

HHA-6

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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Hisham H. Ahmed
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Culture on the Air.

Peter Bird Martin
ICWA
4 West Wheelock Street
Hanover, NH 03755

Dear Peter,

One of the most popular radio programs here is a talk show broadcast on the Voice of Israel radio, Arabic service, on Tuesday evenings. It is more of a forum for people to talk about their problems rather than a lively discussion. However, certain themes can be raised which reveal a lot about traditions among Palestinians and their relationship to modern modes of living and thinking. In fact, the ideas raised in recent programs are worth noting and I have attempted in this newsletter to get some of the more interesting items translated and transcribed. In general I have condensed the often long and rambling conversation and only put interjections by the host where absolutely necessary.

27th September

Caller 1: I want to talk about a problem that is quite important to society. I heard about a woman who had been married for eight years to a man who had the hereditary disease, "sara"¹ which affects the carrier at about the age of thirty.

The woman was at home with her son and her husband but she needed to go out, so she left the son with his father. When she came back she found that her husband had actually set her son alight and burned him to death.

He was just over thirty and the disease had suddenly affected him for the first time. He is now in jail.

¹ Literally translated "sara" means epilepsy. Owing to the nature of the illness described and to the particular events that took place, it seems likely that the caller did not actually use the correct name for the illness in Arabic.

Hisham H. Ahmed is an ICWA fellow compiling oral narratives of the Palestinian people.

The husband's mother and family knew about the disease but nobody had ever informed the man's wife about it. The question

I want answered is who should be punished? The father who committed the act, or his mother who knew about the disease, knew that such a thing could happen around that time, yet never told her daughter-in-law.

I think it is dreadful for a woman to let her son or anybody else in the family who has a hereditary disease, get married without letting the future partner know about it. The wife in this case has two daughters and they are now undergoing all kinds of medical tests at Kupat Holim² to discover whether they too are likely to be afflicted by the disease in the future.

A woman should not do unto another what she does not wish to have done to her, or perhaps in this case, did have done to her. What crime has the wife committed that she should be punished by the murder of her son by his own father and the discovery that her daughters may be afflicted by his disease when they are older. She lived with her husband for eight years only to suddenly find out that he is sick and psychotic. In my opinion, the man is not actually to blame. It's his mother who should be in prison.

There are other cases too especially relating to sight problems which are sometimes hereditary. People should talk about such cases openly. It seems that the only time things are found out is when there is a disaster which makes discussion of the subject unavoidable and this has got to change.

Caller 2: I am Ahmad Badawi from Khan Younis³. I have a rather small problem. I fell in love with a Russian girl and I am now wondering how I can get married to her and get her a residency permit. I met her at work in Israel and I fell in love with her and she fell in love with me. Now all I need to know is how I can obtain her residency so that she can live here.

Host: So she doesn't live in Israel?

Caller: That's right. She was here for a visit and to work, then she left. We wrote to each other and in one letter I asked her to marry me and she wrote back saying that she wanted to marry me too.

² Israeli Health service

³ Khan Younis is a large city in the Gaza Strip.

Host: Well, Ahmad, the way it is supposed to work is in the same way that you would apply for a permit for a visiter from the Arab states, you should be able to apply for a permit for her to come to Khan Younis.

Caller: Where can I apply?

Host: This is a problem. Now there is the Palestinian authority it is rather confusing about where to apply for a permit. Do you have friends or relatives living in Israel?

Caller: Yes, I have friends in Ludd.

Host: Ask one of those friends to apply for a permit for her, or at least some type of a visa to be issued to her in Russia. Once your friend submits an application for a visa for her, she can come to Israel. Then she would be able to visit you in Khan Younis because of her status as a tourist. When she gets there, you can have a marriage certificate ready which you would then submit to the Palestinian authority and which they will most likely approve. Alternatively, you can consult a lawyer who is knowledgeable about such matters. What do you do for work, Ahmad?

Caller: I work at a soap factory.

Host: How did you manage to communicate with this Russian woman?

Caller: Little by little. She speaks some Hebrew but I know very little Russian.

Host: We wish you good luck.

Caller 3: I am Bassem Kittaneh from Baqa Al-Gharbiyyeh.⁴ I would like to talk about the problem of "*al-badal*" or exchanging women for marriage⁵. In such cases, four people are usually involved. Some of them become victims and others become victimizers. I would like to find out what the

4 An (Israeli) Arab village just inside the Green Line which seperates Israel from the northern part of the West Bank.

5 This tradition of "*al-badal*" or exchange, happens when two families exchange daughters through marriage, a decision usually made by both families. In other cases, the son of one family may wish to marry the daughter of another and the girl's family will agree only on the condition that the sister of their prospective son-in-law marries one of their sons. Generally, the daughters and sons involved are compelled to follow the decision of the families.

listeners think as I have a friend who got married under such an arrangement and there are problems.

Host: What is your personal opinion of exchange?

Caller: I don't encourage this type of marriage at all.

Host: Yet, this is a frequent tradition in our society.

Caller: I know but I think that married life is between a man and his wife. We are talking about an arrangement between four people. If only one of them were to have difficulties, the whole arrangement could collapse. One of the four might be happily married with children and with a good relationship, but due to the traditional emphasis on filial loyalty, people will wonder why one wife left but not the other and may condemn and interfere.

Host: You know that many of these cases don't have problems. Usually, people resort to peaceful means to resolve such problems and tend not to let them get out of control.

Caller: I would just like to hear what other listeners think of this subject.

Caller 4: This is Khaldiyyeh Attiyyeh speaking from Nazareth. I too want to talk about the problem of exchanging women for marriage. First of all, I am living in an exchanged marriage situation. I don't support it either and this is out of experience. It is very difficult.

Host: What are the problems based on your personal experience?

Caller: There were problems from the beginning and they continued. My husband's family gave me a house at the beginning but my brother was given only one room by my family. After having given me the house, they then said that I was really entitled to one room only, since my brother and his wife [who is their daughter] had only one room. We had our own house but my husband said that we shouldn't have more than what his sister had.

Host: Since there are four people involved understanding becomes difficult. Was there any attempt at resolving the problem?

Caller: Yes, but there were other problems as well. There were problems about how much gold each wife had compared to the

other⁶ and a lot of family competition as to the value of the gold that each wife had.

I would just like to unequivocally state that I don't support it no matter what the circumstances are. I am living through it and I know what it is like. I have been in it for sixteen years and there is some new problem every day.

Caller 5: This is Tawfiq Mahamid from Umm-al Fahm.⁷ I want to talk about the issue of exchanging women for marriage and first of all, I should state that I got married by way of exchange.

The generally understood definition of exchange is that it is an exchange of one commodity for another, or in this case, one girl for another. Often it is thought that the motive behind the exchange is to get rid of the girl from the house. For me this is not the case. Exchange means exchanging good for good, it is an exchange of equals. Sometimes there are mistakes, good people might be exchanged with others who are not so good. Sometimes the criteria for exchange fail. One has to look for people who understand the true meaning of exchange if it is to be pursued. If all involved in the exchange process appreciate this process and their reasons for doing it then it will certainly be successful. Understanding during the engagement phase and then throughout the marriage is pivotal. Love is also important between the couples. Each couple should respect the other and it is important to remember that success

is dependent on the quality of choice one makes at the beginning. Some young men who are not fully mature might go through the process of exchange after getting attracted to a certain girl. The parents might compel these young men to exchange their sisters with the girls whom they wish to marry. In this case what you have is a man falling in love with a girl and then his sister being forced to get married to her brother's wife's brother. Such an exchange cannot be successful. There are certain criteria for exchange which must be followed. Not all exchanges will work, but if exchange occurs the right way with a solid base then nothing can

⁶ It is customary for a man to give his future wife gold, particularly at the engagement ceremony. This is ostensibly her own financial security in the future. There is no particular amount specified but obviously the more gold that the wife receives the better her position both financially and socially.

⁷ Umm al-Fahm is a large Palestinian town inside Israel, situated near the green line beyond the Northern West Bank.

destroy it. I was engaged by exchange for two and a half years and have now been married for a year and a half. I wish everyone could live the life that myself and my sister are living.

Host: This proves that it is possible for exchange to work out.

Caller: There is a ninety percent chance for exchange to work. Possibly more. Not all individuals are the same, I know other cases of exchange where things worked out. I just hope that those walking the path of exchange think about it carefully, organize it in a rational way and then decide whether it suits them or not. I advise everyone who thinks that exchange may not be right for him or her, not to go through with it. I can't say that there are no problems, in certain cases, I'm sure there are, but understanding between all involved is the answer.

Caller 6: This is Mahmoud Aldeen from Doura [near Hebron]. I want to thank you so much for this program. What you are doing is very important because you raise important issues in Arab society. In these discussions we get to know something new about our customs and traditions and although, by and large, they are similar, there are certain differences between the south, the center and the north. As far as the problem of exchange raised earlier by the man from Baqa Al-Gharbiyyeh is concerned, for us in Hebron this issue belongs to the past.⁸ Nowadays, there are only a few cases although there used to be more between the fifties and early seventies. When I was a child the elderly used to tell us "*al badal shekal waqillat adal*" or exchange is heavy with problems and light with justice. This proverb expresses the problematic social atmosphere when exchange used to take place.

What I have learned is that exchange is the product of custom which basically arose from economic need.⁹ It has nothing to do with love or closeness between a man and a woman. Nowadays married couples have a very difficult time making it work even

⁸ This comment is surprising given the very wide belief that the Hebron area is one of the most conservative in Palestinian society.

⁹ The longer an unmarried daughter remains in her parents house the more she becomes thought of as an economic liability as she is not bringing any money into the household. By exchanging her for the daughter of another family, they gain a wife for their son and an extra hand in the house who is provided for by her husband and not the main family. In some cases the exchange of females negates the obligation for the prospective husband's family to pay a dowry and becomes essentially a *quid pro quo* arrangement.

if they did get married for love. Thus, it must be almost impossible to coordinate the moods of four people as the behavior of any of them is bound to affect the rest. For this reason, this tradition has been vanishing in the Hebron area.

Host: Tawfiq who spoke earlier said that he got married by way of exchange. He further said that he wishes all exchange married couples to enjoy the same type of life he is living.

Caller: Well, *inshallah* [God willing] so they shall. In our town, however, it is difficult to balance the moods of four people. Can this man guarantee that there won't be any problems between the other couple if he and his wife were to have problems? I still remember instances where such marriages would end up in disaster. If one couple in an exchange of four, for example, were to have problems, it would reflect on the other couple even if they were doing fine. If one wife were to decide to leave her husband, therefore, also leaving the exchange arrangement, it is very likely that the other women would follow suit after being pressured to do so by her brother because his wife just left him! These are the negative characteristics of exchange. If my wife and I are in harmony, it is nothing to do with us if my sister and her husband have problems! The way it used to be here, meant that problems with one side would automatically be reflected on the other. It is because of this that the tradition was disliked. Remember the saying I brought up earlier: Exchange is troublesome and unfair.

Host: It is quite pleasing to hear that such arrangements are almost over in your area. Is this tradition also over with in the villages?

Caller: Well, I am actually talking to you from Doura, which is one of the biggest villages in the area and I can honestly say that this tradition has almost vanished completely.

Caller 7 : I am Izzadin al-Agah from Khan Younis. I fell in love with a girl from Khan Younis. My family went to ask for her hand in marriage for me so that we could get engaged. We agreed to get married and everything seemed fine. However, her cousin decided to stand in the way. He did that after she and I agreed to get married.

Host: Traditionally, the male cousin is entitled to marry the female cousin. He has that right and in the words of the proverb can actually "...take her from her horse as she rides to her wedding..." [with another man] and claim her as his, despite the lateness of the claim.

Caller: I know, but we even had the cousin's family involved in making the agreement. Now her family have become reluctant although they haven't actually revoked the agreement because the cousin has claimed that he has the right to marry her.

Host: This is a difficult problem to tackle, for as you very well know tradition and custom in our society dictate that the cousin has the right to claim the girl as his bride. Is this tradition still dominant where you are living?

Caller: Yes, although, less than it used to be.

Host: Hopefully there are people listening in your area who may be able to help. Perhaps, they will call her family and try to help resolve the problem especially if you are in love with the girl and want her to be your life partner.

Caller 8: This is Dr. Kamal al-Awaid.

Host: What a nice surprise, we are used to hearing you in medical programs and it is very good to hear you talking on this program. What would you like to tell us?

Caller: Just a little bit of medicine! I want to tackle the subject raised by the previous caller. It is true that, traditionally speaking, the cousin has the right to "take the bride off the horse". In other words he can carry off this women right up to the last minute if he chooses to do so. However, there is a high probability of hereditary problems when close relatives marry, which I would also like to relate to your first caller this evening. There is a particularly high incidence of the offspring suffering from both mental and physical disability and preferably this ugly tradition will stop. A marriage of this kind will most likely be filled with problems and I hope that the cousin will not stand in the way of the marriage at the last moment but instead will devote his energy to standing in the way of somebody else who wishes to marry a woman he loves. In other words if the cousin wants to fight then let him fight for somebody he loves and not just for spurious desire to be in control of the situation. I would like to emphasize that what I am saying here is sound, from a medical, an ethical and a religious point of view.

Another point is I would like to make is to the man from Umm al-Fahm who talked about exchange. Even if he has a good relationship with his wife, problems may arise if his sister encounters problems with her husband. In my opinion, marriage by exchange is never the product of ones will and therefore doomed to be fraught with trauma, if not to fail.

October 11, 1994

Caller 1: I am Khaled Al Bib from Surif near Hebron. I want to talk about the type of men in society who succumb to the dictates of women, in other words, those who are ruled. A mother usually spends all her life raising her son until he becomes a man. It happens that this man gets married to a wife who makes him forget his mother, his father and the rest of his family. I have seen many cases of this nature. For example, in a town like ours, with a population of about fifteen thousand people, this phenomenon is widespread. It's as if the wife does some magic to the husband where he acts as if he doesn't know either his mother or his father. It's as if he never knew the parents who raised him and cared for him.

All monotheistic religions emphasize the importance of paying respect to parents and this is particularly the case in Islam, where the Prophet stressed the importance of maintaining good relations with parents and close relatives.

Caller 2: This is Abu Abed Khaliq [he seems to be a friend of the host] and I think this is a very difficult problem indeed. It is a great disappointment to have the son distance himself from his family after they have put on a sometimes awesome wedding party for him. What I really think is that one can always get another wife, but there is no way to get another mother or father. This is what is unfortunate about cases of this nature. What really hurts is when the parents are upset. A man who succumbs to his wife is one who has a weak personality, I would like to draw people's attention to the fact that there is no substitute for a father, a mother or a brother. They cannot be replaced.

[The host asked if the caller could give the listeners an example of a traditional song that addresses this problem and the caller immediately began singing a song which supported his argument.]

Caller 3: This is Majida from Jerusalem. I would like to talk about the issue of a husband being ruled by his wife, the one who doesn't let him visit his mother or father. Of course, this is a big mistake. Religion [meaning Islam] has called upon us to maintain good relations with our mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters. A man should never succumb to his wife's dictates except in situations where what she says is sound. He who acquiesces to his wife's will has a weak personality. To have good understanding between a husband and wife is one thing. But for the wife to prevent her husband

from visiting his parents is another. How would things look if e prevented her from visiting her parents? Even if the husband does not visit his parents, the wife should make the effort instead. That way the relationship between them will become closer and stronger. Love will also grow.

Caller 4: Hello, I would like to talk about two subjects. First, I would like to discuss the issue of the wives who control their husbands.

After marriage, we mostly end up with two types of people: those who do well and live happily in their marriage and those, who, due to social pressures, end up going along with the dictates of their wives. However, outsiders often don't leave the couple alone and they tend to tell the man repeatedly that he is the slave of his wife. Having said that, one cannot lose sight of the fact that there are some authoritarian wives just as there are some authoritarian husbands. It is a question of personality and all due to socialization. This is why it is important that one be careful in choosing his or her life partner. The educational level of the wife should be equal to that of the husband or a little less. The same can be said about the social status of the married couple. One should not get married for the sake of getting married.

The second issue I would like to talk about has to do with the kidnapped soldier.¹⁰ I want to make an appeal to the brothers in Hamas to return the soldier to his family. Palestinian society should be a civilized one. We cannot allow our society to be viewed as a terrorist society. We have suffered enough. We must insist on having a civilized society. Killing a soldier or two does not achieve any of our goals. The fact that we are Muslims should make us merciful and gentle. Islam embraces all religions - Judaism and Christianity. All good qualities can be found in Islam. We should know that if Judaism, Christianity and Hinduism call for love, Islam is the heart of love among mankind. We should be fair and merciful and have a vision for the future. I hope that the kidnappers will release the soldier safe and well. This might help us attain even just one percent of our rights in the future. Already, there are a lot of problems confronting the people - the closure of the Gaza Strip and the economic hardships which

¹⁰ The Israeli soldier referred to, Nahshon Wachsmann, was kidnapped on October 9th by members of Hamas.

result from that. Releasing the soldier can be considered as a good gesture for peace.¹¹

Caller 5: This is Yousef from Baqa-al Gharbiyyeh. I work in the construction industry. I was married to a woman from Nazareth. We got divorced after eight years of marriage and I had three daughters. This happened seventeen years ago when the eldest daughter was only eight years old. I used to go back and forth to my ex-wife's relatives, particularly to her uncle's house to ask about the children. I really wanted to see them but my ex-wife's relatives never received me into their house and never allowed me to see the kids, even when they were still young. Time went by and seven years ago I got married again. I had two more children, a boy and a girl but the problem is that people constantly tell me I don't care about my three daughters and that I don't look after them.

About a year ago, I went with my present wife to visit my ex-wife's father. He refused to let us in the house. I heard that one of my daughters had got married in Tamra so I went there to ask, but we couldn't find her. I know nothing about the whereabouts of the girls and I don't know what to do. People are always pointing fingers at me and saying I deserted my children. This is truly a profound problem for me and I don't know who to turn to. I don't know what to say about my ex-wife's family, they are criminals as far as I'm concerned.

Once I went as far as taking my present wife with me to visit. She had said that she was even willing to become a maid to my daughters if we could at least locate them. Still, nobody would help.

Host: I call upon all people of good will who are listening to this human dilemma to try and help if they can. Hopefully your daughters themselves are listening and will contact you as a result.

October 18, 1994

Caller 1: This Safi Ghibariyya. I want to talk about the problem of my photographer friends, those who videotape weddings. The problem is that they go home late at night and as a result conflicts ensue between them and their wives who feel jealous because they videotape the bride. I heard that often these wives don't open the doors for their husbands who come home late. The problem for me is that many of these photographers are friends of mine. When such problems occur

¹¹ On Friday October 14th, 1994, Wachsman was killed along with his kidnapers when Israeli soldiers stormed the house in which he was being held hostage.

they come and knock on my door asking me to help out. The problem is worsened by the fact that brides don't want female photographers. In my view the test that should be applied is whether the photographers are skilled or not, rather than whether they are male or female.

Caller 2: I am Ali from Jerusalem and I would like to talk to you about the subject of disability.

I was born quadriplegic in 1957 and, as you know, medical treatment was not as advanced then as it is today. Therefore, I was not fortunate enough to be able to get the necessary treatment. I am now thirty seven years old and, of my family, only my mother and I are left at home. My mother is seventy five years old and is unfortunately very sick, often going from one hospital to another. Therefore, I wanted to reduce the burden that I placed on her.

As a result, I filled out numerous forms and wrote many letters until I got admitted to a boarding home for the disabled. At the beginning, my relatives were opposed to the idea but I managed to convince them, especially by pointing out that they were not actually very helpful. You know that in today's life, every one is on his own. The brother does not help his brother. Anyway, I now live in a home in Gilo, near Jerusalem.

Not a single individual relative of mine has ever considered visiting me here, despite the fact that I go back and forth to visit them. Visiting me here would very much lift my spirits and morale. There are some residents here from Haifa [A city over two and a half hours drive from Jerusalem] and their families come to visit them from time to time. It would only cost my family five shekels [less than two dollars] to come from Jerusalem to visit. There is nobody who comes. My mother is too old and sick and I am the one who takes her for treatment. The neighbors call me to tell me that she needs to go to the doctor and I go to take her to Haddassa [Hospital] or to Kupat Holim. Fortunately, I have an electric wheelchair which makes things somewhat easier for me. However, it does pain me that families come all the way from Haifa or Beersheba to visit their relatives while I never see mine who live very close. I would very much appreciate if any of the listeners would like to volunteer to come and visit me. I would very grateful if somebody is willing and has the time, say an hour a week or every other week, to come and visit this human being called Ali. The place where I live is called Ma'on Nakhim, Gilo.

Before I came here, I talked to my social worker to try to find me a job. I searched for a job before I applied to this

home. Every time I knocked on the doors of an office or shop they would say that they didn't have a job for me because I was disabled. This is so hurtful. All I want is an opportunity. It is true that I might be disabled, but try me for two weeks before you pass a judgement. I got to the point where I didn't want any money but just wanted to be allowed to work to keep myself busy. Unfortunately, all my attempts were to no avail.

I would still like a job and would like to make it very clear that I don't want a salary. All I ask for is to have my transportation paid and no more, not even the cigarettes I smoke! I will be willing to volunteer all my time for a job just so I will have something to do with my time.

I would very much appreciate if anyone could offer me a job or even a visit.

Host: Thank you very much for being so frank and for opening up your heart with us.

Caller: This is my nature and if I may, I want to say one other little thing. I want to make an appeal to all drivers to pay attention to the disabled. I often go to East Jerusalem. I go to Bab Al-Amoud [Damascus gate]. Sometimes there are ambulances carrying sick people and cars don't make way for them. Suppose they are carrying your brother or mine. One cannot differentiate between an Arab and an Israeli. Once I saw with my own eyes, an Israeli Egged bus go onto the pavement to make way for an ambulance from Bethlehem. There were about five hundred Arab cars that didn't make way for the ambulance. I would also ask drivers why an Israeli commander stops his car to let a disabled person with an electric wheelchair cross the road and they don't? With all respect, why do we, as Arabs, curse a disabled person to hell when we see them travelling on the street. Immediately, drivers will lay the blame on the disabled person's family for letting him out. This happened to me personally time and time again.

I wouldn't be so upset if the issue had to do with me alone. But what about the ambulance that carries sick people. I was hoping that this program would be broadcast during daytime and not at night so that many more people would be able to hear, especially drivers who usually go to sleep early.

Caller 3 : This is Mahmud Abu-Tayeh from Nazareth. We have quite a sensitive problem in that the educated youth in the Arab sector in Israel are not fulfilling the duties expected of them by their families. They just focus on having their own social life without paying much attention to what their families demand. They don't even pay attention to the issues

of their own education. If one has a child, they don't give them the required care. They don't care about the interests of the wider society. Even the standard of the school system is not satisfactory because no one cares enough about it. They always blame somebody else, either the Israeli government or the teachers. They simply don't pay much attention to their children's interests. I used to serve on the fathers' committee. We witnessed how parents acted towards their children. I used to distribute two hundred and seventy invitations for parents to attend a certain function. Hardly ten of them would show up. We even used to choose a time and a day where everybody was off like a Saturday afternoon. We must educate our children and care about them. All you see instead are complaints lodged against the government and the teachers. This is irresponsibility. Let me give you an example. Once I was riding a car, where the driver was talking to another passenger who went to reprimand the principal of another school, not the one his son was attending. Apparently, there had been some misunderstanding between the child and one of the teachers. But, instead of reviewing the matter with the principal of the school in question, the father went to scream at the principal of another school. This tells you how irresponsible such parents are. Even some of the people elected to serve on some of the committees choose not to attend meetings.

Caller 4: This is Kamal calling from my car phone in Al-Ramleh, near Ludd. I want to talk about the subject of peace. Many people don't understand what it means. Peace is good for us all. This is how the Jordanian-Israeli agreement should be viewed. Once the borders open up, I would like to visit Jordan in my car. I have relatives in Amman.

Caller 5: I am a listener from the Galilee. What I want to say is that I love peace from the depths of my heart. Peace is light and happiness. I consider this part of the world, Israel, to be the port of peace since it connects the other parts of the world together. We have gotten tired, really tired. This is what I would say to everyone in the West Bank and everywhere. It fills me with pleasure to sit with Jordanians and Syrians. We all have gotten tired of wars. We have to get to a point where only love governs. All groups working to destroy peace are committing a grave mistake. What we all have to do, child and old man alike is to let love be planted in the heart. All of us have to be brothers, especially with Syria. Those who read history know that this area has suffered many wars throughout the years. Now it is time for peace to be made from the heart and with all sincerity. I listened to the news today and heard that Clinton is going to be in the area. He is visiting the holy land. We are all Semites - there is no difference between Jews, Christians and Druze. We are all made up of human flesh and

blood. We all have children. We all have concerns. Let's all forget about wars. I was so upset to hear that the kidnapped soldier was killed. He was the victim of peace. I call upon every angry young man to think twice in order to give peace a chance. I am thirty six years old. I never felt before what peace could mean in this area. There is fighting all the time. What I know is that I should live peacefully, at least once in my life. Let's try it out. Why have my brother or my cousin live in Jordan without being able to see them? The actual distance between here and Jordan or Syria is very small, indeed. Why can't we go back and forth to visit? Why fight at all? Let's turn Israel into the port of peace.

Caller 6 : I am calling from the Gaza Strip, the autonomous area. I want to talk about the subject of peace in the midst of all the events we have been witnessing and the difficult conditions in which we have been living. Peace is good for all. It should mean security for all and love between all. It should result in warmth among all peoples. However, there can be no peace while we, as a people, still suffer. The situation has been transformed from one of occupation to one of starvation. How can we have peace when our children, youth and workers can't even get food to eat? I myself needed to have surgery in Israel but they refused to give me the required travel permit. I went to the joint Palestinian-Israeli liaison committee to obtain the permit but they kept sending me from one place to the other without any results. I provided all the necessary paperwork including my Israeli insurance card but nothing was done. Can it then be called peace when a patient like me was not allowed to have the surgery? Fortunately, I eventually had the surgery but only after I took the risk of crossing the Erez checkpoint while being shot at. I have worked for 15 years in the Tel Aviv area but I have been denied a travel permit for no reason. I have never been imprisoned or committed any crime of any kind. Worse than that, I am not an isolated case. What does peace mean? I have applied for a travel permit so many times in order to be able to work. Each time, however, it was to no avail. This is what happens with many other people, not just with me. They deny people travel permits and consequently the only job opportunities that exist. How do they intend to maintain the peace that they are making?

I'll just tell you something else. I work to provide for a family of twenty five members. I have been away from home for several months now. Therefore, I don't know who recently gave birth and what the final count is. Ten more people may have been born during this period. I alone support them. I haven't seen my brothers and sisters and parents for quite a long time now. I just send them the money I make. We beg the authorities to issue us travel permits so that we can go back and forth.

Instead what is put into place is a policy of collective starvation - keeping the people deprived of making a living. What kind of peace is this? At least show us that things are going to improve. Give us a spark of hope. Every time the Israeli authorities declare ~~that~~ they will allow, say, ten thousand more workers to travel, they only allow five hundred at the most. What happens is that travel permits are usually confiscated from workers at the Erez checkpoint. Other times some workers are arrested when they return home in the evening. How do they expect Gazans to support this kind of peace or to be a part of it? I am not talking to you as one who is against peace. I want peace to succeed but I want to see things improved, not just for myself, but for others as well. I, as one person, provide for twenty five Other families have no one to support them whatsoever. One hundred thousand workers from Gaza used to be able to go into Israel to work. Now, there are no more than ten thousand. In conclusion, I pray for peace to prevail so that people can live a better life.

Hisham H. Ahmed