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A Letter from Anwar Nusseibeh to David Ben-Gurion, Jerusalem, 25 July 1972

Sent on 25 July 1972, this 3-page document shows a letter from Anwar Nusseibeh in Jerusalem to David Ben-Gurion.

Jerusalem

25 July ,1972.

Dear Mr.Ben-Gurion,

I read , with deep interest, the English version of your book "My Talks with Arab Leaders". In retrospect, it is comforting to know that some people did try, even then, to seek the way of reason, in the weltering swell of turgid emotions.

However , my immediate object in imposing upon your valuable timenow is somewhat different. At page 77 of the English copy you relate Mr.Smilansky's version of the "silver bridge" attempted deal with some Arab Leaders. I was greatly shocked.

I knew the late Haj Yacoub El Ghussein personally, and well. He was my father-in-Law. Far from being venal, I thought that his greatest weakness - and charm - lay in his utter unworldliness . He was a simple farmer, who felt more at ease with the soil which he tended, and the people who worked it, than he ever did with manipulative politics and politicians. Spiritually, he was a great "Sufi", who deeply cherished human values, and stoutly defended intellectual unhibitedness and integrity .

To my knowledge, his relations with his Jewish neighbours at Ness-Ziona were always friendly. When he returned from exile in Seyschelles they received him, Arab fashion, with gifts of rice and sheep. To the ever lasting credit of both, they could and did invariably differ - and fight - for their respective political convictions ; but they were also always able to meet across a bridge not of silver, but of human understanding .

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The Ghusseins owned and administered rich and extensive properties of which, again to my knowledge, they did not voluntarily seel a single dunom. In this connection, it is significant to point out that their house in Ness-Ziona was the only important Arab house that was totally destroyed after 1948.

Haj Yacoub's widow and children, like other Palestinian Arab widows and children, before and after them, were rendered by the 1948 fighting penniless, homeless and stateless; but amidst all their sufferings, they were sustained by the memory of a proud name which they believed Haj Yacoub had earned in a life time of immense challenge and as he had been best able to judge, generous response. Must they now be begrudged even that, in an anecdote which adds little to your main narrative, which represents an unpalatable line of policy which you yourself felt would be generally unacceptable to Arab sentiments, and on the basis of hearsay evidence of people, since dead, whose own self-confessed conduct in the matter is such as to inspire little enough cause for confidence, and about people who are no longer living and able to refute the charges made?

For my part, I must confess to complete ignorance of the events described. They occurred long before I married; at a time, in fact, when my wife was still a child. However, in fairness to the memory of the dead, no less than to the feelings of the living, I have requested a life long friend and companion of Haj Yacoub to go through my father-in-law's diary, and see whether he can throw any further light on this unpleasant incident. I will let you know the result of my enquiry. If, as a result, I find that my evaluation of the situation is wrong, then I shall unhesitatingly apologise for wasting your time. However, if not, then I shall be entitled to expect from you a response that will be no less generous, or just. I know that, if satisfied, you will not accept to fall back on the plea that you were simply quoting others.

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After all, Sir, does it not strike you as totally illogical that a leader who can attract and inspire young people with high ideals should, according to the story , himself lack respect for such ideals ?

Yours Sincerely,

Anwar Nuseibeh

