

Case of Dr. Joseph Hallit

After finishing his studies in Medicine, Dr. Hallit wanted to pursue a specialization in Medicine in a foreign country. In need of a visa and since the embassies were closed in Lebanon, he left for Syria to prepare his papers from there. As he was sitting in a coffee shop, a man came to him asking for medical advice as it turns out it was a Syrian internal force agent. As he was forced in car, he got kidnapped and was taken in as a Syrian prison and remained a prisoner for eight years, five months and one day. From November 1992 to 2000 he was held illegally in Syria, and for two years and a half he was held incommunicado and prevented from communicating with his family. His family was able to reach for a brief period of his sentence. His crime was being a member of the Lebanese Forces. His crime was his ideology and belief.

Joseph was held in solitary confinement, a cell of 190cm high and 90cm by 98cm wide (measures that he took with a tissue) without a toilet or any light. They are kept in darkness, with very minimal lighting. In the solitary confinements, prisoners were banned from any contact with the outside world or with any one on the inside. The communication between cells was forbidden and punishable by torture. As a consequence, the prisoner would feel completely isolated, would rarely have any human

contact, except maybe to be tortured. Any person held in such a condition is driven to lose his sanity. The use of the bathroom is restricted to three times a day with one minute for each time. The detainee is rushed into the bathroom for one minute, where he is to make full use of this minute by multitasking. Bathes were limited to three times a year. Foods in small rations were provided three times a day (at 6 am, 2pm and 8 pm). The only contact with any human being was with his guards. After two years, he was used a prison doctor to consult other prisoners but without any contact, he still had to communicate with the guard as a mediator. Every condition of the solitary confinement is as such that any relief is unreachable. The prison appears to have been designed to inflict the maximum suffering, humiliation and fear on prisoners and to keep them under the strictest control by breaking their spirit. Prisoners are not only completely isolated from the outside world, they are also prevented from communicating with each other. Every aspect of life in the prison is a dehumanizing experience. They are unable to see the sky. He is also meant to forget his name, to only be a number: Joseph was number sixteen.

The first three weeks are the most difficult ones; torture takes place on a regular basis of three times a day without mercy. Prisoners are beaten with metallic sticks on every part of their body until they faint. Daily torture,

constant humiliation and dehumanization while putting the detainee in inhumane conditions, they are denied any access to a fair trial, or any justice or redress. Dr. Hallit was “granted” a trial on the 24th December 1997 while he was arrested on the 11th November 1992. His trial endured a few minutes and according to him the trial looked more like a “kiosk”. He was accused and sentenced in an unfair trial.

In his testimony, Dr. Hallit admitted that the hardest part was getting reintroduced into society: Realizing that a decade had passed, the world changed, technology improved, and even society changed. The delay between inside and outside, the rejection of society the shock of the changes made his freedom harder than expected.