

My dearest beloved grandson, Salah Binyameen,

Ever since I learned of your birth and that you will bear my name, I have been praying for you and constantly thinking about you. I fervently pray to God Almighty that you become a positive force in our community and the world at large. It is no secret that you were born during one of the most challenging periods of my imprisonment, yet news of your birth brought me immense solace and joy. Your coming is a reminder of the time that has passed, my fifth grandson, the fourth of whom I have not met or spent time with because of my decade-long wrongful imprisonment in solitary confinement. The passing years have been arduous, and I feel as though time slips away from me without anyone to share my happiness or alleviate my solitude.

Dearest grandson, Salah, enduring a decade of imprisonment and torture, I found solace only in God. The darkness of my solitude has revealed many certainties and has granted me clarity about my past with all of its good and bad, particularly as I witness death so frequently around me. I feel as if I stared death in the eyes while lying on the ground, paralyzed and denied help and medicine for days. During those helpless moments, all I could do was ponder: Will I ever have the opportunity to see you? What will you come to know of me? If you never meet me, who will be your source of information about me? So, I've decided to write you a series of letters, this being the first, so that you may come to know me as I am. I want you to understand who I am, what my values are, and what I stand for.

My dearest Salah, I have always believed, and will continue to believe, that justice is the bedrock of faith. Freedom and justice are the imperatives of our religious beliefs. I have always prayed for divine guidance towards truth, and for inspiration to stand up for the distressed and most marginalized. In the depths of my suffering, I question whether I have consistently lived up to those ideals. I am grateful to God for the guidance on the things I got right and for forgiveness on those that I got wrong. Allah Himself swore by the sanctity of the questioning soul: "And I swear by the reproaching soul" (Quran 75:2). **None of us is immune, not even from the gravest of errors, and repentance is a virtue of a sound heart.**

The first of these revisions occurred in the immediate aftermath of the 2013 coup and the gruesome Rabaa Massacre. I penned an Op-Ed to the Egyptian people apologizing for the Islamist Political movements' political mistakes. My decade in solitude that followed compelled me to delve further inwards, to think and rethink. When your father and I shared a prison cell, I engaged in deep contemplations and introspections. Those were both bitter and sweet days, I miss him so much. We engaged in endless debates as I contemplated the meaning of justice, injustice, and advocating for the most disenfranchised. I pondered anger, violence, righteousness, the common good, and reform. I held myself accountable, questioning whether I adhered to my intellectual commitments for the benefit of all or only for certain groups. I reflected on my intellectual journey from Egypt to the United States, Bahrain, and beyond. I have learned and grown and want to acknowledge my regrets and mistakes, as acknowledging what is right and wrong is the beginning of wisdom.

The Palestinian cause shaped my generation's worldview and awakened my political consciousness and activism. It laid the foundations for my understanding of justice, starting from my elementary school days until I obtained my Ph.D. in Islamic jurisprudence. For many years, I allowed my anger to inform my reactions to the senseless bloodshed, and the desecration of sacred sites and to drive my approach to the Palestinian issue privately and publicly. I focused on the losses and struggles of the Palestinian people and their powerlessness and while then as now, many more Palestinians have been injured and killed. My impassioned defense of the oppressed in the Muslim world in those days relied on the common rhetoric that was fueled by anger which turned to hate. As the death toll mounted, my statements sometimes veered toward antisemitism. In doing so, I displayed a blind rage that contradicted the fundamental principles of our beautiful religion. We are a religion of tolerance and compassion toward all religions and such rhetoric has no place in our community or our pursuit of justice. I deeply regret times when I engaged in that kind of rhetoric that I shudder to recall and condemn all rhetoric that is discriminatory, hateful and violent. The ends can never justify the means and noble objectives can only be attained through noble methods. Let me be clear, my commitment to justice for the Palestinian people remains steadfast, as is my belief that the many paths towards justice and peace do not require demonization of the other. Salah, justice and solidarity must extend to those with whom we disagree. In fact, our true commitment to these ideals is measured by how we apply them to those who differ from us.

Look at me now, Salah; I find myself in a country with a Muslim ruler, where the judge, warden, officer, and guards who wrongfully imprison, torture and deny me basic medical needs are all Muslim. While those who stand up for me (and others) are individuals who share little in common with me, except for our shared belief in justice and freedom. I recall how Eric Lewis, a Jewish lawyer and now a dear friend of the family, was the sole international lawyer permitted to visit a political prisoner in Egyptian prisons. I remember how Andrea Prasow, a Jewish human rights lawyer, assumed your father's position as the Executive Director of a rights organization advocating on behalf of Arab political prisoners. Senators Patrick Leahy (liberal Christian), and the late John McCain (Conservative Christian) also come to mind. These individuals, spanning the political spectrum, have dedicated their professional careers to advocating for the oppressed despite their respective political and ideological differences. All of these contradictions and ironies have compelled me to see the error in some of my previous beliefs, statements and positions.

My previous statements and stances are wrong and the best of us are those who reflect, hold oneself accountable and repent. Here I am, reflecting and seeking forgiveness from God for the harm that may have been inflicted upon anyone. I apologize to everyone harmed by what I said and called for. I leave behind these prison walls all forms of anger, hate and coarseness. I bear the burden of upholding the sanctity of human life, speaking truth and defending it wherever it may be.

I had only intended to stand up for justice, but what I did resulted in the exact opposite of the intent; and became a reason for further oppression, suffering and marginalization of the

innocent. In fact, my oppressors used my decade-old stances to justify and fend off pressure from concerned western parties about my release.

Lastly, my dearest grandson, I am writing to you in pursuit of a world that leads with love and eschews hatred. Life is far too short and precious to allow it to be dominated by anger. I urge you to set your moral compass towards justice and truth. Defend those with every peaceful means at your disposal. I hope you grow up to build a world where tolerance, peace and coexistence despite differences is the norm. My beloved, I pray that you grow up knowing and being proud of your grandfather and everything he stood for. I love you, and I long for the opportunity to meet you, whether it is in this life or in the corridors of Paradise in the one after. Oh God, please make me better than they think, and forgive me for what they do not know.

Your loving grandfather,

Salah el Deen Soltan

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