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THE PALESTINIAN BAR MITZVAH

July 24, 2008 at 8:48 am ([Israel](#), [Palestine](#), [Soldier Brutality](#))



The following essay was written by Bassam Aramin, the father of the gorgeous child pictured at the left. Abir was only 10 years old when she was brutally murdered by Israeli soldiers while at play in her schoolyard.

Bassam is an active member of a Palestinian/Israeli organisation known as [Combatants for Peace](#). Despite his personal loss and suffering, he has never lost his vision for peace in this region.

The following is a personal account of the continuing struggle.....

The Palestinian Bar Mitzvah

Bassam Aramin writing from occupied Jerusalem



Israeli soldiers arrest a young man in the West Bank city of Qalqiliya, June 2008. (Khaleel Reash/[MaanImages](#))

My son Arab is 14, just past the age that his Jewish Israeli peers are celebrating their Bar Mitzvahs. This ceremony in Jewish culture is a rite of passage that marks a boy's entrance into the realities and responsibilities of adulthood. And last week, my son experienced something akin to the Palestinian Bar Mitzvah.

It was a beautiful day on Friday the 12 July when Arab went with his friends to the beach in Tiberias. He spent all of his time in the days leading up to the trip trying to convince me that I should let him go. At first I refused — he's young to be traveling so far in a group without his parents. But then I remembered the regret I still feel about the death of my daughter Abir.

Abir was ten when she was killed by Israeli occupation forces on 16 January 2007 in front of her school in Anata. That morning, when she asked her mother and me for permission to play with her friends after school, I'd refused. I told her, "Don't even think of coming home late, come back right away so you can prepare for your next exam." And she answered me with the last words I ever heard from her,

petulant and innocent. "Well, I'm going to be late." She was angry with me. She was late that day, but not because she met her friends. A bullet from an Israeli border patrolman found her instead, and she never came back. I regret having refused her request, not knowing that it would be her last — that she would be late despite me and despite herself.

When I saw how much Arab wanted to go, I thought of Abir and gave my permission with the condition that he look after himself and be in constant phone contact with me.

Arab and his friends Rafet, Saleh and Mohammad got themselves ready for a day at the beach, and the bus set out at 7:00am. There were about 45 passengers: Arab and nine of his peers, who range in age from 14 to 17; the rest were families and children and a group of girls Arab's age, all legal residents of Israel with East Jerusalem IDs. I was pleased with how happy Arab was during the time he called to check in. Arab loved Abir fiercely, and her death was an awful blow especially to him, the oldest of her siblings. I was so glad to hear joy in his voice again.

At 11:00pm Arab called me and said they had almost made it back and he'd be home in half an hour. But 11:30 came and went. At exactly 12:00am I called him, angry that he was late. He answered in a hushed voice with words that chilled me.

"There are a lot of soldiers here. The police stopped the bus, we don't know why, and we're in Jerusalem — the soldier is asking us not to talk on the phone, I'll call back later." And he hung up the phone. I didn't know why they went all the way into Jerusalem proper and where exactly they were in the city, and I was in this terrible state of not knowing what was happening to my son, trying to call him and getting no answer until an hour and a half later when he answered the phone and said quickly, "we are now in the Israeli police station, they've detained everyone from the bus, they are checking us all and I am not allowed to talk to you now and

they'll let us go soon," and again he hung up.

There are no words for the state I was in during those hours, waiting for his next call and dreading it would not come. Then at 2:30am he called again to say that they were at the Moscobiyye detention center in Jerusalem. I asked him why they were being detained, and he said he did not know. I told him, "Go up to the soldier and tell him, you have to talk to my father, he does not know where I am."

He replied that he was scared to do so; they'd already beaten many of the kids there because they had talked and talking was not allowed. "But I trust you, Dad."

I told him he was brave, and that he shouldn't be scared of the soldier. "Talk to him in Hebrew," I said. I made sure to teach all my children Hebrew from a young age. I could hear Arab go up to the soldier and tell him, "Please, can you talk to my father?" But the soldier told him to shut his mouth and hang up the phone.

"If your father wants to see you tell him to come here," he said.

I was beside myself. I yelled in my loudest voice, "You murderers! Where is my son? Do you want to kill him as you killed his sister a year ago?" I told Arab to turn on the speakerphone so the soldier could hear what I was saying, but he had a better eye on the situation and said to me, "Dad, don't be afraid. I am okay. They are going to let us go in a bit like they said; I'll talk with you soon." And he hung up.

At exactly 3:00am the Israeli occupying forces let the group go, and I waited on pins and needles until 3:40am for Arab to come home. He was exhausted, so I told him to please go to sleep and we could talk in the morning. The most important thing was that he was okay.

The next day I returned from work in the evening to find

Arab and Rafet in the house, and I heard what had happened.

In the industrial neighborhood of Wad al-Joz in Jerusalem, a group of Israeli special forces troops on motorcycles along with police and army reinforcements were stationed on the path the bus from Tiberias was taking to get its passengers, all legal residents of Israel, home. They demanded that the driver stop immediately. One of the soldiers got on the bus and said, "Anyone who moves his head, I'll put a bullet in it." Arab said to me, "At that moment all I could think of was Abir, who really was shot in the head by a bullet."

The soldier continued, "We are from national security." He then told the young men, about ten of them, to begin taking off their clothes in the bus, in front of the women and girls. Then he took them out one by one and had them lie down on the filthy street, littered with stones and pieces of glass. They began with Ahmed, who was 16 years old. Then all the young men had to strip and get out of the bus and lie on the ground. One of them was injured in the stomach by a piece of glass. Arab asked me, "How can they ask the men to undress in front of the women? They don't have morals!"

I asked him, "Do you think they perhaps have at least some basic morals?"

His answer was definitive: "None at all." I explained to him that humiliation by forced nakedness didn't just happen to his friends: it is a longstanding problem in the Israeli military. When we were in their prisons without any way to defend ourselves, our guards would take sadistic pleasure in seeing us naked, in humiliating us.

Arab, the youngest of the boys, stayed in the bus with the women and children. Then one of the female soldiers got on the bus and called out to another soldier who he couldn't see, "Avichai, come bring the dog."

Arab said, "At first I thought that Avichai was Avichai

Sharon," my friend and colleague in Combatants For Peace who also is a part of the partner organization Breaking the Silence, an organization that publicizes the barbaric and criminal practices of the Israeli occupying forces in Hebron. Arab wasn't so scared of the idea of a military dog because he thought that the Avichai that he knew would be its master. But then he saw that this Avichai was not our friend, and he didn't resemble him in any manner except his first name. This soldier would let out the dog's leash in the direction of women and children and then pull him back at the last second. He looked pleased with himself when the leader of the trip, Um Shams, fainted, and he also smiled when two children, ages four and five, urinated out of fear and terror. The soldiers checked everyone, even taking off the diaper of a baby who was under one year old. "They're even afraid of our unweaned babies," said Arab in amazement. "They cursed us with all the ugly expressions and slurs they could think of. One of them said that all Arabs are trash-they are racist!" All the passengers on the bus had the absolute legal right as residents of East Jerusalem to travel anywhere within Israel that they please.

I told my son, "Some of them are, but not every Jewish Israeli is like that. There are a few who aren't affected by this racism, but nevertheless it colors Israeli society. It's no wonder that the United Nations determined that Zionism was a racist movement over 30 years ago." True, that decision was overturned, but the racism has remained deeply ingrained. Most don't consider the continual discrimination against Palestinians, be they residents of the West Bank and Gaza, residents of East Jerusalem, or Israeli citizens to be racist. They try to spin it as necessary "for ongoing security reasons." But at least some people in Israeli society see the shameful truth as it is, without attempting to whitewash it. And they are not alone. Recently a delegation of human rights activists, lawyers and judges from South Africa, a country which suffered under the yoke of Apartheid, visited our region. They declared that what they saw in Israel was

more than just racial segregation — it was government-sponsored racism, discriminatory policies against Palestinians.

Arab kept asking me why the Israeli soldiers were doing what they were doing to the Palestinians. At one point I thought he was about to explode in anger. And then his voice changed, and he said something very unexpected. "I wish that you had been there with us, Dad. I'm sure you would have taught them a lesson, and spared all of us that indignity. You would have spoken to them in Hebrew and made them understand that they were wrong, like you always do with soldiers at checkpoints, like when that soldier yelled at us at the Wad al-Nar checkpoint when we were going to visit the Galilee. Then, you spoke with him and he ended up apologizing to you and wishing that we could all live together in peace."

Then he said something even more surprising. "I want you to take me with you when you go to one of your lectures in Israel so I can tell the Israelis about the practices of their soldiers on that night." I asked him if he was serious — Arab has always questioned my willingness to talk with the other side and sit down with Israelis in forums like those Combatants for Peace provides. But he insisted, saying, "They have to know what happened so the parents of those soldiers can forbid their children to act that way towards women and children again."

The final indignity of that Friday night was when Saleh, Arab's friend, had to go to the bathroom and asked many times if he could get up from his prone position on the asphalt to go relieve himself. Avichai refused his request each time. Saleh talked quietly with Rafet, who has a limited range of motion in his hand and left foot, and they decided that Rafet would ask if he could go and Saleh could volunteer to help him. At last Avichai gave his permission to let Rafet go to the bathroom on the condition that Saleh would not relieve himself. Saleh did not know this protector of the security of the state of Israel was following them on their

base errand until he was squatting in the middle of his "terrorist operation," trying to relieve himself, and Avichai began using his hands and feet to hit him across the face and head as a lesson to others as to what happens when you fail to carry out a military order. Let me remind you, Saleh and Rafet are legal residents of the state of Israel.

What happened is deeply embarrassing and shameful, but it is the truth. I asked Arab, "Did they apologize to you when they finally let you go?"

He said, "Sure they did. They said to us, 'Looks like you were naked on the beach in Tiberias by day, and naked on the "beach" of Wad al-Joz by night. Now scram.'" He repeated these words to me with an ironic expression on his face that I have never seen before. And I thought, with an equal measure of irony, "Today, he is a man."

Translated from Arabic by Miriam Asnes

Bassam Aramin lives in Anata, just outside of Jerusalem.

[Source](#)

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6 Comments



coolcuke said,

July 24, 2008 at [5:56 pm](#)

Woe unto the Earth for Satan has been cast down among you knowing that he has but a short time.



Jerry said,

July 24, 2008 at [7:20 pm](#)

The days of that cancerous terrorist rathole in the middle east are numbered. Rest assured. And all those inbred reptile, cowardly, born evil, child murdering rodents will get what they have coming.

Amen.



[aliyaallzionists](#) said,

July 24, 2008 at [9:51 pm](#)

Rest In Peace, sweet, tender child, Abir, israel can no longer harm you.
Arab and his wise, loving father, Bassam Aramin, are heroes.



Jawahir said,

July 25, 2008 at [12:54 am](#)

It is sad to hear such stories come out and i am sure there are more which is much much worst than this...and yet we see the international community could not even care less...the double standard that exist is so apparent in their views of how a Palestinian life is valued....

I wish for peace in the world and pray that by Almighty Allah that justice will prevail one day for my fellow Muslims in Palestine. Incidents like these should be widely publicised and anyone who can help/assist on this should do so..not because of religion or whether Christians or Muslims ut for teh sake of humanity , human values and right /wrong.

Jawahir



[Bronwin Peel](#) said,

July 25, 2008 at [2:57 am](#)

I am so very sorry about what happened to Abir. What a beautiful child she was! What a waste! As an American I cannot describe the shame I feel that my government continues to support Israel. I am desolate about what has happened to my country due to the stranglehold the Zionists have on our elected officials and our media. We have become the United States of Israel, with our presidential nominees fawning over a foreign government and ignoring the interests and needs of their US constituents.

6.

**[Extremist Zionism is Dead](#) said,**July 25, 2008 at [8:33 am](#)

The sad thing is its not the soldiers fault either, they're just acting out with those raging hormones.

The real problem is the racist rabbis who indoctrinate these soldiers, these people of the IDF from a very young age to believe they are the biblical chosen people and have "MORAL" authority, to treat everyone else lesser!

Or treat them like THIS! My god the things in the Babylon bible sound just like they came from Satan. No just God could EVER demand a chosen race which treats everyone else out there like lesser animals. These people following the racist teachings of that book, of osiris and the pharisees, they are truly the most poisoned of the mind & soul to give all the soldiers this teaching and make them believe in it like they believe in santa claus.

Same principle applies!!!!

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