

Samih Al-Qasim

(1939–2014)

A TWIP Tribute

*From the narrow window of my small cell,
I see trees that are smiling at me
and rooftops crowded with my family.
And windows weeping and praying for me.
From the narrow window of my small cell
I can see your big cell!*

These words of resistance, wisdom, and compassion will continue to echo through the walls of our prison cells, in our threatened houses, and in every corner of Palestine. They are a reminder of a man who became a symbol and ultimately a legend of the Palestinian poetry movement and national resistance.

They call him the last of a great line of Palestinian poets that started with the likes of Ibrahim Touqan and Abdul Rahim Mahmoud in the 1930s, and continued with Samih's long-time mates Tawfiq Zayyad and Mahmoud Darwish.

Samih Al-Qasim was unique. He not only talked the talk, he also walked the walk. He remained true to himself and to his outspoken beliefs right up until his very last breath. A nationalist and believer in Arab unity, Al-Qasim was devastated by the *Naksa* in 1967, but he never lost hope, and his poetry did not deviate from the path he believed in. Unlike many of his contemporary poets, Samih Al-Qasim did not change his language or attitude. He remained in Palestine and chose a simple, down-to-earth lifestyle. He shied away from the glow of the lights and took comfort in the shade of the olive and fig trees in his Palestinian village of Rameh.

Voices like that of Samih Al-Qasim were, and continue to be, an important pillar of defence against the Israeli offensive against



Palestinian identity inside the 1948 occupied Palestinian lands. Being a member of the Druze faith in Israel, he refused the compulsory military service imposed on his people and wrote an open letter to David Ben-Gurion, the Israeli Prime Minister at the time, declaring that he was, in fact, born for poetry and not for the gun.

The huge reaction to his death, documented in all the newspapers throughout the Arab World, attests to his influence as an Arabic poet with a vast heritage of creativity – poetry, novels, books, and political essays.

Al-Qasim has left a rich legacy for many young poets in Palestine, but he always encouraged them to create a new Palestinian voice in their own poetry: “Look, this poem looks like me. Go away and bring me a poem that looks like you. I don’t want you to be a copy of me. I want your face, your language.”

We cannot help but be saddened by the tremendous loss of Samih Al-Qasim, his words and his presence in the Palestinian cultural arena. He fought illness for two years but was recently able to enjoy the wedding of his youngest son (Yasser). Al-Qasim decided finally to rest in peace and left wishing his people the peace they deserve and long for.

*The Day I die
my killer will find
tickets in my pocket:
One to peace,
one to the fields and the rain,
and one to humanity’s conscience.
I beg you – please don’t waste them
I beg you, you who killed me: go*