

Prison interrogation techniques in Israel: Now you are paralyzed, as we promised

by Gideon Levy

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"We have to make you do a little sports," the Shin Bet interrogator said, launching four successive days of questioning accompanied by brutal physical torture. The result: Luwail Ashqar can no longer stand on his feet. He sits in his wheelchair, dressed in a fashionable quasi-military suit, super-elegant, new Caterpillar-brand shoes on his paralyzed feet.

"I love this color," he says about his uniform. "It's the color of the soldiers who came to arrest me for the interrogation that did all this to me."

His smile is captivating, his Hebrew rich and incisive. He is a young man whose world fell apart. He entered prison sound of body and mind and emerged a broken man. For four days and four nights nonstop, he says, he was interrogated and subjected to torture of the most brutal kind. The result is the person we see before us in the wheelchair, in the elegant home high in the village of Saida, north of Tul Karm, which was placed at his disposal by a friend after he was released from Israeli prison a month ago.

Was there a judgment by the High Court of Justice? There was. It banned precisely the types of torture he underwent: the "banana posture," the "shabah" (body stretching with hands tied to a chair), "invisible" blows and the "frog posture" (being forced to stand for hours on the toes in a crouching position) - all the way to a vicious kick to his chest that bent his body backward while he was tied to a chair with his arms and legs, and which was the probable cause of the partial paralysis of his legs.

Throwing up with the vomit entering his nostrils, losing consciousness and being given only saltwater to drink, relieving himself in his pants, not sleeping or resting - all of that for four consecutive days and nights.

What does the interrogator Maimon tell his children when he

goes home? What do Eldad and Sagiv tell their wives about their daily labors before they turn in? That they tortured another helpless prisoner until they turned him into a cripple? That they beat this charming young man brutally and that at the end of the interrogation he was tried for only marginal offenses? And where is the Supreme Court, which in 1999 prohibited precisely the chain of torture that Luwail Sati Ashqar, 30, who was married three years ago, underwent in the Kishon detention facility?

Ashqar is not alone. The Public Committee Against Torture in Israel has just issued a new report containing the testimonies of nine torture victims (English version: www.stoptorture.org.il//eng). As the authors of the shocking report say, the testimonies "paint a dismal picture in which can be discerned various categories of secret-keeping collaborators, who, in keeping silent, protect the [Shin Bet] system of torture." ...

On the wall is a picture, a fine drawing of a kneeling prisoner, his head between his knees. The caption: "I am in the darkness of the prison, living on your memory. I am far from you, lying in my bed, my spirit cruising your land all night. God will release all the prisoners, the strong will triumph."

Ashqar is sitting in his wheelchair, his left leg completely enclosed in a cast, his right leg shaking nonstop. When he tries to get up and lean on his crutches, he threatens to topple over. "I was married in 2004, and I started to work in aluminum in the village to provide for my new household. On April 22, 2005, at 2:30 A.M., the soldiers came and started to throw grenades and to shout for everyone in the house to go outside. They blindfolded me with whatever they use and handcuffed me. I was taken in a jeep to prison and I was examined by an army doctor. He looked over my body - no operations, doesn't take medication, no illnesses. Again I was taken in a military jeep, this time to Kishon. 'Yehuda, incoming,' the warder said and transferred me to the interrogation office. They opened my eyes: Good morning. An excellent morning. One of the interrogators, Maimon, told me: I am responsible for your file. What file? The one you were arrested for. This is the major, and this tall guy is the colonel, this is Sagiv and this is Eldad.

Eight interrogators.

"They said: We have no time, it will soon be our Passover and you have to finish everything in a short time. Finish what? You have to tell us what you have. I don't have anything to tell you. I begged. They said: We know all that nonsense. We are talking about security. Plans for terrorist attacks at Passover. I said: I don't understand what you are talking about. They said: The suicide bomber was at your place. What suicide bomber?

"After two hours of talking they said to me: If you don't give everything you have, we will have to take it by a different way. What is the different way? Did you hear of a military interrogation? You might leave here with your body battered or crippled. I was taken to a military interrogation. Here you pray to God that you will die, they said, but we won't give you that. We will let you die only after you spill out what we are looking for. He gave me a prison uniform and I told him that if I was going to die, I preferred my own clothes.

"They sat me down on a square chair without a back, which was attached to the floor and had sharp metal ends [sticking up]. My legs were tied to the legs of the chair with metal cuffs and my hands were tied behind my back with metal cuffs. One interrogator sat behind me and the other in front of me. The interrogator opposite me said: We have to give you a little sports, so you will be able to hold out in the military interrogation. The sports was that they pushed me backward by the chest, a backward somersault, and I would hold myself so my bones would not break. After a minute or two I would automatically fall on the floor, but the interrogator behind me would put his foot on my chest and press, and the interrogator in front would grab my hands and pull and pull behind the chair. They kept on like that until I don't know what happened to me, heat in every part of my body, puking everything I had in my stomach and it would go into my nostrils. I would wake up when they poured water on my face. When I woke up, we went back to the same situation. It went on like this 15-20 times an hour.

"After that they made me crouch on my toes, not letting me lean on the back of my foot. I was in that position for 40-50

minutes, maybe an hour - that was my estimate - until I felt my soles swelling and they turned blue and there was tremendous pain. After that, stand up, and they tied my hands and pressed as hard as they could on the metal handcuffs until the metal dug into my hand. Here are the signs, you can still see them. Because of the pressure, the key of the handcuffs didn't always work and they would bring huge metal scissors, like they use in construction, and tear off the handcuffs and then bring new ones, to go on. The color of my hands changed to blue, and when they opened [the handcuffs] my hands shook. The interrogator stood on the table and pulled me with a chain of handcuffs. When I fell, they pulled me by the hair.

"I would cry, beg, shout, and they came back to me with words, that it was impossible to stop, only after you start talking about what we want. I said to them: Tell me what you want. Tell me I am responsible for the attack on the Pentagon, I am ready to confess to everything, just tell me what. I want to end this death."

"There were always four interrogators and two rotated every four hours, day and night. The new ones would tell me they were stronger than the ones before, that the ones before were a joke, we are the strong ones. And that was true. The new ones tied me and started to beat me all over my body. One interrogator pressed hard on my testicles and on my feet with his shoes. When they slapped me and I tried to pull back, the major would say: What are you doing? If you move back, I will break your nose, and if you move forward I will rip off your ear. Be strong and take it sportingly, because you are a soldier and a fighter. They broke this tooth."

Ashqar suddenly stops talking. He turns pale and his face is covered with beads of perspiration. His father, Sati, quickly wipes his face with a damp cloth. "Every time I try to remember I get dizzy, even when I am alone." Quiet descends in the room. It will take Ashqar another few minutes to pull himself together.

"I was taken into detention on Friday morning, and that was the last light of day I saw before the interrogation. I came out for the first time on Monday night or before dawn on Tuesday

morning. On those long days I sat in a chair and did not even go to the toilet. So you won't kill yourself, they said. I urinated in my clothes, and a terrible stench started. For four days I didn't eat anything. They told me: If we give you something to eat, something will happen to your stomach and your intestines. Maybe they will explode under the pressure of the food when we push you backward. You will drink only half a cup of saltwater. That is what they gave me every time after they bent me and I vomited. Why with salt? I asked. Give me without salt. No, so nothing will happen in your stomach and intestines. I would drink it and vomit.

"On Monday evening, they told me that five witnesses had testified that Luwail had transported a wanted man. I told them that there was a famous wanted man named Luwail Sadi, but my name is Luwail Sati, and maybe they had mixed us up. He said to me: Are you saying the Shin Bet is that stupid? We know exactly what we're doing, and it is all correct. I said: Put me on trial for whatever you want. He said: Ya'allah, sports again. He pushes me backward in the chair. I will help you become a story in Palestinian history. He is talking to me and my head is down below. He pushes strongly with his leg and presses on my chest. I felt something like an explosion in my body. Like something broke. After that I don't know what happened. I woke up and they were pouring water on my face. Again they pushed me backward and again I fainted.

"He said to me: Stand on your feet. I felt that my legs were cold, like pins and needles in the legs. I said: I can't. He said: Now you are paralyzed. I said: I guess I am. He said: That is what we promised you and that is what you want."

"I discovered I had a wound in the back and it was bleeding - because of the sharp chair - and one of my bones was protruding. Because of the blood and because of the urine of four days there was such a stench that the interrogator could not come close to me. He said: Why do you stink like that? I told him: That is your perfume. A warder took me to the shower and threw me on the floor and said to me: Ya'allah, you have two minutes to shower. I looked at the faucet up above and I could not reach it. I pulled down my pants and the underpants stayed in place. I tried to pull them down - I could

do it in front but behind it was stuck to my back. The two minutes went by and the warder started to pound on the door. Time's up. I told him: Give me another two minutes, I can't reach the faucet. He came in and asked: What do you have on your back? I said: I don't know.

"He called the interrogator and said: Come and see the prisoner. The interrogator came and asked: What do you have, Luwaili? I said: I don't know what I have on my back, I can't pull the underpants down and I can't reach the faucet. He said: Ya'allah, we will go up and finish the story and take you to the doctor.

"Two warders took me in a Prisons Service vehicle to Rambam [Medical Center in Haifa]. In emergency, my hands and feet were tied and a Russian doctor asked me: What hurts you? I told him: My whole body hurts from the interrogation. The Druze warder said: Shut up. The doctor turned me on the side and stuck a finger into my ass. I asked him: What are you doing? He said: I am checking whether you have hemorrhoids. Why didn't you ask me first? I am a professional, he said. I said: What about the wound on the back? He put ointment there and dressed it. After 10 minutes I was taken back to interrogation. Again I was tied to the square chair. The bandage fell off and the wound started to bleed again. After that, they stopped the military interrogation."

He was interrogated for another two months, but without physical torture. He was told that his wife had been arrested because of him - a complete fabrication - and he was given a lie detector test ("the falsehoods machine," in his Hebrew). For two weeks he was placed in a cell with stool pigeons. In the end, he was indicted on only two counts, in Prosecution File 2157/05: assisting a wanted person to hide and using a forged document. No ticking and no bomb. Ashqar was sentenced to 26 months in prison and was released a month ago. In the meantime, his younger brother, Osaimar, disappeared. Soldiers came to the house looking for him, but he was not there. His family has not seen him since: He told them that he was not willing to undergo what Luwaili did.

Luwaii is now looking for a way to get medical treatment in Israel or abroad, after his physician told him that he would not be able to get rehabilitation in the West Bank. His lawyer told him that the Shin Bet will almost certainly prevent him from going anywhere.

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=7609>