warden in Ramallah, if I remember correctly, and then she threw at both of us nearly a bottle of eau de cologne while the jeering soldiers around us laughed louder!

After an hour of miserable riding, with the handcuffs nearly breaking our wrists, the truck stopped and untying me, they took me down. I was at the prison in Jerusalem.

CHAPTER V

MY LAST DAYS AT THE JERUSALEM PRISON

No sooner had I stepped into the prison yard than I came face to face with Major Youssef and Commander Sapir. They led me to an office and Major Youssef sat in front of me.

— Late last night we sent for you to discuss with you the possibility of stopping all this bloodshed and tears.

Such a poetic expression! Still, I could not understand what he had in mind. So I said:

★ I believe there is some mistake. What bloodshed and which tears do you want to put an end to? Why did you send after me in particular and what is my relationship with all that?

— Listen well. After your arrest, several military operations were executed that we believe had something to do with you. In a moment, we will be joined by Tayseer Koubaa and Ahmed Khalifeh so that we might put an end to bloodshed and tears.

★ But I don't understand what you are saying at all. I am simply responsible for the federation of Palestinian students and my connection with Tayseer is that of colleagues in the Federation. As for Ahmed Khalifeh, my acquaintance with

him is very slight. Then, what is our connection to the bloodshed and tears you keep on referring to? I see no excuse for such a meeting!

As he was answering me, Tayseer came in. We had not seen each other for twenty-five days, so our meeting was warm.

Investigator Youssef repeated what he had told me before and I noticed the astonishment in Tayseer's eyes as he interrupted the investigator by saying:

— What do we have to do with all this?

Ahmed Khalifeh was then brought in by Sapir and like Tayseer, showed surprise at the role given us and repeated like us:

— I do not understand what is happening here.

Then they had been trying to trick us. Otherwise, what was the meaning of such a meeting? Finally, the investigator said:

— Very good. You do not want to cooperate in order to save people's lives and relieve their tension!

With that he got up and left the room.



Sapir then led me to the prison building and I was put again in cell No. 8. It was as if nothing had changed. The

two men who had been with me were still there. However, there were two new men, an Arab from the Western Bank accused of spying for Jordan and another man who was raving mad and had continuous attacks of insanity when he would all of a sudden take off his clothes, start urinating wherever he pleased while his shrieks filled the whole prison. On top of that, at regular intervals, the guards came in to give him a beating and it was more than we could bear when we saw how bruised his body would become at this inhuman treatment. We asked the guards over and over again to take him to a hospital where he belonged but they promised us to do so in vain. Why had the poor man been arrested? The story was that he had come to the prison and told the prison guards while brandishing two knives, "Where are the Israelis? I want to kill them!"

The next day I was called for interrogation. I had to write my name and life history; mainly that I was president of the Palestinian Student Union and of the confederation of Arab Students in Lebanon and that I had stayed in Amman for six months after the June war to apply for a doctoral scholarship and finally that I had come to visit my family on the occasion of Ramadan Feast as well as to study the condition of Arab Students in the occupied territory.

Thursday passed in the same manner except that that mad man was driving us crazy.

On Friday morning, I was called to find my father, mother, and sister accompanying Sapir. I had not seen my mother and sister for one year, and my father too! Their

eyes filled with tears when they saw me and I felt that they could not speak. So I said:

★ Did you receive my letter?

— Which letter?

Sapir intervened by saying:

— Your letter is still with us in your file.

The first question my mother asked me, and she tried to put it tactfully was:

— They did not beat you very much, am I right?

Pointing to Sapir, I answered:

★ He was the one who was responsible for interrogating me, so ask him!

Without answering, Sapir withdrew and sent someone else in his place!

After fifteen minutes, Sapir came back to announce that visiting time was up. Giving me some clothes, my mother asked me anxiously:

— How is the food here? Shall I bring you some the next time?

★ Very bad so I hope you'll alleviate our hunger!
From Sapir:

— This is not a prison but a police station. The food in our prisons is usually much better.

As I was led back to my cell, I noticed that Tayseer was in cell No. 5. His mother, too, had been to see him. The poor old woman who had lost her elder son in the June war and now had the second one in prison facing a closed future!

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Another week passed. On the last day, three guards entered and after searching our belongings, led us to cell No. 1. The cold was bitter and our stomachs were churning on nothing all day long, especially during the night; our last meal was given to us between three-thirty and four and the next meal, breakfast, was at eight the following morning!

A new week was ahead of us but this time, they allowed us to buy cigarettes. I saw my parents for another quarter of an hour during which time we saw military police take Ahmed Khalifeh to the concentration camp in Sarafand.

It was snowing in Jerusalem then and our very bones were chilled. The snow was piling in front of the doors of our cells in a manner that had not occurred in Jerusalem since 1952.

Towards the end of January, we were taken to another cell, No. 2. We were thirteen men in a room that would barely take five. Furthermore, the food that was offered to

us was the same amount we had received when we were only three persons. Starved as we were, this was beyond human tolerance so one morning we refused the small portions of margarine and jam given to us. After a lot of cursing and shouting, they increased the amount to a minimum share for each person.

We used to spend the day discussing the Palestine problem. We also started learning some Hebrew. However, most of the time we used to sing national songs in a very loud voice indeed and many a times this led us into trouble with the guards and other Israeli prisoners.

One day, one of the guards came to us saying very happily:

— Shukairi has died! Shukairi has died!

Well, we found out later that Ahmed Shukairi had not died but had been replaced in his position by Yahya Hamouda.

During this period of time, we heard a lot about the Central Prison in Ramleh. We even wished that we would be moved there. As a matter of fact, during the last week of January, a group of us (except Tayseer and a few others) were called to the Warden's office where we were blindfolded and handcuffed before they transferred us, under heavy guard, to a bus that would take us to the Ramleh Prison.

CHAPTER VI

THE CENTRAL PRISON IN RAMLEH

The bus stopped in front of the prison gates. We were taken down and led to a room, stumbling many times before we reached. Handcuffs and folds removed, we waited for half an hour until I was led with three of my friends to another room. There we were asked to undress while they made a thorough search of our clothes, piece by piece. They looked into our mouths, plucked our hair and examined even the folds of our body before they asked us to put on our clothes.

We were called after that, one by one, to the room of the assistant warden who told us that we were not to be allowed to discuss political matters, he also warned us that there would be severe punishment for any critical or foolish behavior. Then, they led all four of us to a small room to await our transfer to another place.

Lunch was brought us at two thirty and at three o'clock, three people, the warden, his assistant and an important officer, came to give us the look over before handing us over to a guard called Aeges, a Jew of Turkish origin.

After an hour, two of us were taken from one long corridor to a second, a third and even a fourth and through several doors to the storeroom.

There was a sergeant there who ordered us to remove our clothes, which they placed in special bags. We were then given a prison uniform—a baggy pant and a very narrow jacket—and led back through a different set of corridors.

We were stopped in front of an office inside the prison and given one mattress and two blankets. There were more corridors and more doors before we reached a two-by-one meter cell. They ordered us to go in there and locked the door.

What was that? Is this the prison we had heard so much about? What were all those stories about large rooms, bunk beds, special luxuries? Finally, we decided that it must be one of two things: either that the treatment was special or that this was a transitory stage that would last one or two days at most.

After half an hour, two other friends were brought and put in the adjacent cell. We all cursed the moment we had left our prison in Jerusalem.

An hour had passed when we heard the unlocking of doors and someone shouting. We remained seated when a guard came and started shouting more at us. He finally cursed us and told us to stand up. We stood up asking him:

★ Why should we stand and when did you tell us to stand?

At this moment, the prison warden and his assistant arrived. They looked us over and left. I realized then that the guard had been shouting at us in Hebrew and that was why we could not understand him. That was a very expensive

way to learn Hebrew on our part—expensive as far as curses were concerned.

*
**

The next morning, we had breakfast and then they took us out for a little while. One of our mates cleaned the cell and then another prisoner was brought to cut our hair. They took us out again to shave and gave every two a razor blade. So another day passed.

We asked the guard several times why we were in that section of the prison. The answer was that the warden wanted this. So we decided to take it up with the warden himself.

When the warden passed our cell, we asked him our question in English; he replied that we would be moved soon to another place.

The third day passed, the fourth, the fifth—until the seventh day, February 1, 1968. We were transferred to a section called "Abu Suleiman" specially for saboteurs, whose warden was a Cuban Jew called Abu Suleiman. Several doors had to be opened before we reached the area. It was composed of a yard with concrete slab surrounded by eight cells, the largest of which could hold thirty persons. There was a total of nearly 150 prisoners.

We were taken first to the guard's room where we were briefed with many threats on the prison rules. We asked whether we could have newspapers as we had heard this was

possible in the Ramleh Prison but we were denied this. We were refused all our other demands such as books to read, objects to buy from the prison canteen and a radio to listen to the news. News, we were told, would be given us when the prison officials wanted and only from the Israeli Broadcasting Station.

At this instant Tayseer Koubaa came in accompanied by a guard. We exchanged heavy glances as the warden repeated what he had told us. As we were waiting, we heard an uproar and a sergeant came in pushing two prisoners. He spoke to the warden angrily in Hebrew. The warden's answer was to confine these two for three days in their cell. Turning to us he said:

— I do not want any political discussions from you. I know exactly what happens in those cells. I am going to put you together in one cell but remember that whether you are King Hussein or even Abdel-Nasser, you are still prisoners and you must behave accordingly.

Then he ordered a guard to take us away. We were taken to our cell which, we understood later, had been an old storeroom. It had four double beds and the door was covered with net. It was very dark inside so that although we could see the persons walking, they could not see us.

**

Our daily routine was as follows:

Waking time was between four-thirty and five in the morning. Five minutes later the guards would start shouting

for us to stand up. So we would line up in front of the doors of our cells in two lines while the lieutenant in charge or sergeant came to count us roomful by roomful. Making our beds followed a certain procedure—we had to fold the blankets one on top of the other and put them at the end of the bed. A towel had to cover those blankets and on top of the pile we had to place a plastic cup; each prisoner had one cup. After this, we would mop the floor of the cell before breakfast was brought at six or six-thirty.

Half the number of cells in our section would then be opened and the prisoners would come out in a long line, each holding his cup so that he would be served tea or coffee at the door of the dining room. This room was meant for sixty people and it had long tables and benches all around it. The prisoners would then walk to the end where they would get their food from the kitchen aperture before they would sit down. As a rule, talking was forbidden.

After finishing his meal, a prisoner would carry his tray and hand it to some other prisoners whose responsibility was to throw away the remains before giving the trays to the kitchen.

Breakfast over, the prisoners would return to their cells except for the convicted ones who had to fulfill their duties such as the cutting up of carton, the cleaning of the prison grounds or the removing of used stamps for the purpose of re-selling them.

At twelve-thirty, lunch would be served in the same manner, and at quarter to five supper.

After each meal, the prisoners would be counted again.

Every prisoner had the right to four cigarettes (of the worst kind) a day. It was the job of the guards to light your cigarette when you or he felt like it.

Lights were automatically put off at ten when it was time for sleep. Any conversation or sound after that was forbidden and the prisoner would be punished if he violated the rule.

So ended our day and every day with no change except for our continuous friction with the guards and prison officials.

The treatment in our section was sometimes ordinary and many times very bad indeed. Some of the guards were fine but the others maltreated us, misusing the rules and even creating trouble for us.

The assistant warden was a Jew of Yemeni origin who had spent most of his life in Palestine even during the mandate. But he was strange. He had the dirtiest tongue, his curses reaching God, the Arabs, the person himself and so on; he was very narrow minded and simple too. Yet at times, he would try to become polite. His complex was partly due to the incident of the Arab prisoners' escape from the prison of Shatta of which he had been warden.

The worst type of guards were those of the prison yard who outweighed all the others in their maltreatment.

Visits were allowed every Monday, weekly for the arrested ones, fortnightly for the condemned and none at all

for those arrested according to Article III concerning administrative arrest. The visitors allowed in were the parents, brothers and sisters, wife and children only. The visit routine was as follows:

Papers with the names of those called for meeting their parents come. Every prisoner then takes his basket in his hand and is taken to the warden's office where he is stripped and searched thoroughly. Then every four or five men are led as a group through twelve doors until they reach a room that has tables and benches around. The prisoner sits on one side with a guard or two at his side for surveillance, and his family sits on the other. The prisoner then speaks with his family and eats the food they have brought him. When his fifteen minutes are up, he is taken to the office where he finds his basket filled with 2 kilos of fruit, two packets of the worst quality of Israeli cigarettes, one or two bars of chocolate, and a few biscuits. (This is all a prisoner is allowed.)

Back through twelve doors, the prisoner is taken to the warden's office for another thorough search of his body, clothes and the food his family has brought him. Finally, he is returned to his cell.

*
**

Clashes with the guards were frequent—a smile which did not please, a voice raised slightly, a blanket that was not very tidy, a political discussion taking place among the inmates, conversation in the dining room, or even growing tension between the State of Israel and the neighboring coun-

tries. After every clash, a report was sent to the warden, followed by a lot of shouting and swearing; if the offence happened to be major, the punishment was solitary confinement. More frequently, the punishment was that the prisoner would have to stay for a few days with only a crust of bread and some water for food and many a time he would be beaten before entering his cell.

During a prisoner's confinement, he would have to wear a dirty overall, eat his meals in the cell, going out once a day to the W.C. at a definite time whether he needed it or not, not touch water at all and not have any visitors.

Group punishment meant a worse type and quantity of food, no visits, cigarettes, correspondence, mattresses or blankets, other than all the curses hurled on the prisoners.

**

After a long struggle, we succeeded in getting a few old Arabic books, the most recent of which having been published in 1945. We were also allowed to listen to the 7:05 p.m. evening news broadcast from Israel. Walks in the yard were also granted us and we would walk for fifteen minutes in a circle, morning and noon, with our hands behind our back.

Definitely, such privileges were withdrawn at every conflict or disagreement.

**

A few days after we were brought to the Ramleh prison,

we were given a medical checkup. By that time, we had lost a lot of weight and had developed a number of ailments.

Medical rounds were maintained in a systematic manner. Nurses would go round and give the prisoners pills for headaches, influenza, acids, inflammations, etc... The prison also had its own hospital to which the prisoner was taken only in severe illness.

**

Ten days passed when Ahmad Khalifeh was brought in and placed with us.

Three months later, representatives from the International Red Cross were brought to visit us for the first time. We presented to them our problems and explained to them the torture and beating we had been exposed to. In reality, the Red Cross helped us greatly during our stay in the Ramleh prison.

Among the inmates, we had two commandos who had been imprisoned before the June war, Mahmoud Bakr Hijazi and Sakran Muhammad Sakran. There were also a number of commandos from Gaza who had been imprisoned in 1954 or 1956 and were still there.

**

Ahmad Khalifeh was the first to receive the list of charges against him in preparation for bringing his case to court. His charge was that he was politically responsible for the Arab National Movement. His trial therefore took place

very quickly as his case was tied up with that of an Arab national in the occupied territories, Khalil Tomeh, chairman of the Arab Students' Committee at the Hebrew University.

Ahmad's trial took place at the military court in Ramleh after they had refused the services of any defence attorney on the basis that Ahmad would defend himself. Yet, every time he tried to lay in the open the Palestine problem, they threatened to throw him out of the courtroom. Finally, he stood up and said:

— Do whatever you like with me. I do not recognize you or the legality of what you are doing. I consider myself facing a court-martial!

Actually, Ahmad boycotted the court after that and the trial continued in an amazing speed. The verdict was two years' imprisonment for Ahmad.

From that moment, Ahmad was put in solitary confinement for a period of two months before being transferred to the Damoun Prison.

CAPTER VII TO SARAFAND AGAIN

One afternoon late February, a guard came carrying a paper with a list of names, among which was mine. He led me through the many corridors of the prison until we arrived at the room we had entered when we first came to the Ramleh prison.

A few seconds later, two military policemen appeared. I knew them instantly; they were from that hateful prison at Sarafand.

They handcuffed me but before they blindfolded me, I saw that they had also brought Ahmad Khalifeh to accompany me on that terrifying journey. A thousand questions came to my mind: why were they taking me back? What is new?

I took hold of Ahmad's shirt and followed while one of the soldiers led us out of the prison of Ramleh. After a short distance, we were directed up an army jeep where we had to sit on top of the wheel, covered by a piece of tent material. The jeep then took off at a mad speed.

Half an hour later, we reached the concentration camp. I was taken down and thrown into a small closed cell of an

area of one and a half square meters. After fifteen minutes, the soldier came back with two blankets; he also made me sign a paper stating that I had been well treated! This time they made me sign the paper the moment I had arrived. What did they mean by that?

Hours of horror passed. During the night, I was awakened by screams of prisoners being tortured. My God, when would all this end?

Early the next morning, a soldier came and after taking the fold off my eyes, he took me to the prison yard to wash the dishes.

It was the first time I had seen that part of the prison. There were two palm trees, an oak tree, and plenty of pits into which I continually fell. There were also two rows of rooms that included the interrogation rooms on one side.

Having finished the dishes, I was given my breakfast and taken to a cell a little larger than that of the previous night.

Washing those dishes had been excellent therapy for me. Now I was back to my loneliness and fear.

At around ten o'clock, I was called for interrogation. I found two officers facing me, one of whom I recognized as an important official in this camp. The second person was a middle-aged man with grey hair and brown skin and he wore civilian clothes.

The officer ordered me to sit down and informed me that the professor wanted to speak to me.

I obeyed him with great misgiving. The professor then asked:

— Shall we speak in Arabic or English?

★ As you wish. It doesn't matter to me.

At this point, the officer withdrew and we began our discussion, partly in Arabic and partly in English. He said:

— Before I begin, I must tell you that I believe that the Palestinian Arabs have not been treated fairly. Yet, at the same time, I also believe that the Jews have been subjected to a lot of injustice too!

★ I agree with you there, especially at the hands of Hitler in Europe.

— I would like to ask you what you know about the Palestine question.

★ I have read most of the books written by Herzl, Ben Gurion, Weizmann, and . . .

Here, with utmost politeness never evidenced before by me in any of the other Israelis, he interrupted me by saying:

— I do know that you are an expert on Zionism. I would like you to tell me about your Arabic books

★ In what subject?

— Any subject—any subject at all!

And before I could speak, he started to ask me about the books of many Arab authors such as Nadim Bitar, Naji

Aloush, Ghassan Kanafani and others. I answered him as well as I could. Suddenly he said:

— What about the books on the Palestine question?

I answered him that I had read most of the books that had been published, books by Aref el Aref, Muhammad Izzat Darwazah, Najib Sadaka, Dr. Fayez Sayegh, Naji Aloush, Walid Khalidi . . .

— What do you think of Walid Khalidi?

★ A Palestinian researcher of the first degree.

— But he lies!

★ This is not true.

— Have you read his article in the Middle East Forum?

★ Of course. Furthermore, we have published several articles for him at the branch of the Palestinian Student Union of which I am President.

— He is a great liar.

★ You are not being objective then. It is really upsetting to hear you speak like that about a person I respect.

— How can you say that I am not being objective when I told you from the beginning that the Palestinian Arabs have suffered a lot of injustice.

★ Then you have tried to be objective about this aspect only.

— But Walid doesn't know any Hebrew!

★ He started to learn it three years ago.

The atmosphere between us grew tense. I was really surprised at this man who had tried to be so civil all that time. He went on to say:

— Two Palestinian organizations in Beirut are publishing books about the Palestine problem. What do you think of these books?

★ They are the most objective books written on the Palestine problem.

He answered that he fully agreed and started mentioning the names of the books and their authors. Up till then, he had not mentioned any of my three books published by the Research Center. After a while, he said:

— There's a book called *American and West German Aid to Israel* but I have forgotten the name of the author. Do you know who he is?

★ Asaad Abdel Rahman.

— What a coincidence—a name like yours!

★ I am the author.

Affecting surprise, he asked me whether that was true or not. I answered that it was. Then he asked me about my two other books, *Israeli Infiltration in Asia* and *International Zionism*. I answered that these two were also my books and that actually the latter was my M.A. thesis and that it had been translated into Arabic. He interrupted me there by saying:

— I know that and I can also tell you that it has a green cover. The book is with me. I can send it to you if you like.

After a while, he continued:

— What do you think the possibilities of the Arab-Israeli conflict are?

★ To put it briefly, I consider the Arab-Israeli conflict a tragedy that will not end except in violence.

— Do you want to ask me anything?

★ Yes. What is your opinion about the Arab-Israeli conflict?

He spoke for a while about the demilitarized zones and then added:

— I share your pessimism. I cannot be optimistic when the situation is actually tragic.

At this point a soldier came. He blindfolded me and led me back to my cell.

**

In the evening, Investigator Yousse and Captain Haim came accompanied by a soldier. He took the fetters off my feet and kept the handcuffs only. He blindfolded me and led me outside the room. After a while, they brought Ahmad, whom I recognized from his voice. Yousse asked me:

— What is your opinion about the man you met this afternoon?

★ He's well-informed.

— That he is. Did you recognize him?

★ No, I did not. He may be chief of police, Sassoun.

— No, he isn't. He is much more important.

★ Has he written any books that I could read?

— He has written one book and several articles.

★ Could I read them?

— Ask Captain Haim.

Haim came and said:

— We will now take you to the prison in Ramleh.

★ Before we go, can I read something written by the person I met today?

— No, you may not. He is

Here, he hesitated, then said:

— He writes specialized reports for the army chief-of-staff and these are not publishable.

So in fifteen minutes, I was in a car going to Ramleh. After half an hour, we were there.

**

In the Ramleh prison, I found out that my cellmates had been moved to cell No. 5 of the same section, Abu Suleiman.

Life followed the same pattern as before until one noon in March 1968, when my daily routine was disrupted by a new fear.

**

I was called to the entrance of the prison near the office of the assistant warden. There I found Ahmad Khalifeh handcuffed and blindfolded with two army policemen accompanying him. They did the same to me and then led both of us to a military car standing outside. After tying us securely to a bar inside the car, they covered us completely with a piece of tent material. We then sped on our way to Sarafand!

On reaching the camp, more shackles were added to my feet and we received the same humiliating treatment we had received at Sarafand.

Early the next morning, a guard led me out and gave me a bucket and a mop, ordering me harshly to clean six rooms. I could not move because of the chains on my hands and feet. After I had finished, I was given breakfast; the food at Sarafand seemed to be getting worse with each journey. While I was eating, Captain Haim saw me, so he gave an order that I be put in an ordinary room rather than a cell.

At ten o'clock, I was taken for interrogation. I found three army officers waiting for me, two of whom I discovered later were General Jazett, Governor of the Arab Sectors and one of his aides. I sat on a long bench beside the third officer who spoke English with an American accent. Jazett said:

— The Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza want to live in peace with Israel. Yet the other Arab countries are still playing around with the Palestinian problem as if it were a football.

★ The problem primarily is that of the basic rights of the Palestinian people, and these, the Palestinians, still aim to achieve. The connection between the Palestinian and other Arab nations is one of membership. The Palestinians want the Arab nations to play a role and help them.

— But the Palestinian people as well as the Arab nations have had enough of lost wars and want to live in peace with us.

— What do you say is wishful thinking; it is also unrealistic.

★ I believe that the opinion which states that the Palestinian and Arab nations have become bored with asking for their rights and are ready to give up is wishful thinking itself.

— How is it so when you can see for yourself that the citizens of the newly occupied areas are silent. They do not want trouble!

★ What about the commando action?

— That is directed from outside and is very limited. By the way, you exaggerate the results of these subversive actions. Do you know that our losses have amounted to only one dead man up till now?

★ Commando action has been limited so far because it is only the beginning. It is going to develop, however. As for saying

that you have lost one Israeli soldier, now, this is a gross disparaging of the results of commando action!

— Then you do believe in those false declarations about the killing of tens of Israelis and the downing of helicopter planes?

★ I believe that you know more than any other the exact number of losses which, in any case, is larger than you care to confess. I still assert that commando activity is still at its start.

— And I also believe that there is no scope for the development of such an activity because the people of the occupied areas do not want any more trouble.

★ Your strict measures are the reason why some citizens hesitate about standing up to you but this barrier of fear will soon be dissipated once commando activity evolves further.

— Nine months have passed already since the June war and if the Palestinian nation and other Arab countries had wanted to uphold the commandos, they would have done so!

★ I'm sure you know that the French as well as the Yugoslav resistance movements never showed real fruition before two or three years.

The officer who spoke good English turned to me and asked:

— On what basis do you say those words? It is only wishful thinking!

★ What I am saying is not wishful thinking as our nation is willing to fight in order to gain its rights and I can prove it.

— Go ahead.

★ The Arab Governments are reiterating the decisions taken at the Khartoum Conference . . .

— We are not speaking about the Arab Governments but about the Arab and Palestine people.

★ As far as I know, the three basic organizations in the Arab World are the Baath, the Arab Nationalist and the Communist parties and these three organizations are still on their original stand. If any, the change that has occurred is toward a more solidified political stand and more military action. I believe that the Egyptian masses have expressed their stand when they demanded Abdel Nasser to withdraw his resignation and resume his position that was not because of his mesmeric looks or magic power of speaking to the masses but because he has become the symbol of resistance, all kinds of resistance. As for the Palestinian people, their stand is more clearly defined; to the Palestinians it has spelled the end of political organizations and parties and the beginning of military commando action. I, therefore, do not understand on what you base your statement that the Palestinians and Arab nations do not want to clash with Israel.

— We say that as a result of studies and data we have collected from the investigation we have carried out in the Western Bank.

★ Those studies I'm sure will have obtained the same results when undertaken by any occupying force since most people will be afraid to state their real beliefs fearful of what this might implicate them in. As for evidence, I'm sure you have been reading the reports of foreign news agencies which include the news about the lack of unity and the condemnation of commando action among the citizens of the Western Bank. Yet, those citizens have given you their clear proof of the falseness of such reports when they acted as individuals on April 17, 1963, and as a nation after the Samu' incident when a whole village was destroyed.

— We are not saying that the Palestinians approve of the occupation. All we meant was that they are asking now for the 1947 partition rather than throwing us into the sea.

★ First of all, I don't believe that the Palestinian people want to throw the Jews into the sea. This is the only statement that I hear from you. I think you like to repeat it so much so that you will come to believe it! As for demanding the 1947 partition plan, I would like to point out that the impact of the June war has encouraged certain people in taking up that tune. But the shock will gradually pass away as the commando activities and germs of national resistance have begun to prove. The goal of this resistance is to prepare the circumstances under which the Palestinian nation will one day gain its rights.

— One facet of our problem with you is that we do not find one side to address! One nation has one point of view and another nation has a different one, a Palestinian organization here and another one there. To whom shall we address our-

selves! We tend to believe that the Arab Governments are in one valley and the people are in another.

★ There is Abdel Nasser. He is the only one who can speak to you in the name of the Arab people, among whom are the Palestinians. His word is the final among the Arabs and any negotiations with other than Abdel Nasser will lead to more complications.

— We know that fully well and are working on that basis. Yet he does not understand except military tactics and solutions. Do you realize that he never meant a real military confrontation when he ordered his army to the front? We did reckon that but we still regarded this move as a direct act of aggression and therefore this led to a war that he had begun!

★ On my part, I do not agree to this point of view. It is unimportant whether we regard the directing of the Egyptian army to the front after the withdrawing of the U.N. forces and the closing of the Tiran Strait a declaration of war or not. This is not the question. The core of the problem lies in the dumping of the basic rights of the Palestinian nation. Consequently, the events of 1948, 1956 or 1967 are the results of bitter fact that occurred at the expense of the Palestinian people. For that, I regard Zionist politics even before 1948 as responsible for whatever happened, is happening or will happen in the future. The injustice is dated and the problem with all its weight will still affect heavily on all of the Middle East and maybe beyond if the afore mentioned fact is not recognized.

With great heroism, I received the following answer:

— We cannot lose one single war. Our faith in the Israeli intelligence and valour will always assure us victory!

They all rose up as a new person entered; he might have been one of General Jazett's aides. He was short and wore eye glasses with very thick lenses; he also spoke English with a pronounced British accent. Very politely, he began the discussion by saying:

— I would like to speak to you. I do not aim to interrogate you and I am not going to record anything of our conversation. I have met with many of the Egyptian army officers we imprisoned during the war.

★ What would you like us to discuss?

— Why you want to throw us into the sea!

★ This as I have already told one of you is a story you have fabricated and repeated until you believed it.

— What do you mean?

★ There is a lot of difference between saying that we want to throw you into the sea and saying that the rights of the Palestinian people will undoubtedly return to them.

— What is your opinion about socialism?

★ Raise its slogans and work to realize them.

— Do you think it is suitable for the Arabs?

★ It is the only solution in front of us and in front of the third world as a whole.

— Don't you see along with me that the enthusiasm for Arab socialism is diminishing in the Arab world?

★ First I do not believe that there is anything specially called Arab socialism. There is one type of theoretical socialism that takes into consideration the conditions of every country. Second, it is not the enthusiasm for socialism that has decreased, but the lack of its application in a clearly defined and comprehensive way that has distorted its possible application as a solution on the one hand, and the last war with Israel that opened the eyes of the people and responsible officials to the fact that it is necessary to take certain radical steps in the application of socialism on the other hand.

— Do you believe that socialism will succeed in a country like Jordan?

★ Yes, I do.

— What is your socialistic program for such a country like Jordan then?

★ Any theoretical plan needs scientific study of all the different aspects of a problem; therefore I do not have a program now. Yet, I believe it is through socialism that Jordan can stand on its feet economically. Simultaneously, industry is another field which could be exploited and the abolishment of rural feudalism which has been transformed through its transferring to the city into political feudalism is a third field.

— Would you allow me to record the expression 'political feudalism' because I have heard it for the first time!

He wrote it down and went on to ask:

— Who are the Palestinian leaders and what are they? Why don't they come here?

★ Those who had the courage to speak a fraction about the rights of the Palestinian people have been deported from this country, so how do you now demand the real Palestinian leaders to present themselves when they will not agree to any bargaining or divisions!

— What sort of leaders do you mean?

★ Those who have the confidence and support of the masses and these are not necessarily distinguished persons or sons of distinguished persons!

— Like whom for instance?

★

— I am not writing anything as you can see and you don't have to say anything if you don't want to.

★ I cannot remember now any names except that of Dr. Ghoshe whom you arrested less than two months after the June war and who is still imprisoned!

The man arose as he said:

— You are one of the few I have met who is able to give significance for the slogans you profess.

★ Then, why don't you speak more to the Palestinian people and you will find many like me.

I was blindfolded again and taken to my room.

♦♦

In the afternoon, I was called once more to find Captain Haim with Ahmed Khalifeh. Haim asked me to sit down.

— I am undertaking a study about the Lebanese Phalangist Party to present at the University. Ahmed here has informed me that his knowledge of the subject is limited. Are you better qualified than him?

★ Actually, my information is also very slight and I do not think I know anything more than you do.

— I have this doctoral thesis which is about political parties in Lebanon.

I looked at the thesis and found that it was written by Michel Suleiman and presented at one of the American Universities.

After that I was placed with Ahmed Khalifeh in a single room. We spoke with Haim about Marx. He told us that Marx would have been good . . . if electricity had not been discovered as it had destroyed all Marxist theories. Hence, according to Haim, Marx is silly and his theories have no value. He went on describing Marx in this manner using all kinds of dirty words.

In the meanwhile, another officer entered the room. We were told that this man, who spoke Arabic well, had been military governor of Acre before 1965. He kept on asserting

that if he were given the opportunity to write a doctoral thesis, he would write on the following subject:

.... The woman is at the root of the Arab problems since ancient times. (I have here omitted the dirty language that he used which cannot even be written out!)

That night Ahmad and I slept with the hope that we would be transferred to the prison in Ramleh the next day.

But the second, the third, the fourth and fifth days passed with no one even coming near us except the guard that brought the food, which was very bad indeed, a diet of eggs, morning noon and evening. We were not even given cigarettes and the shackles on our hands and feet made our stay a misery.

On the sixth day, the door was suddenly opened upon us. Haim entered hurriedly and while he removed the fetters off our feet and blindfolded us, I heard him say:

— The organization is dead.

★ What?

— The organization is dead; you will hear about it!

We were put in a military car with a third person, nicknamed Dr. Nour, who had been charged with the Cinema Zion incident and had been sentenced to life imprisonment.

We arrived at the prison in Ramleh in a very disturbed state of mind. What did Haim mean when he said that the Organization was dead?

They took us to the section of Abu Suleiman where we found the rest of our friends in the yard. I asked them what Haim had meant by his statement, so they told me about the attempt of the Israeli army to occupy the village of Karameh and how the commandos and the Jordanian army had dealt them a losing blow that had cost them great losses!

It was clear in the next two days that the atmosphere was stormy. The nerves of the warden and his guards were very taut indeed; this was reflected badly in their treatment of us. They were clearly very upset by the results of the attack on Karameh.



A few days later, on Monday, April 1, the warden came and called out eight names, among which were my name and Tayseer Koubaa's. We were led to the front room, handcuffed and blindfolded and exchanged the prison clothes for our own. We were then taken to a car standing outside, while the guards beat and shoved us, I could not understand why.

The car sped on but due to the fact that our friends had not been moved for a long time, they could not stand the journey and started vomiting. So they stopped us at a petrol station to clean up and it was then that we saw two military cars accompanying us, one in front and one in back. Blindfolded again, we continued our journey to what we discovered was the prison in Ramallah in the newly occupied Western Bank.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PRISON IN RAMALLAH

The car stopped in front of the main office of the prison. When the folds were taken off our eyes, we saw ourselves facing two sergeants from the prison corps, Rospeir and Abu Asher.

Abu Asher held our files in his hand and began reading our names, one by one. Suddenly, he asked:

— Who is Ali Suleiman Awad el-Awawida?

— It is I.

It was as if our friend had committed blasphemy as Abu Asher snarled.

— Ali Suleiman . . . (curses) . . . al Awawida!
and he advanced on the poor man and started beating him up. One question came to our minds: What justification was there for all this?

We were then led to an adjoining room. The weather was cold and rainy. We were given a towel and four blankets each, only one which could be considered a blanket. As we were leaving the room, Abu Asher and three other guards started punching us and jolting us with their guns; some

even hit us on our heads. This treatment went on as we walked and when we reached the inner office, another sergeant and all his guards joined the 'party' until they pushed us into our cells.

I was placed with Tayseer and another prisoner in a two-by-one cell. There was one mattress for the three of us. The buckets for urinating and drinking were both placed outside the iron bars!

This would have been an easy matter to bear had they left us alone. Every five minutes, a guard would come up and he would start shouting and cursing if we did not stand up for him. Our days became composed of successive hours of cursing and continuous requests for standing up and sitting down. Even after we settled for the night, the guards would come and start shouting and cursing at us. We would try to go back to sleep, but in vain. The cell was so small that we would try to sleep in various positions—lengthwise, sidewise, head and toes . . . of no avail! We would try to make a joke of it. Our conversation would run something like this:

— I now realize, Tayseer, the disadvantages of being tall.

— Was it necessary for them to arrest you so that you would be with us?

So it went until utterly exhausted, we would doze off into troubled sleep!

The next morning, one of the guards came to take us to the toilets. We could hardly enter than there would be kicking on the doors:

"You . . . get out . . ."

So one decided to get out. Why did they bring us then?

On our way to the cells, we were stopped at certain check-points and given our share of beating.

The second day passed. We were quite sleepy but there was no chance for any of us to take a nap—get up, sit down—get up, sit down—don't sleep—arise!

On the third day, we had an important visitor, the military governor of Ramallah. He spoke to Tayseer when he recognized him and asked him about the treatment we were receiving. Tayseer told him exactly what had happened and was happening to us since we were brought to this prison. The governor then asked Tayseer to give him the names of those persons or the description of those who had maltreated us, and so he did.

We stayed in that same cell, however, for fifteen more days.

The routine of our daily life in the Ramallah prison was as follows:

We would be awakened at five o'clock in the morning or a little earlier. After roll call was taken, we would each take a bucket and go to the toilets to clean them but we could hardly stay one or two minutes. We would wash our faces to be driven back directly to our cells. Breakfast would be brought to us by other prisoners and then another count of the prisoners would be taken. At noon, we would have lunch

and at three-thirty or four, dinner and roll call. Lights were always put out at ten o'clock.

During our sojourn in the prison in Ramallah, we were allowed to write letters to our families, telling them about the conditions of the prison. Visits from family were allowed every Friday for those awaiting trial and once every fortnight for those who had already faced trial; however, for those arrested according to code No. 111, no visits were allowed. Each visit would last from ten to fifteen minutes. The prisoner would go to a room outside the main prison building and the guards were supposed to stand beside him all the time. Each family was allowed to bring three kilos of fruit, some chocolate, biscuits, and three packets of cigarettes of any brand.

On the tenth day, we received the lists of our charges in Hebrew as a preliminary step of our trials. One of the guards and a sergeant translated those charges to us orally. The only charge against me was unarmed infiltration to the West Bank while Tayseer was charged with two offences of unarmed infiltration to the West Bank.

**

One morning, Tayseer was called to meet the lawyer appointed by the court to serve as his attorney. However, Tayseer refused such an appointment since he wished to defend himself.

Tayseer was summoned again after a few days to see the same lawyer and while we sat waiting anxiously for his re-

turn, the warden came with the public prosecutor. The latter asked me what my name was. When I answered him, he said:

— You are Tayseer's friend, aren't you?

★ Yes, I am.

— A few changes have been made in the charges against you and Tayseer.

★ Why?

— There was a certain mistake committed.

★ But it's not like you to make mistakes in such matters, especially as those charges were announced five months after our arrest.

— At any rate, the change is very minor and technical.

★ What do you think of my indictment?

At this point, the two men laughed and the public prosecutor in his turn asked me:

— What is your opinion?

★ I do not think that the charge against me is serious; the only catch is in your employing the expression infiltration!

— What is so dangerous about such an expression?

★ You are calling any commuting from Amman to Jerusalem illegal but isn't this my country and aren't Jerusalem and Amman within one political entity in the eyes of international law?

— Why did you not apply for an official permit from the Israeli government?

★ What is the connection? I was going from one city to another in my country and it pleased me then to go walking.

— Who told you this is your country? It is under our jurisdiction now. I cannot understand your attitude!

★ I do not wonder at your lack of understanding since I have noticed that you are a people who have the least regard for the theories of Einstein, who was a Jew and a Zionist like you.

— Which theories?

★ Isn't the theory of relativity his? Well then, how can you understand a subject from your point of view and not from another's?

— Say this in court!

★ I'll say more than that.

**

Tayseer came back at last very angry indeed. It seemed

that they had added a new charge against us: that of belonging to a subversive organization!

**

Eighteen days later, we were transferred to another section of the prison known as Section X used for isolating prisoners. There were three small cells there; I was placed with Tayseer and two other prisoners in one cell.

The explanation for such a move was to make us more comfortable but we knew very well that they wanted to isolate us from the rest of the prisoners.

Within a few days, we received the new list of charges and these proved to be an unpleasant surprise! What was a secondary charge, according to the public prosecutor, took the following form in my case:

First charge: Infiltration.

Second charge: Membership in an illegal organization.

Third charge: Counterfeiting an identity card.

As for Tayseer, he was charged with the following:

First charge: Infiltration.

Second charge: Infiltration.

Third charge: Membership in an illegal organization.

The changes were deliberate and all we could do was to await trial.

**

There was a marked improvement in the treatment we were receiving then. This was due to three reasons:

First: Our many requests.

Second: The International Red Cross.

Third: The prison warden, Mans, who understood our rights and was one of the few people I met who never forgot that we were human beings like he was and had some rights even though we were prisoners.

We were allowed to read Israeli newspapers, books and magazines, except for the Israeli Union Newspaper which was the voice of the new communist Arab party.

We began to be taken out twice a day into the sunshine and even our food began to be improved; we actually started to have our meals at tables in the prison yard. Besides, they even brought us a Sheikh who gave us a Sermon every Sunday.

Nevertheless, the permission for reading was soon withdrawn after two months for reasons that we were never able to discover.

**

Finally, Tayseer Koubaa's trial began. In the meantime, the Israeli authorities had refused to grant permission to two French lawyers to serve as our attorneys. For Tayseer, they had appointed an Israeli lawyer in spite of Tayseer's constant refusal.

Tayseer's lawyer came and interviewed me on two matters: First, he told me of his desire to serve as my attorney too, and second, he informed me that he would like to use me as a witness for the defence in Tayseer's trial. I agreed to the latter request and was summoned at once.

**

The court consisted of three judges. The public prosecutor had an interpreter with him since the official language of the court was Hebrew. The audience was composed of both Israelis and Arabs, among whom were Tayseer's family, my mother, and Mrs. Samiha Khalil, a very active lady whose son had been sentenced to seven years' imprisonment. Also present were those two French lawyers whose services we had been denied.

I was called to the witness stand after I had sworn on the Koran. The defense attorney's aim of putting me on the witness stand was to prove to the court that we had entered the Western Bank by a different route from that the prosecuting attorney was resting his case upon. Moreover, he wanted me to answer the question as to whether Tayseer belonged to a subversive organization or not.

The cross examination took place as follows:

— Your name?

★ Asaad Mohammad Abdel Rahman.

— Do you know the defendent and since when?

★ Yes, I have known the defendent for eight years as one of my dearest friends, and for seven years as a colleague in the Palestinian Students' Union.

— Do you know or have you ever heard whether Tayseer belongs to any organization?

★ Tayseer belongs to one organization: that of the Federation of Palestinian Students of which he is president.

— Does he belong to any other organization or party?

★ No, as a matter of fact, ever since we assumed our positions in the Federation, he as president and vice president of the executory committee and I as president of the Lebanese branch, we were not allowed to join any party.

At this point, the public prosecutor interrupted me, his words full of threat:

— The public prosecutor and the judge wish to call to your attention the fact that you are not here to defend Tayseer because of your friendship because whatever you might say now will be used as evidence against you and will harm you in the end.

I sensed his threats and insults, so I answered him through the interpreter:

★ Inform the judge and the public prosecutor that even though I realize their concern for my welfare, I would like to remind them that I have taken an oath on the Holy Koran and this oath binds me to tell the truth and only the truth in spite of what the consequences may be!

They were all taken aback and the defense attorney proceeded with his interrogation.

— Why did you come to the West Bank?

★ To visit our parents primarily, and to study the situation of the students as part of a report we were preparing for the Union secondarily.

The public prosecutor interrupted me here saying:

— You have said in your statement that you came here to organize a student resistance movement as a result of the alterations the Israeli government has made in the school curricula!

★ If you read my statement carefully, you will find that I literally said that we came in order to see what we could do in order to organize students 'union' resistance movement and not a student's resistance movement.

— This is not true as this is only your translation here in front of me.

★ I objected to the translation even when I was in the Jerusalem prison and I now ask that the court interpreter translate this statement in front of you all.

The interpreter was directed by the judge to translate my statement and his verdict came thus:

— What the witness has said is true.

The defense attorney continued and asked me to recount to the court the exact route we had taken in entering the West Bank.

I began to describe every thing in the fullest detail. After I had finished, Tayseer's lawyer turned to the judge and said:

— I hope this makes it clear to the public prosecutor that what he described when he spoke of another route via the village of Beit Furick and how the defendent and the witness slept there and had meetings with some persons is not founded on any facts!

The public prosecutor arose and directing his question to me said:

— Did you know that the defendent, Tayseer, infiltrated to the West Bank in August?

★ Yes, I did. He told me when he returned that he had been to Kalkeelia to visit his family after he had received no direct news from them at a time when he had heard that most of

the houses in that village had been bombed and that his brother had been killed during the war.

— Did you know that the defendent was meeting with saboteurs in Amman?

★ I have never known Tayseer to meet with any saboteurs. But if you mean the commando leaders, then Tayseer because of his position in the Students' Union had to see certain Palestinian and Arab officials to discuss certain problems connected with the union.

— The question is specific. Did you know of any meetings he had with the leaders of the saboteurs in Amman?

★ My answer is also specific. I do not know and have not heard of any saboteurs. I know the commandos.

The judge reprimanded me here by saying:

— You have understood the question so do not play around with the words.

★ When I took an oath, I swore to tell the truth using words that best describe the truth as I see it. So I wish, your honor, you would respect my oath and not ask me to lie!

The counter-questioning continued.

— Where in Jerusalem were you arrested?

★ We were arrested in the Arab sector of Jerusalem in a house near the Syriac Monastery.

— Do you know the Wahadat Building in Amman?

★ No, I don't. Even though I know Amman well, I have never heard of such a building.

— Then do you know a district called Wahadat?

★ No, but I know a camp by that name.

— Who lives in that camp? Do you know any of its residents?

★ Yes I do because they are part of the Palestinian nation who were dispersed from their country in 1948.

The judge again turned to me and said threateningly:

— Once again I warn you not to play around with expressions.

I gave him the same answer before I was asked another question by the public prosecutor:

— You say you reached the Balata. Is this a village near Nablus?

★ No, it is a camp where the Palestinians who were forced to emigrate from their country in 1948 live.

The prosecutor became quite angry and then said:

— I have had enough of this witness!

A soldier led me away from the court to a hall where I saw Ahmed Khalifeh for the first time in 3 months. He too had been summoned by the defense attorney to act as a witness.

The Israeli Authorities had moved Ahmed from his prison in Damoun to the Jerusalem prison the day before bringing him to Ramallah. In Jerusalem, they had placed him with the Israeli prisoners (all thieves and drug addicts) who had beat him up to such an extent that they even broke his eye glasses.

I greeted Ahmed but I would not be allowed to speak to him and that was the last time I saw Ahmed Khalifeh.

**

After several trials, Tayseer was summoned for a last trial to hear the verdict. The court had accepted the testimonies of all the prosecuting witnesses (even that of Ibrahim Natour who had confessed that he would say anything under pressure) but they refused my testimony and that of Ahmed Khalifeh's, the only two testimonies for the defense, on the grounds that we were the three educated prisoners they had arrested and as a result we were able very easily to avoid the public prosecutor's questions. These were the public prosecutor's exact words.

Throughout all these trials, Tayseer had explained to them the harsh treatment he had received during interrogation and when he had asked to give his political defense in front of the court, the judge had refused to allow him that right. Tayseer, however, did not obey the court and started to talk. At this point, the judge ordered him out of the courtroom. As he was leaving, Tayseer's last words were the following:

— Pass your sentences as you wish. I do not recognize you

or recognize your courts. One day you will be in my place and I will be in yours.

The sentence passed against him in absentia was three years imprisonment.

On July 18, 1968, Tayseer with the rest of our friends were transferred to the prison in Nablus while I was taken back to the prison to await my trial.

CHAPTER IX

TORTURE

During my stay at the Ramleh central prison, I began collecting information about the experiences of my fellow prisoners with the Israeli investigators. They all collaborated and as they were recounting their stories, I started drawing comparisons until I arrived at a clear picture of prison conditions and treatment of prisoners.

Having been an inmate at one time or another during the period of my imprisonment at the prisons in Jerusalem, Ramleh, Ramallah and the military concentration camp at Sarafand, I can now present an authentic case:

Techniques of the Investigations

If the investigating authorities have information about the prisoners, the following procedures are applied:— beating, torturing, threatening, decoy and facing the prisoner with information asking him to confirm it, explain it and add to it.

If the investigating authorities do not have information about the prisoners, the procedures applied are mainly beating, torturing, threatening, decoy and asking the prisoner to tell everything about himself and others.

Sometimes a person would speak about affairs that were of no relation to him or to the others he is talking to. I would like to recount what one of the investigators told a friend of mine. "I know," he said, "that when one is exposed to an excess of beating, he will assume responsibility for certain affairs that are of no concern to him. I will not be surprised if one day, one of these investigators will discover a man who tells him that he had assassinated J. F. Kennedy."

With some investigators, the interrogation goes beyond the organizational frame to include political, psychological and social discussions, which military and intelligence service personnel as well as psychiatrists and sociologists attached to the army take part in.

The interrogation usually follows the following methods:

Decoy: The investigator tells the prisoner that if he talks, he will be set free. If he is afraid of repercussions, they promise to send him anywhere he wants. They also offer him a tempting sum of money or even women and money as a reward.

Threats: The prisoner is threatened with beating and torture. He is also threatened that his family, both males and females, would be imprisoned or that his home would be blown up or his property confiscated. Other threats included the threat of killing under the pretext of escape; the threat of destroying him politically through a farce they would force him to play; a threat to commit adultery with his female relatives; the threat to place the prisoner in the cell of Israeli criminals or prostitutes in order that they would beat him up

and insult him; the threat to imprison him for an indefinite period of time according to the law of administrative arrest, and so on. Mostly, the threats were accompanied by beating and abuses.

Beating: The prisoner has to take off his clothes, either partially or in full and he is beaten with the bare hands, feet, sticks, iron bars, and whips for a period of time that is prolonged according to the investigator's mood.

Torture: This method follows two paths, either psychological or physical. The psychological torture aims at wrecking the nerves of the prisoner and bringing about a nervous breakdown in him through a series of threats and beatings. The prisoner is placed in a darkened room or a room that is lit, day and night. Furthermore, the prisoner is handcuffed, blindfolded, and his legs are enchained so that when he is led and falls down, the other soldiers start to mock him. He is also placed in a very small cell, 80 cms. x 60 cms., without any blankets and with an open gutter inside. Other methods include making him hear the sound of his friends being tortured, forcing him to open his eyes in front of graves from which a leg appears explaining to him that that man had been killed because he had not confessed; they point out an empty grave to him and tell him that it would be his if he did not speak; they fire at him over his head and between his feet; they bring huge dogs specially trained to snatch the fold from his eyes or to tear the clothes of his body without a scratch; they throw snakes at him while he is blindfolded although the snakes are either half real or harmless; they take him into the torture room to make him look at others who are being tortured and

then they put him through a lie detector test, telling him at the end, in a very learned air, that he is lying.

One of the prisoners at the Ramleh prison told me of an incident that had happened to him. He was very reluctant to recount his experience for fear of further punishment if the authorities knew he had talked. Yet if what has happened to him is true, then, it must have happened to other prisoners. Here is the story as he told it:

"I was taken to a place that I didn't know. They took me to a narrow room on whose walls were hung four pictures of Palestinian leaders. I was put through a starvation diet. A very strong spotlight was lit day and night and I had to sit handcuffed on the floor while currents of cold air followed by currents of hot air would be directed at me. I was left in complete isolation except for the bits of food they used to throw from time to time. Yet all the while, a tape was on with voices of people being tortured or a mother pleading to her son to confess, or of a sister begging her brother to confess lest they attack her. This went on for four days until madness was not far away."

I have recorded this incident although I did not hear it from any other prisoner because throughout my dealings with this man, I did not discover him to lie or to exaggerate matters.

Before discussing physical torture it is worth mentioning the following observations:

First, I believe that the investigators prefer to use their methods

on the basis that no death or permanent injury results; however, at times, these same investigators would lose control of the situation. I have seen a man struck with complete mental breakdown and two others with severe internal haemorrhage. I have also heard from people I trust of several cases of paralysis, a case of the gouging of the eye and several cases of death. I can even give the names of these people.

Second, a prisoner is never put on trial, which is public, except four months after they had finished interrogating him and all traces of torture have become erased. Yet, there are few who still carry the effects of what they had gone through even after so long a period and I have witnessed these cases.

Third, I believe that knowledge of these methods used by the investigators is limited to only a small sector of the officials in authority and completely hidden from the public whether Arab, foreign or Israeli.

Fourth, the methods are not used with all the prisoners but with a minority group and if used, then in parts and not all at once.

Following is a picture of what happens during physical torture:

1. The prisoner is stripped completely and beaten with whips, sticks, and fists on all parts of his body, even his head, until he bleeds. Then his body is covered with salt which causes a violent smarting of all his wounds, and the beating starts again.

2. One of the prisoner's hands is tied to the floor and the other is placed between the iron bars of a window which is opened slowly until the prisoner feels he is being cut in two.
3. The prisoner's hands are placed palms up on the floor of the room and the investigators start walking on them and rubbing them against the tiles.
4. The prisoner's fingers are placed in the crack of the door and then the door is slammed upon them. After that or sometimes at a different time, the nails are extracted with pincers.
5. Two enormous dogs are set after the prisoner who is both chained at the feet and handcuffed so that he cannot stand properly. Then the dogs attack the prisoner and throw him to the ground but the investigator's whip forces him up again only to be attacked by the dogs anew until he faints.
6. The prisoner is suspended from the ceiling either from his wrists or ankles. Then they start pulling him in downward motion.
7. The prisoner is subjected to electric shocks by the placing of clamps on his ear lobes, the chest or any other sensitive part of his body.
8. The prisoner is injected with a solution that they tell him would cause temporary insanity. Then, they ask him to speak before it is too late, offering him a glass of some liquid that would serve as an antidote to the substance if he seems willing to talk.

9. The investigators put out cigarette butts on the prisoner's body or they seat the naked prisoner on a board covered with cactus leaves.
10. The motions of a homosexuality act is enacted by a certain Negro brought specially for this purpose.
11. A certain chemical substance is placed in the prisoner's hand and he is asked to press on it by closing his fist; this brings about a series of heat waves and electric shocks.
12. The prisoner is given a metal helmet that covers his head and neck. He puts it on and fastens it securely by tying it to his waist by means of strings attached to it. Then with series of nerve wracking beats the helmet is hit from the outside slowly at first but gathers momentum as the helmet closes on the victim's head. After that, the prisoner is laid on the floor, the strings around his waist are untied and as one investigator snatches the helmet strongly, the other plants his foot on the prisoner's stomach.
13. The investigator bends his thumb and forefinger and starts to rub the prisoner's eye.
14. The prisoner's hands are handcuffed while they are raised very high. Then they are fixed to a ring nailed to the wall and the prisoner has to stand in this position for quite a long time.
15. A refill of a dry ink pen or some matches are forced into the prisoner's sexual organs.

What I have just recounted is only a sample of what more than one prisoner told me and at more than one prison. It should be noted here that there was no collaboration among the prisoners as to the stories they told since there was no opportunity for them to get in touch with each other or hear each other out. Moreover, I was the first person to whom these stories were told.

Among the ugliest torture pictures from a human point of view are the following:

First, when a wounded commando is arrested, they use his wounds as a means to put pressure on him either by beating him on these injuries or by not giving him any medical care before he confesses.

Second, when treating a seriously wounded prisoner, the doctor himself would ask him to confess in exchange for medicine, thus making medicine, the most humane of sciences, a vehicle for torture.

The condition of Israeli prisons during the first months of occupation. Treatment of prisoners

Actually, the treatment of Arab prisoners in the Israeli prisons during the first months of occupation was not much different from what took place during the interrogations. Beating and cursing was continuous at every instant and for no reason save for the fact that the prisoners were Arabs.

As far as the prisoners were concerned, sunshine was

part of history. Even if the prisoners were taken out to the yard, they would be lined up two by two with their hands behind their backs and ordered to run around in a continual fashion. Then, they would be given two cigarettes each and ordered to smoke it while in a squatting position. Any comment by the prisoner would expose him to a beating and insults and starvation punishment in a solitary cell.

During the day, a prisoner had no permission to sleep but he would have to fold his blanket into a pile and sit on it.

Conditions of prisons

The conditions in the prisons were disgusting from two angles: the food in the first place, the cells in the second place, so much so that hosts of fleas were a common sight.

Naturally, visits were forbidden!

CHAPTER X

THE TRIAL

After the Israeli authorities had refused to allow the two French lawyers to defend us, after the list of charges was changed to include three offences, and after I noticed that the Israeli courts did not give my friends, Ahmad Khalifeh and Tayseer Koubaa, the opportunity to defend themselves (in fact they had threatened to throw Ahmad out and had actually thrown Tayseer out when they uttered a word of defense), I decided that I would hand over my case to Hanna Nakkarah, one of the most prominent Arab lawyers in the occupied Arab land and a prominent member of the Arab Communist Party there.

As a result of this decision and by virtue of professional relationships with other lawyers, the circle of defense attorneys for me and two other Palestinian Arab prisoners I had met in jail, Khalil Bahis and Ali Awawida, was widened to include the following members:

1. Mr. Hanna Nakkarah, an Arab living in Jaffa.
2. Mrs. Felicia Langer, an anti-Zionist communist Jewess.
3. Mr. Sabri Jeries, an Arab.

4. Mr. Ghazi Koufer, an anti-Zionist, communist, Iraqi Jew.

5. Mr. Ali Rafeh, an Arab from Deir el Asad.

I met with some of these lawyers before the trial and they all showed surprise at the charges directed against me. My colleagues and I made it perfectly clear to our attorneys that the length of the prison terms we would be sentenced was of secondary importance to us. The only concern we had was that we be given the chance to say all that we believed in full, supported by International Laws and pacts. This was, we believed, the only way we could serve our nation.

It was decided, eventually, for various reasons, that Mrs. Langer would be the one to present our political point of view in full to the court and Messrs. Nakkarah and Foufer would take up the legal-political aspects.

On the morning of May 20, 1968, the three defendants were summoned to the warden's office where we were handcuffed and then driven under heavy guard to a room two hundred meters away from the prison near the court. On arriving, the sergeant insisted that we squat on the ground and stay in that position in spite of the fact that there were tables and chairs in the room. Even when First Lieutenant Mans passed by and we asked him whether we would be allowed to stand up, the sergeant did not consent.

We were then taken into the courtroom. There was the military judge with the rank of a major, the public prosecutor

First Lieutenant Hosiah, the court avower, and the interpreter.

We pleaded not guilty to the three charges: infiltration, membership in an illegal organization, and counterfeit.

Mrs. Langer stood up and said:

— If it pleases the court, before the trial begins, my clients would like me to bring up for them certain important points that are related to the legality of their trials and the lawfulness of this court.

The judge ordered her to proceed.

Mrs. Langer began:

— The Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan Heights was effected by military force. Thus, this occupation goes against the United Nations Charter. Moreover, the Security Council and the General Assembly have taken several decisions asking the Israeli authorities to withdraw from the occupied territory and actually the first paragraph of the Security Council decision of November 1967, asks Israel openly to withdraw from all occupied territory. And so, my clients regard this occupation, as does all the world through the international organizations, as unlawful and they ask that it be ended . . .

Here the judge interrupted by saying:

— You? Are you saying that?

Mrs. Langer replied:

— This may or may not be my opinion. However, I am only stating now my clients' point of view . . .

The Judge: How can you utter such words? Who is forcing you?

Mrs. Langer: I have already told you that we are not here to decide whether this is my point of view or not. What is important is that my clients have asked me to say what I have said and if I refuse, they hire a different lawyer who would be more obliging.

The judge asked us through the interpreter:

— Would you withdraw your appointment of Mrs. Langer if she won't say what you want, and is this your opinion?

★ Yes, this is our opinion and we have not been given the opportunity to say everything yet. We also will try to find another lawyer if Mrs. Langer does not express our opinion.

The judge became angry and answered us sarcastically:

— Don't worry. She will say what you want. What else, Mrs. Langer?

Mrs. Langer: In that the occupation is not lawful according to international resolutions, the authority that issues from it is by necessity unlawful. Therefore, all the laws that brought the defendants to court are unlawful and the laws by which this court was formed are unlawful and void.

Again the judge interrupted violently:

— I would be ready to pay the price of two cases of whisky if these defendants were able to say that to a Jordanian military court!

Mrs. Langer: The question now is not one of compare and contrast and then if this had been Jordanian jurisdiction, these defendants would not have been sued at any court because they would not have committed any crime.

The Judge: They haven't committed any crime?

Mrs. Langer: No, they haven't. They came to their country that happened to be occupied by the Israeli army. International laws and the Geneva Conventions itself guarantee the right for any citizen of an occupied country to return to his land.

Hanna Nakkarah and Ghazi Koufer joined the discussion by producing documents and international law books that supported our point of view from the legal side.

Mrs. Langer: Your occupation of this country is not legal. By the same token, whatever emanates from it is not legal also. You have no right to form courts and prosecute persons who do not fall under the legislation of the Knesset concerning the treatment of Israeli citizens. The sons of the occupied territory still follow the statutes of another country which is the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

The judge: If you consider yourselves to be men, confess that

you are saboteurs. If you had any valour, you would confess to the charges against you!

Our answer: You have no right to try us. We are not guilty and we do not have to remind you that what you want us to confess, in the name of manhood, is not within the frames of charges directed against us.

The judge: This country is not for the Kingdom of Jordan. The Ottomans occupied it, after then the British, then King Abdullah and now we!

Ghazi Koufer stood up and produced as evidence a collection of resolutions taken by the Knesset.

Koufer: Even if there were no international laws and pacts to refute the legality of your trying the defendents, the resolutions of the Knesset itself say that the formation of this court in its present form is not legal. It is to be assumed that a court-martial is usually formed from the defense minister and there is no representative of the West Bank Governor in this court.

The judge: May I see these resolutions?

After looking at them, the judge said:

— Our trials are carried in accordance with the British Mandate Laws that are being used by Israel and Jordan. King Hussein through the mayor forms a court-martial. Our defense minister through the military governor forms the court. So objections is therefore overruled.

Turning to the public prosecutor, the judge said:

— Well, answer some of the points raised by the defendents.

Public Prosecutor: The defendents want to transform this court into a political one. Very well, I will answer them. However, your honor, this is the first time that such points for discussion are posed and in fact, I did not anticipate such a move. So may I ask for an adjournment of the court for three weeks while I prepare a counter study.

Court was adjourned and we were taken back to prison.

**

In the period between the two trials, the public prosecutor visited us in prison. I asked him whether he had prepared his reply. So he said:

— It was not for your own good to have changed the court into a political arena. Tell me, by Jove, how can you say that you do not recognize the charge of infiltration when it is clear that you had come from the East Bank without a permit?

★ The word "infiltration" denotes meanings that we cannot accept. As I told you before, we crossed the river and came from one city in our country to another city in our country. So, as a corollary, we would regard you as the infiltrators in the form of armed groups.

— All right, say that you crossed the river and that you do not accept the word "infiltration." Don't complicate matters!

★ Who, do we complicate matters? You told me once that the change in the list of charges was going to be only minor and when I received the new list, I found two other charges added that have no connection with me. You just want us to fall in the pit you have prepared for us. I am really surprised that you do not add any more charges that are of no connection to us. You can, I am sure, pass sentence for the mere fact that we have crossed the Jordan River. So why do you resort to the foolish addition of charges?

— The court will decide if the charges against you are just or not!

**

The day of the second trial arrived. There were more people present than at the previous trial. There were many Arabs from the Western Bank and occupied Palestine who had come to listen and there was a group of ladies from Nablus who had come to witness the proceedings of the court. (One reason for this increase might be due to the article dealing with our trial in the Israel Union newspaper, an Israeli Communist publication).

The public prosecutor took the floor and began his counter arguments. At one point, he held the Bible in his hand and stated that Palestine was their country according to what was written in the Bible. He started giving the corresponding Hebrew names to all the cities and towns of the Western Bank and Gaza! He then said:

— International law is elastic enough and here are some codes that allow us to organize life in the occupied territory.

Court was adjourned for a short interval to allow the judge to arrive at his verdict of what had taken place so far.

We were allowed in the meantime to see our families. Yet, no sooner had they come than a long argument took place between them and the Nablus ladies on one side and the Israeli sergeant escorting us. One of the ladies even told the sergeant as she wept bitterly:

— Listen to what I have to say. One day you are going to be on the other side. Hitler soared very high before he fell. Hulago also rose high before he fell. So beware of the day when you will fall as the wheel of time goes around.

We returned to the courtroom to hear the statement of the judge which turned out to be as follows:

— The defendents say (everything in detail). The public prosecutor says (everything in detail). It is the opinion of this court to accept everything that the public prosecutor says and to refute everything else.

Was it a surprise? No, since a court such as that cannot pronounce any other verdicts. At any rate, it is not important what the judge says or does not say; what is of utmost value is that we said what we wanted and our fellow citizens heard it.

**

Suddenly, the date of the next trial was upon us.

We were handcuffed and led to the courtroom and placed in the prisoner's dock.

This time all the police and army officers I had met in Jerusalem were present. First, Sapir came up to me and after shaking my hand said:

— Don't worry, your case is simple. It will be all right.

After him, Sergeant Levi came and his comment was:

— Why have you grown so thin?

★ Because of your treatment.

— Don't they treat you well in prison?

★ I am not referring to the treatment in the prisons but to yours.

— Who me?

★ Not you particularly but I just want to know, especially from you because you wrote down my statements, how I could be charged with three offences? Do you want to show a certain danger that you imagine is there in order to justify my long detention?

— Did you say that you are charged with three offences? How come?

★ Are you asking me that?

— I will say only what you have told me.

★ I would like you to tell me from where you got the accusation that I belong to an illegal organization.

— Is this one of the charges?

★ Yes, it is.

The public prosecutor came. So I asked him, in order to break the ice:

★ Where is your mother? I do not see her here today, although she was here last time.

— She isn't here. But why do you want to see her?

★ Actually this courtroom means nothing to me. I just wanted to see new faces.

— I hope you will visit us at home and have a cup of coffee there after you are set free.

★ Set free? This will only happen if there is justice in Israel.

— Don't you believe that we have justice?

★ You have taken a country and complicated generations yet you ask me whether you have justice or not?

— You always deviate towards politics. One day you will pay the price for your political arguments.

★ And so simply enough, the myth of democracy in Israel dissolves! With all that, let me tell you something: My political ideas and beliefs I will always proclaim. Instead of sentencing me for one month, make it ten, instead of a year, make it ten. I believe that the free word of the Palestinians will be uttered in front of you even if you evolve your weapons and acquire nuclear ones.

With that the public prosecutor left me, somewhat apologetically.

✱

The court session began with a reading of our statements. When it was time for my statement to be read, Defense Attorney, Hanna Nakkarah, objected. He said:

— We have noticed clear differences between my client Asaad's statement and its Hebrew translation. We, therefore, refute the statement and refuse all translated statements.

Sapir: The translation is exact.

Nakkarah: I maintain it is wrong.

The judge: Let us compare between the two texts in court.

Sapir took the witness stand and began to read the Hebrew

text while Nakkarah followed with the Arabic one. To our astonishment, there was an implicating change in every line.

Everyone in court began deriding the twisted translation, even the judge himself, until the last paragraph was reached, which proved to be the last straw on the camel's back.

I had literally said in one of the paragraphs:

★ And so you can see that my work during the last six years has been limited to union activity only. While I was in Beirut, I was a friend to the Arab Nationalist Movement and I still respect and support it; I am still and will remain its friend.

In Hebrew this paragraph read as follows:

— During my stay in Beirut, I became a *member* of the Arab Nationalist Movement and I am still and will remain one.

This was the translation that Sapir had assured me was done by a student of the Arabic language at the Hebrew University.

Faced with laughter among the public, the judge announced that the session will continue when the translation is corrected. Then he called on Sapir to bring forth the evidence against us. So Sapir said:

— We arrested the first defendant, Ali Awawida and found with him these blankets.

A soldier came in with four blankets which were entered as evidence.

Sapir continued.

— We arrested the second defendent, Khalil Bahis, while he was carrying this heater.

Another soldier came in carrying the heater which was entered as evidence.

Sapir went on:

— We arrested the third defendent and found in his possession a counterfeit identity card in the name of Ghaith.

I immediately objected stating that the identity card was in my name. Sapir apologized quickly to the bench and said:

— We found another paper with the defendent that I am not carrying with me now!

Court was adjourned until further notice so that my statement would be re-translated.

✱

In the interval during the last two sessions, Mrs. Felicia Langer and Mr. Ali Rafah visited me and told me that they had interviewed the public prosecutor who had informed them of the decision that the charges of armed infiltration against

my two friends and the charge of belonging to an illegal organization against me had all been dropped on the grounds of lack of evidence. They also said that they were expecting the court to issue a sentence setting me free. For that there was no need now for any witnesses for the defense to testify on the bad treatment we had received during investigation; among those witnesses were Ishac Muraghi and Tayseer Koubaa.

✱

Finally, the date of the last trial came. The public prosecutor opened the session by dropping the two charges of armed infiltration against my friends and that of membership in an illegal organization against me.

As far as I was concerned, the public prosecutor said:

— I am not insisting on the charge of membership on the grounds of lack of evidence but I ask the court to convict the defendent on the charge of infiltration and the charge of possessing a counterfeit identity card.

Mrs. Langer then presented the case for the defense. Concerning me, she said:

— Since the charges directed against the first and second defendents are not confirmed and therefore need the minimum indictment, namely Asaad Abdel Rahman, should be reduced in period to a ratio of seven times less the minimum indictment. And we request the court to consider the period

the defendent has already spent in prison sufficing and to set him free.

Court was adjourned for a period of ten minutes for the judge to study the case finally and give his verdict.

The public prosecutor approached me and said:

— Do you mind if we should talk a little?

★ Not at all.

We walked in the prison yard and then the prosecutor said:

— I think there is no need to place the handcuffs. Will you escape?

★ Escape? How can I escape when this building is surrounded by your soldiers. Handcuffs are not the only hindrance to escape. You can relax.

— Let me tell you something. I respect Asaad Abdel Rahman who has tried to defend his case but I despise Asaad Abdel Rahman the saboteur.

★ Concerning the first part of your statement, this is up to you. As for the second part, I believe that the object of our long discussions was to explain that I am not a saboteur.

— In any case, I believe, though not irrevocably, that the

verdict would be to send you today to the East Bank and so there won't be any opportunity for me to hear what you have already said to other Israeli officers. Could you give me a brief resume of what you think of Israel?

★ Throughout my discussion with the high-ranking officers, I stressed on three points:

First: Israel is a colonial evacuant entity and is also a base for international imperialism, in particular American imperialism.

Second: Israel is an aggressive entity, both theoretically and practically.

Third: Israel is an entity that practices racial discrimination against the Arabs and Oriental Jews.

I wish I had the opportunity of discussing the problem in more detail to prove to you, as I have already proved to others, through quotations taken from your books found at the Hebrew Library, the validity of my stand.

— But Abdel Nasser want to throw us into the sea.

★ Do you believe that this is true? I think that you have fabricated such a statement and have come to believe it through repetition. Being a university man, why don't you study Abdel Nasser's speeches to make sure that he never uttered such a statement. Nasser has consistently demanded that the rights

of the Palestinian nation be restored. This is quite a different thing from throwing you into the sea.

We were summoned back to court. I informed my attorneys, friends, and family what had passed between the public prosecutor and myself. They all wished me luck and bade me goodbye as that meeting was probably going to be the last.

Finally, the judge read the following verdicts:

First Defendent; Ali Awawida five years' imprisonment.

Second Defendent: Khalil Bahis three years' imprisonment.

Third Defendent; Asaad Abdel Rahman one year imprisonment.

So the discussion we had in the prison yard was not without purpose. They had hinted that they would send me away immediately and after that, they asked my political opinion for the last time expecting me to flatter them. In any case, as I had previously told the public prosecutor:

★ I shall always state my political opinions and beliefs. Instead of one month, sentence me to ten; instead of one year, sentence me to ten. I believe that the free word of the Palestinians will be uttered in front of you even if you evolve your weapons and acquire nuclear ones.

CHAPTER XI

DEPARTURE

After the sentence was passed, I was called to the main office in the prison to register the length of imprisonment and decide on the date for my release.

I was shocked to find that they had registered the day of my internment as Jan. 23, 1968 instead of Dec. 21, 1967. This meant that the period of my imprisonment would be extended one more month if I did not prove to them the real date. I entrusted this case to my attorneys so that they would follow up the problem with the Jerusalem police; I also asked the attorneys to do what they could with the officials concerned to allow us to receive magazines and newspapers in the prison, a privilege they had granted us for only two months and then stopped.

A few days later, I was called to see Sergeant Abu Asher, a prison sergeant who was known to most prisoners as the 'Prisoner Murderer' for his bad treatment of prisoners; he was actually responsible for beating us when we first came to the Ramallah prison but I should also say that after the passing of our sentences, he tried his best to change from the level of murderer to that of a human being. Abu Asher said to me:

— I spoke the other day to the warden and asked that you be kept here in Ramallah because we have noticed that all the prisoners respect you and respect your opinion. If you wish, therefore, to represent the prisoners in front of us, we will try to solve some problems. I believe that you are more able to help your friends and solve their problems.

★ Well, I fully accept on basic principle. However, I can see that I will not be able to solve any problem if the administration does not prove to the prisoners that it actually wants to abolish the causes of the problems. We regard ourselves as your prisoners but we do not consider that we are fighting the prison officials as much as fighting the whole existence of our occupied land . . .

— Don't let's go into politics now. Let's leave politics out of the prison scope. I do not care what you did before you were arrested; all I want is to stop all this trouble . . .

★ What is important is to reflect your lack of concern for what we had done before our arrest in your treatment of us in actual practice. A halting of troubles is subject to a better treatment. I will take the opinion of my friends as to your suggestion and we will see.

I did discuss the situation with my fellow prisoners and they all insisted that I accept the proposal so that we would insure at least the minimal amount of fair treatment. Thus, I assumed my new role as a go-between between the prisoners and the administration after a few days.

For all that, I noticed, right at the beginning, that a number of guards and one sergeant did not approve of this new attempt towards a better treatment. On the whole, curses and insults decreased to a minimum; beating became rare; punishment through isolation in a cell or in Section X, which was the most terrifying section in the prison, began to be used only with new prisoners in order to isolate them, beat them, or hide the traces of preliminary investigation; the time spent in the toilets became adequate enough to allow us to fulfill our needs, without any kicking on the doors; exposure to the sun became allowed twice a day for ten minutes each time; getting partly in touch with the outside world was now allowed through *The Jerusalem Post*, the only newspaper we were allowed to see; medical attention was improved; basic cleanliness in the prison increased; shaving became allowed twice per week and bathing once every seven or ten days; the period allowed for family visits began to increase towards the half-hour formally allowed us; finally, food, when it contained any worms, could be returned and substituted for by olives or some other kind of food.

As for the prison officials, the improvement was clear in their personalities and treatment:

— Prison Warden Mans most of the time forgot that the prisoners were Arab nationalists and treated them like human beings. Nevertheless, the fact that he did not have everyday dealings minimized his role greatly.

— Sergeant Rospier was a person who never appeared except during trouble and then only to side against the prisoners.

— Sergeant Abu Asher improved greatly during the last part of my stay, yet one could feel that he was putting a lot of effort in order to behave humanely since he had been known for his strictness throughout that first year of the occupation.

— Sergeant Bodpaul was a disciplinarian of an astonishing degree who reconciled between the rights the prisoners had and his own Zionist inclinations.

— Sergeant Ali Juan seemed to be very easy with the prisoners but never fulfilled any promises to help them.

— Sergeant Berlanti joked a lot with the prisoners malevolently, for the minute any clash with the administration arose, the joking attitude would change to one of tyranny.

With that set-up, there was no choice for us but to keep on clashing on certain occasions. As an example, here is one incident:

A spiteful and mean guard called Hakshor was continually grasping every opportunity to insult, bother, and annoy us above all that we were suffering. One morning, he started beating a sick prisoner. When I tried to come between them so that he would stop this assault, he pushed me aside very roughly. I became angry and cursed him. After a while, Sergeant Berlanti appeared on the scene; apparently, this was an opportunity for him to destroy all that we had been able to build of an existence for ourselves. He gave his orders to place me in a solitary cell or in 'X'. It was, however, Bodpaul

who apportunately intervened and stopped them from transferring me. I asked to have an interview with him during which I told him very angrily:

★ You've got to decide whether you want to treat us like human beings or like animals. We refuse to be treated like anything but human beings. This guard Hakshor never greets us except with you . . . and he never calls except you . . .; we are never able to enter the toilet without his curses and kicking descend upon us . . . and today he deliberately beat a prisoner whom you all know is sick!

After half an hour, the whole prison was in a state of tension. I went to my room, having decided to stop whatever I was trying to do to cooperate with the administration. Besides, the prisoners decided to go on a hunger strike. Berlanti send for me. I went to see him and found that Bodpaul was there too. He pointed to a chair and said:

— Sit down. I want you to tell me what happened.

I began telling him exactly what had happened noticing that all the time he was shaking his head, pretending to be sympathetic. He even started to swear at the guard. So, in order to break his pretense, I said:

★ . . . and for all that, you came and before even verifying the situation, you put a fellow prisoner in 'X' and you issue orders to put me in solitary confinement. I have tried what is more difficult than solitary confinement. In brief, it is up to you to decide how you want to treat us, like human beings or not!

— You know very well that I do not want to create trouble. I actually wanted to ask you what had happened but the guards told me that you had abused us. At any rate, let's consider the problem ended.

Yet the problem did not end as we continued with our hunger strike until a fellow prisoner was removed from Section X.

**

The public prosecutor Hosiah used to come to the prison to interview the prisoners who were going to stand trial in order to see whether they wanted defense attorneys appointed for them or not. During those visits, I had several political discussions with him in English. They would go along the following lines:

After the National Front had hijacked the El Al Boeing 707 plane and imprisoned its passengers, Hosiah came one day and said:

— I'll bet you anything that the plane and its passengers will be returned.

★ I do not think so; in fact, I am positive that it will be the contrary. Algiers has its own private revolutionary laws. If in fact they are still detaining Tschombe so what do you think would they do with an Israeli plane and its passengers? The sympathy of the Algerian people which is quite sharp towards Palestine, the Arab upholding of the Algerian position, and

the hopes of the Palestinian prisoners cannot but guide the Algerian government towards a sound attitude. Subsequently, the return of the plane and its passengers is a pawn for fulfilling the demands of the National Front for the release of all prisoners.

— At least, I can say that my personal opinion is the disagreement with the demands of the National Front. Under all circumstances, the plane and its passengers must be returned unconditionally. Do you understand what it would mean if we were to give in? Sabotaging will extend with new blood through the release of all those saboteurs, in addition to the fact that this will mean a recognition on our part of the legality of the act of hijacking and the encouragement of other saboteurs to perform similar deeds.

★ For this reason Algiers will insist on keeping its position.

Actually after the incident, the prisoners started inviting each other to visit, once they would return to their homes and families. At last, the Palestinians had a weapon they could use.

The plane with all its passengers was returned in the midst of much ridicule and mockery of us and our hopes, on the part of some of guards and prison officials. The great hopes of the prisoners had all been destroyed . . . satirical jokes about the plane from the guards fell like blows on our faces. The following up of news about the aeroplane had for forty days changed the routine of prison life and filled the empty hours of our lives; now, the routine was brought back mixed with a bitter let-down. Words cannot adequately describe

the hope and joy for a short time and the gloom and disappointment for a long time following. And as if to console ourselves, we used to say:

— When we decided to work, we had decided before to pay the price with willing hearts. It is enough that the world has heard at last through this incident that the Palestinian people are still fighting.

**

In my last discussion with the public prosecutor he said:

— I see you are smoking a lot.

★ I used to smoke more.

— Then at least the prison has benefited you by making you smoke less.

★ My smoking less is a result of the scarcity of cigarettes and not because of any benefits that the prison might have caused.

— How many cigarettes can you now get?

★ It depends. Except for Friday, the most I can get is seven cigarettes a day. Sometimes, it is five, sometimes two and at times none at all.

— Have you ever tried 'Hashish'?

★ No, never. I will never try it.

— Why not? 'Hashish' is not harmful because it does not cause a person to become an addict as in the case of opium. By the way, what are your plans after you get out of prison?

★ I do not know as yet. I might continue for my doctorate.

— I am not sure that you will continue your studies.

★ If you are referring to my serving the Palestinian question, this is inevitable.

— In what scope?

★ If the situation continues as it is now, I will be ready to assume any role I am convinced is of most value, whether it is military or political.

— You have no hope in military work. You tried yourselves with us in 1956, 1967 and also in 1948!

★ This is not true. We did not try ourselves with you alone, especially in 1956.

— Who occupied Gaza and Sinai?

★ You took the opportunity when the Egyptian army withdrew to face the British and French and you occupied the territory. Your position was aptly described by Moshe Dayan in his book *Diary of the Sinai Campaign* when he said that you were like the man riding a motorcycle who was helped in ascending the mountain by holding on to an Anglo-French truck.

— This is not true.

★ I was not the one to say that. It was Moshe Dayan.

— At any rate, why do you always insist that war is the only solution?

★ Have you left us any other choice? By the way, how old are you?

— Twenty seven.

★ Do you know that sometimes I am ashamed that you, nearly my age, are a full ranking captain ready to fight me at any time while I do not—until now—know how to use a revolver!

— Is that really so? But do you really want to participate in a war against us?

★ Let me tell you frankly: I have missed three wars but I do not want to miss a fourth.

— Anyhow, military training is not a difficult question.

★ My people are not trained militarily not because the training is difficult but because of political reasons.

— Why don't you negotiate directly with us? Why this silly insistence on indirect negotiations?

★ Why *your* silly insistence on direct negotiations? We do

not recognize your existence and any direct negotiations would mean that we have actually recognized the Israeli State.

— This is totally unnecessary. Here we are talking now . . . does this mean that you recognize me as a captain or that I recognize you as a Palestinian official?

★ The case between countries is different in accordance with international laws. Direct negotiations mean clear recognition. Why do you see all this difference in America's insistence—which I am sure you do not consider silly—on no direct negotiations with the Viet Cong? In relation to our conversation, if I had not been a prisoner, I would not have exchanged a word with any Israeli official. I do not want you to make the mistake that since I am a prisoner, I should be cowardly in front of you; for that I answer you!

— Do you mean that if you had met me in New York, you would have refused to speak to me, being an Israeli officer?

★ Certainly. On many occasions, we met Israeli student delegations—during various international conferences— but we refused to discuss anything with them.

— You haven't answered up till now my question about your future plans!

★ The only thing I am sure of is that I am going to write a book about my experiences in your jails!

— Will this book also have a subject by which you express your real convictions?

★ My convictions have not changed in the first place. In the second place, I am not one who would write about things that he has not experienced at first hand but just imagined while sitting in a closed room. I am telling you from now, the book will be a black book!

— Why?

★ Because you still insist on complicating the Palestinian generations, generation after generation—beating, torture . . .

— I wonder at your talk of torture.

★ I wonder at your astonishment and I can give you the names of those who are with me in the cell. Ask . . ., ask . . ., ask . . . You know all these prisoners since they are now in prison!

— It is dangerous to release a person like you!

★ I will repeat what I told you in court. You can detain me as long as you please. The only difference at the end is that instead of your opening the gates for me, the Arab army will open the gates for all of us.

— You believe in that no doubt! May be this explains the lack of concern on the part of the prisoner for our sentences. At any rate aren't you afraid that I might write to the responsible officials advising that they detain you for a new term after this one ends?

★ If I were afraid of that, I would not have said what you know I have to some important Israeli officials. We will express our opinion regardless of the consequences.

At that moment, I saw a new prisoner in the yard. His face was swollen and his face was bleeding. So I quickly turned to the public prosecutor and said:

★ Do you want a tangible example of your torture? Look back.

He looked and what he saw made him turn pale. I did not know that someone could become that deathly pale so soon! Suddenly he said:

— For this reason, I think it is a mistake to set you free! Yet I am in the habit of fulfilling my job and that only; so do not fear a report I am not going to write.

★ I have already answered you on this point. Now, I'd like to add that what you saw right now of injuries on that man's face are only the traces hiding a lot of what that man was like four days ago. I wish you could have seen him then or when he returns from Sarafand where the torture camp is. I must mention that this happened during preliminary investigations here in Ramallah!



During the next two months, my attorneys pursued their attempts to set me free. Mrs. Langer and Ali Rafeh visited me several times and informed me that they were trying to arrange

it so that I would be able to stay with my family two weeks when I came out of prison in preparation for my trip to Amman, where I would continue my studies. For that reason, they asked me to hand in an application. When a few days later, the prison warden called me in to see him, I actually presented my request to him.

I was informed after that that I would be released after a few days; the army had consented to that. However, the events of bomb-throwing in Tel-Aviv delayed my release. I was informed anew that I would be released, but the Egyptian-Israeli border clashes again delayed my release.

On November 28, 1968 a guard came to inform me that I would be released the following day and sent away to the East Bank. I asked him:

★ What about my stay with my family in Nablus?

— This was refused.

★ Not even for three days?

— That is not to be allowed.

★ Then allow me to remain eighty more days here so that I can stay with my family after my release for as long as I want.

— The military governor of Ramallah has communicated the following message: that you will be sent away tomorrow and

that you will not be allowed to stay with your family for even one day.

★ But from where did this decision come? I was sentenced for a year but the sentence did not include anything about sending me away!

— All I know is that you will be leaving tomorrow.

As a matter of fact, I was called the next day and taken in a car to the police station in Ramallah, where I found my parents waiting to accompany me to Amman.

We were escorted by Israeli policemen from the police station in Ramallah to the Allenby Bridge. From there, without turning back, we continued our trip to Amman.

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