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Eyad Hallaq was shot to death in a roofless garbage room. According to the testimony of his caregiver, who was by his side and tried to protect him, he was executed. For long minutes she stood next to him and pleaded for his life, trying to explain to the police officers, in Hebrew and in Arabic, that he suffered from a disability. They shot him three times from close range with a rifle, directly into the center of his body, as he lay on his back, wounded and terrified, on the floor of the room.

The garbage room is located in a narrow courtyard in Jerusalem's Old City, inside Lions Gate, exactly at the start of the Via Dolorosa, where Jesus walked from the site of his trial to the place of his crucifixion, on what's now called King Faisal Street. It's just a few dozen meters from the entrance to the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound. The sanctity of the area did not help Hallaq. Nor did the fact that he was someone with special needs, a 32-year-old autistic person, the apple of the eye of his parents, who devoted their lives to looking after him.

Hallaq was afraid of blood: His mother shaved him in the morning, for fear he would cut himself. Every scratch threw him into a panic, she says. He was also afraid of the armed police officers who stood along the route to the special needs center he went to, where participated in a vocational training program. His instructor taught him how to make his way there alone on foot – it took a month before he dared walk the route by himself – a little more than a kilometer from his home in the Wadi Joz neighborhood into the Old City.

On his first days at the center the teacher stopped with Hallaq next to the police guard post at Lions Gate. She tried to explain to him that he had nothing to fear; they wouldn't do him any harm, she promised. She also explained to the police officers that he was disabled and was attending the therapeutic institution where she worked – the El Quds center run by the Elwyn Israel organization, as part of its network of facilities for special-needs children and adults.

Hallaq passed the police post every day for six years, apparently without any problems. In his pocket he carried a certificate issued by the center, stating in Hebrew and in Arabic that he was a person with special needs, as well as a National Insurance Institute card confirming that he had a 100-percent disability. But nothing saved the young man from the hands of Border Policemen, quick on the draw, unrestrained, bloodthirsty.

Last Saturday, Hallaq left home a little after 6 A.M. The day at Elwyn El Quds, located at the entrance to the Al-Aqsa compound, begins at 7:30, but he always arrived early in order to prepare the kitchen for the cooking classes. Last week, for the first time in his life, he made a vegetable salad for his parents, slicing tomatoes and an onion, and dressing the result with olive oil. His father, Khairy, says it was the tastiest salad he'd ever eaten.

Eyad liked going to the special needs center. When the institution shut down for a month and a half during the coronavirus lockdown, his mother had to take him there a few times to prove to him that it was closed. Last Saturday, on the last day of his life, he set out tranquilly and in good spirits. He had a cup of tea, ate a sandwich his mother made for him, showered, dressed and left. Security camera footage shows him walking along the street, a garbage bag in his hands. Every morning on the way to school he threw out the garbage from home.

A little before 6 A.M., Warda Abu Hadid, Eyad's caregiver, also set out from her home in the Jabal Mukkaber neighborhood, headed for the Elwyn center. At about 6:10, Abu Hadid, 47, passed by the Border Policemen who were manning the security post at Lions Gate and entered the Old City. She had not walked much more than 100 meters before she heard shouts behind her: "Terrorist! Terrorist!" Immediately afterward she heard three shots. She rushed to the garbage room nearby, taking shelter behind the iron closet on its right side. Just then her ward, Hallaq, ran into the room in a panic and collapsed on the floor. A sanitation worker was sitting there, drinking tea.

The garbage room is an open space, not very big, with a few chairs for sanitation workers and a large container that reeked unmercifully this week when we visited the site. On the iron closet is a metal plaque with verses from the Koran, which has been here a long time. There were three bullet holes in the tin wall.

Abu Hadid noticed that Hallaq, lying on the floor, was bleeding, apparently from being shot in the leg by the Border Policemen as he fled. She later told Amer Aruri, of the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem, that Hallaq lay there for between three and five minutes, wounded, before he was shot and killed.

The whole time she shouted, "He is disabled, he is disabled!" in Hebrew, and Hallaq shouted, "Ana ma'aha!" – Arabic for "I am with her" – as he attempted to cling to his caregiver for protection. It's not hard to imagine what went through his mind in those last terrified minutes, as three officers ran into the room screaming, "Where is the rifle? Where is the rifle?"

The officers aimed their weapons at Hallaq. They were at point-blank range, standing over him at the entrance to the garbage room. Abu Hadid kept trying to explain that Hallaq didn't have any sort of gun – he was only holding the surgical face mask that is required these days at the center, and rubber gloves – when one of the officers fired three shots with his M-16 into the center of the young man's body, killing him instantly.

Suddenly the area was filled with Border Police, among them an officer who aimed her weapon at Abu Hadid's head, ordering her to stand still while she subjected her to a body search. The caregiver, whose ward had just been killed before her eyes, was utterly distraught. She was then taken to the police position next to Lions Gate, stripped almost naked in a search for the nonexistent firearm, and then interrogated for three hours.

The officers wanted to know about Hallaq and the institution he attended. They then informed Abu Hadid that she would be taken for questioning to the notorious room No. 4 in the police station in the Russian Compound, in downtown Jerusalem. She balked, telling the police that she first had to call her director, which they allowed her to do.

The director of the center joined her, and Abu Hadid was interrogated for an additional three hours in the Russian Compound, until her family arrived. They took her to a clinic in her neighborhood, to calm her down and tend to her mental state. Later on this week she was summoned to the offices of the Justice Ministry unit that investigates police actions to give testimony.

In the meantime, the Elwyn center had called Hallaq's father and told him his son had been shot in the leg. Khairy says now that he had a bad feeling: He knows that the regular police and the Border Police don't injure people – they shoot to kill. He and his wife Rana rushed to Elwyn El Quds. A large group of officers blocked their way and told them that they were going to search their home. No one told the couple what had happened to their son. It was only when the officers raided their house and carried out a short search that one of them asked Khairy, "When do you intend to hold the funeral?"

That is how Eyad's father learned that his beloved son was dead. That's the way of police officers when it comes to Palestinians. Khairy says that the commander of the force acted humanely, but that one officer was vulgar and violent, telling Eyad's bereaved sister, "If you were a man I would have already smashed you," after she tried to grab his arm during the search.

Khairy Hallaq is a thin, gentle man of 64 who this week was living on tranquilizer injections, not eating or sleeping. His eyes, red from crying and exhaustion alike, said everything. He is disabled as a result of a work accident about 15 years ago in a marble factory he owned in Anata, near the Old City. He has been unemployed ever since. When Eyad was a boy he sometimes took him to work with him.

The couple has two daughters, Diana, 35, and Joanna, 34. When we visit, the latter, a special-education teacher, is sitting next to her weeping mother and looks no less tormented. Eyad's parents devoted their lives to his care. This week Khairy and Rana, who is 58 and in poor health, mourned separately, as is the custom – he in the mourning tent that was erected at the end of their road; she in their home on Yakut al-Hamawi Street.

Eyad Hallaq's small room is tidy and spotless. A wide bed covered with a brown velvet blanket, a television mounted on the wall, and a row of the cheap bottles of aftershave and other grooming products that he loved are on the chest of drawers, along with the de rigueur bottle of hand sanitizer. He was meticulous about his appearance.

"I don't wear fine clothes like my son and I don't have the kind of cellphone he does," his father says. The mourning poster hanging at the top of the street shows a handsome young man. His mother tells us that she is convinced he will return.

“They took Eyad. I want Eyad. When will Eyad come back? When? When? When? All day long I am at the door – maybe he will come back,” she says. “Thirty-two years I raised him, step by step. I put so much into him. My health suffered. Everyone who took care of him said there was no Palestinian who was looked after like him. But your people think he was garbage. That’s why he was murdered.”

Both parents speak Hebrew. Their initial fears about their son first arose when he was 2. For two more years they made the rounds of doctors and clinics, until he was diagnosed as autistic. At first he was sent to a regular private school, but couldn’t integrate there; up until about six years ago he was home, not enrolled in any educational framework. The years at Elwyn El Quds were apparently the best years of his life. His parents are sorry that they only heard about the center when he was in his 20s. On Fridays, when it was closed, he would go out in the morning to buy his parents Jerusalem-style sesame-seed pretzels.

Hallaq never spoke to strangers, only to people he knew well. Once he got used to people, he liked to laugh with them. Walking on the street, his head was usually hung low. If he passed someone he knew he might wave hello but wouldn’t stop to speak. He spoke only with his close family and his friends, and with the caregivers at Elwyn.

“If you sat next to him, he would move away. He needed a lot of time to get used to you,” his father says. When he was not in the center he didn’t hang out with friends. In his room he liked to watch cartoons – Mickey Mouse, and Tom and Jerry on MBC3, the Arabic children’s channel. Rana says he didn’t always focus on the cartoons, only stared at them. “He was a baby,” she says, “a 2-year-old baby.”

Her husband adds later, “He was 32 but had the intelligence of an 8-year-old.”

Hallaq’s dream was to work as an assistant cook. In the meantime, he and others at the center would prepare food and go to the Beit Hanina neighborhood to give it to children with special needs there.

Sitting in the mourning tent is one of Eyad’s friends from Elwyn, wrapped in a black winter coat and a thick sweater. Pointing the friend out, the bereaved father says to us: “You asked me a lot of questions and now I want to ask you a question. Look at that person. Could you wear what he is wearing in this

heat? What do you see in this person who dressed like that in the summer? What can you see? I will bring you a little boy, what will you see? A boy. A sick boy. That is what the officer who killed Eyad saw.”

Back at home, Rana says, “He was an angel while he was on the earth, and now he is an angel when he is under the earth” – and again bursts into tears.

The day before her son was killed, she says, she asked him not to go to the center the next day, but he insisted. As often happens with bereaved parents, Rana says she had a feeling that something bad was liable to happen to her son. “We saw in the United States the policeman who killed. He is under arrest. And in Israel? He should get at least 25 years. They killed him like he was a fly. My son was a fly.”

A sign at the entrance to the Hallaqs’ house requests people not to kiss or shake hands, because of the coronavirus, but no one pays any heed to it here. A delegation from the Hadash party, led by MKs Aida Touma-Sliman and Yousef Jabareen, arrives to pay condolences. The police haven’t yet returned Eyad’s disability card and his clothes. A cousin, Tareq Akash, an electrical engineer who was in high-tech and is now a doctoral student at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, asks, “Can we go and demonstrate now? Burn police stations like in the United States? We don’t want to burn anything. But are we allowed to express anger? You know, they’ll open fire at us.”

We follow Hallaq’s route on his last day. Leaving the house, we turn right and walk up the street to Jericho Road. At the traffic lights we cross the busy street, above which is a poster: “Look drivers in the eye.” Behind us is the university’s Mount Scopus campus, in front of us is the Old City. After the young man crossed the street, he walked along the renovated stone path that follows the Old City wall to Lions Gate, next to the Yeusefiya Cemetery. Three cute puppies are hiding next to the wall. Here Hallaq walked down the slope, between the graves and the wall, moments before his death. Steps lead up to Lions Gate. Four Border Policemen armed and armored from head to foot, truncheons and rifles in their slings, stand at the entrance in a threatening posture as we pass by.

Here is where Warda Abu Hadid heard the shots, here is the garbage room, near the sign to the Via Dolorosa. Here she tried to take shelter from the shooting and here lay Eyad, her ward, until his death.

Elwyn El Quds is only a few dozen meters from here. An electric glass door protects the wards at the facility; there's no entry to strangers during the coronavirus crisis. Young people emerge from the stone courtyard, it's midday and the school day will soon be over. The director, Manar Zamamiri, says that about 100 people get training and therapy at this center, all of them 21 and above, but this is just one branch of the Elwyn network – there are several other centers with schools and other programs in the city, serving hundreds of disabled children and adults. The main effort here is invested in vocational training.