

Bahaa Alayyan



By Ahlam Tarayra



Bahaa Alayyan.

Writing about Bahaa Alayyan is a tough task, given that his story has been the source of many articles published before and after he was extrajudicially executed in a shooting and stabbing attack against Israelis in Jerusalem in October 2015. His story is perceived in various ways by Palestinians themselves and by people from different parts of the world.

In addition to running a successful business in graphic design and printing, Bahaa was engaged in social activism. He had a passion for working with children and youth, striving to help them find a space in which they could express themselves and embrace their capabilities and potentials. At age 22, Bahaa was a remarkable community organizer, scout leader, and political activist, as well as a founder of the Local Youth Initiative that organized the first local library, a youth club, and a children's entertainment initiative in his neighborhood in East Jerusalem. Bahaa organized a human reading chain around the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem, and the human reading chains that have been organized and named after him in Palestine and around



Bahaa during an children's event.

commitment, solidarity, helping those in need, and implanting the values of freedom and togetherness," said Baraa, a 16-year-old guide with the local girl scouts, founded by Bahaa and his friends in a city where scouts are traditionally meant to be for boys only. "Bahaa always taught us that nothing is impossible," another girl scout said.* Bahaa was religious, yet tolerant, publicly insisting that it would be his future bride's personal decision whether or not to wear a head scarf.

"If Bahaa were here, he would have dressed like a clown and gone to see Dima, making her laugh, drawing colors on her cheek, putting wings on her back, and teaching her how to fly and reach the sky of her childhood. He would have given her a beautiful dream in a pink box that she could hide under her pillow in her tiny room," wrote Bahaa's father Muhammed Alayyan in a post that was published following the release of Dima Alwawi, the 12-year-old Palestinian girl imprisoned by Israel.

This Facebook post is part of a series of texts that the father has called "The Bahaa's" and dedicated to his son's memory, emphasizing that they are spaces of hope. Muhammed keeps reminding us that, despite the nagging question about the end of his son's journey, Bahaa's life mission had been

the world since his death are meant to maintain this part of his legacy.

"His message was that scouting is not just about marching in the streets and banging on a drum. It's about



*A reading chain at Jerusalem's Old City in March 2014.
Photo by Saeed Qaq.*

to work for the well-being of his people, especially children. The Bahaa's series consistently reminds us never to condone the involvement of Palestinian children in any kind of attacks because they have more important things to do: to live as children. Bahaa's family and friends are convinced that Bahaa, through his activities, was promoting the ideal that our responsibility as adults is to acknowledge that our children, like all children, deserve a normal life far removed from the conflicts and disputes of adults.

So what happened? What provoked a successful young leader to snap, get on a bus, and attack people with a gun and knives in an act that entirely contradicted his humanitarian ideals?

Bahaa was killed in the early days of what some people have called a third Intifada, which had already witnessed many extrajudicial killings of Palestinians. Only two days before his execution, Bahaa insisted on his Facebook page that Israa Ja'abees, his fellow resident of Jabal Al-Mukabber, was killed in cold blood when her car had malfunctioned due to an electrical short on her way to Hebrew University. Israel reported the incident as a gas-canister attack. Only one day before Bahaa's death, a video of Ahmed Manasra' went viral, showing the 13-year-old boy lying on a street, severely bleeding, extremely traumatized, and surrounded by hostile



Israeli settlers who were screaming at him and telling him to die. At the time when Bahaa boarded that bus, no one was sure whether or not Manasra' would survive his injuries. Bahaa likely was overwhelmed by feelings of helplessness in the face of widespread, prolonged cruelty.

As this article goes to print, Bahaa's body is still being held by the Israeli authorities, but the positive legacy of Bahaa's social activism remains alive.

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*Budour Youssef Hassan, "How a Scout Leader Became a Martyr," the The Electronic Intifada, October 22, 2015.