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By Aviv Lavie

M., who serves in the Intelligence Corps reserves, remembers the first time he was sent to do guard duty at Camp 1391. Before climbing to the top of the observation tower he received an explicit order from the responsible officer: "When you're on the tower you look straight ahead only, outside the base, and to the sides. What happens behind you is none of your business. Do not turn around."

M., of course, couldn't resist the temptation and occasionally snuck a look behind him. From atop the tower he saw the double fence surrounding the camp, enclosing a compound ruled by trained attack dogs; the jeep that patrols inside the two fences; the vehicles utilized by the members of the unit who man the base; and especially the large concrete structure, dating from the British Mandate period, when it was used by the British police, and which now bears a description that carries an aura of mystery: Israel's secret detention facility.

Some of the people who were interviewed for this article dubbed the camp "the Israeli Guantanamo." There are in fact certain points of resemblance between the American detention camp in Cuba and the Israeli site, mainly in relation to the legal questions that hover over them and the gnawing doubt about whether they are consistent with the values of democracy. In terms of the exotic, though, we lag far behind. Whereas the watchtowers of the Guantanamo facility look out over the aquamarine waters of the Caribbean Sea, the secret prison in Israel is situated by the side of a completely ordinary road in the heart of a bustling region in the center of the country.

A narrow, tree-lined road ascends to the camp, and inside it looks like any other army base: barracks, mess hall, workshop to repair vehicles. Even the guards are not the best the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have available. The guard towers and the patrols are manned, for the most part, by graduates of the IDF's

general basic training program, who "never carried out an assault against anything," as one of them put it. "As always with us, there's a lot of hoo-ha, but behind it is the usual army chaos," an officer who served at the base says ironically.

What really surrounds Camp 1391, more than physical protection, is an entrenched wall of silence. Since the 1980s, when the facility was moved from a more southerly location to its present site, the Israeli authorities have made every effort to keep its very existence secret. And even now that its existence has been revealed, the state refuses to answer the many questions of the world and of the Israeli public: Where is the facility? Who is being held there, why, and for how long? Were they tried before being locked up in Camp 1391, or are they awaiting trial? What are their conditions of incarceration? In every other lockup in Israel the answers to these and many other questions are open and amenable to external, legal, public and international review.

As far as is known, the 1391 site is the only detention facility whose detainees don't know where they are. If they ask, the warders may answer, "on the moon," or "in outer space," or "outside the borders of Israel." It is also the only detention facility that the state prevents the International Red Cross from visiting. Nor, as far as can be ascertained, have Knesset members ever visited the place, and many of the politicians who have been asked about it in the past few weeks said they had never heard of it - including some who have held senior positions in the government, such as Prof. David Libai, who was justice minister in the government of Yitzhak Rabin and a member of the ministerial committee that deals with the secret services: "I will not say a single word about the subject, for the simple reason that I am not familiar with it. This is the first time I have ever heard about such a thing."

If a former justice minister doesn't know about it, a disturbing question arises: who does? Dan Meridor, another former justice minister and chairman of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, is aware of the facility's existence: "I'm not sure there's anything wrong here," he says. "I remember that as a minister and as one who dealt with intelligence matters, I visited every place I wanted to and everything was always open to me. I know about the existence of this facility, but I was never there - apparently because I never asked to visit it. I don't want to bandy words about, because I am not familiar with the subject in depth. There are many complex questions of human rights involved here."

Do you think it's right that in the State of Israel there is a facility in which people don't know where they are, nor do their families or lawyers?

"No. If there are people who are incarcerated incommunicado, that doesn't seem right to me."

According to attorney Dan Yakir, the legal adviser of the Association of Civil

Rights in Israel (ACRI), "A secret detention facility contradicts basic principles of every democracy - transparency and public supervision over the governmental authorities. And those principles are especially important in relation to the deprivation of freedom - which is one of the most severe infringements of human rights. The existence of a lockup like this gives rise to a double concern: first, of secret arrests and 'disappearances' of people; and second, an abuse of power, unfair treatment, violence and torture."

As will be seen, attorney Yakir's concerns are well founded.

Stepson of army intelligence

Camp 1391 is an Israel Defense Forces facility. Agents of the Shin Bet security service and other security branches visit the site and since the start of the intifada have apparently made greater use of it than in the past, but the facility belongs to the IDF. One of the reasons for the wall of secrecy that surrounds it is the fact that it is located in the center of a military base that belongs to one of the secret units of the Intelligence Corps - Unit 504 (according to foreign sources the unit's name has recently been changed). Unit 504 gathers intelligence by means of the human factor - "humint." Most of its work is done by using agents outside Israel.

The officers in the unit, which is not large, are known as katamim (acronym for "officers for special tasks") and undergo two-track training. Some of them handle agents and the others - former members of the unit say they are those whose skills the system isn't wild about - are directed to the hakshabim track (interrogators of prisoners). The unit commander is an officer with the rank of colonel. The attitude toward the unit is characterized by duality: on the one hand, this is a small, seemingly elitist unit, which carries out sensitive missions; on the other hand, as one of the unit's members says, "We are the stepson of army intelligence. Sometimes you look at some of the officers and you ask yourself whether these are the standards the IDF assigns to these posts."

The same individual adds, "There is also a problem about the impact of long-term service on their mental state. To be an interrogator you have to start out with some kind of scratch on the brain. But the handlers, too - after a time they also start to be handlers in their private life. You see it in their attitude toward women, with the family, even in the interaction between the people in the unit."

Along with operational successes, which have naturally remained far from the public eye, the names of some of the unit's members have been linked to dubious affairs in recent years. One of the unit's commanders became criminally entangled because of a romantic affair. Another accidentally discharged his pistol during a meeting with the command personnel. Jean-Pierre Elraz, who last year was accused of murdering Yitzhak Kwartatz, the security coordinator of Kibbutz Manara, is a former member of the unit (and afterward served in the Shin Bet); so is Major Yosef Amit, who was convicted of

aggravated espionage and contact with a foreign agent.

During the IDF's 18-year presence in Lebanon, the members of Unit 504 were especially active across Israel's northern border. To this day the Lebanese press occasionally runs stories about the arrest and trial of local agents who operated in the service of Unit 504. In November 1998, a Lebanese court convicted no fewer than 57 citizens of collaborating with Israel via the unit. The penalty for this offense: death.

The unit's extensive activity in Lebanon placed Camp 1391 at the center of affairs. It became the entry gate to Israel for Lebanese, especially those who were suspected of membership in Hezbollah, who were transferred to the southern side of the border. Some of them were captured in battle, others were abducted at Israel's initiative. The most famous of the abductees are Sheikh Abd al Karim Obeid, who was seized in 1989, and Mustafa Dirani, who was brought by force to Israel in 1994. The helicopter in which members of Sayeret Matkal, the ultra-elite reconnaissance unit, took Obeid from his home in the town of Jibsheat, took him directly to the gates of Camp 1391. The next time Obeid left the camp - apart from medical checks and to appear in court when his detention was extended - was 13 years later. Last summer Obeid and Dirani were moved to Ashmoret prison, near Kfar Yona in the Netanya area.

However, well-known anti-Israel activists such as Obeid and Dirani are not the only abductees who have been thrown into Camp 1391. When the soldiers of Sayeret Matkal entered Obeid's house in the dead of night they encountered a few other people, too, among them some of Obeid's relatives and his bodyguard. Hashem Fahaf, then about 20, who happened to visit the sheikh that day to receive his blessing and decided to stay overnight, was especially unlucky. The soldiers bundled him into the helicopter, too. He spent the next 11 years incarcerated in Israel, initially in Camp 1391 and afterward in Ayalon Prison in Ramle. During this entire period he was not tried or accused of any crime. In the first years of his incarceration, Israel denied he was in the country and refused him any contact with the outside world.

In April 2000, Fahaf, by now 31, was released by order of the Supreme Court. Together with him another 18 Lebanese, who according to the official version were being held as "bargaining chips" for the missing air force navigator Ron Arad, were also released. The group included two men who had been kidnapped and brought to Israel when they were teenagers aged 16 and 17, as well as Ghasan Dirani, a relative of Mustafa Dirani, who developed catatonic schizophrenia during his incarceration in Israel. At one stage or another, all of them were held in Camp 1391.

Inside the facility

In aerial photographs of the area in which Camp 1391 is located - as is the case with aerial photos of other security-sensitive sites in the country - the facility

and the large building in its center are nonexistent. Most maps of Israel also do not cite the facility, though on a few maps of the Nature and National Parks Protection Authority, it is marked by means of a letter, with no further explanation. There is no sign on the main road directing the curious to the camp. After we drove around the base a couple of times and stopped a bit to take pictures, a security vehicle was sent out to follow us for a few kilometers. At the first opportunity, two armed and surly security men got out of the vehicle and barraged us with questions.

Anyone entering the camp has to negotiate two iron gates draped with barbed wire. The first gate closes after the visitor enters and only then does the second gate open. The detention and interrogation section is located not far from the mess hall. A person who served on the base recalls with a smile that a poster spelling out the main points of the Geneva Convention hung on one of the walls of the dining hall. The cells proceed along a corridor; they abut one another but are separated by thick concrete walls. The detainees can communicate by knocking on the walls, "and they often shout to one another," relates an officer who served in the facility. "That is forbidden, but we didn't always have the energy to deal with it."

The detainees are led into the facility blindfolded, to prevent them from knowing where they are. Their personal effects are taken from them, as are their clothes and they are given blue pants and a blue shirt. The cells are pretty much identical, though there are two levels of detainees: those who are in the middle of being interrogated, who get the worst cells and worst conditions; and those whose interrogation has been completed.

Two of the cells are relatively large (2.5 x 4 meters), have reasonable lighting and running water, and are therefore called the "villas" by the prisoners. Sheikh Obeid shared one of the "villas" with two Lebanese detainees. Two of the solitary confinement cells are considered the worst of the lot. They are 1.25 x 1.25 meters in size, almost completely dark, and the walls are painted black or red. The differences between the other cells are largely insignificant, expressed mainly in the form of a few basic rights that are accorded to those whom the system no longer has any reason to subject to psychological pressure.

The doors of the cells are made of heavy steel, with a small crack - which can be opened only from the outside - being the only opening to the outside world. The cells measure about 2 x 2 meters and are made entirely of concrete on the inside. There are no windows or any source of external light. Abutting one of the walls is a concrete platform that serves as a bed, with a mattress and a blanket on it. On the wall opposite is an orifice, a kind of pipe through which water flows, but the tap is controlled by soldiers outside the cell. Below the water source is a hole in the floor that the detainees use to relieve themselves. That, it turns out, is a privilege. In some of the cells, apparently those used for detainees under interrogation, there is no place at all to go to the toilet: the prisoners have to use a large plastic bucket, which is emptied only once every

few days.

There are ventilation openings in the upper part of the cells, but the main testimony to their existence is the noise they make when they are turned on. A lamp protected by heavy glass casts a dim light 24 hours a day. The detainees have no way to tell night from day. Most of the cells are also under supervision by means of cameras that send the images via closed-circuit television. The majority of the prisoners are incarcerated alone, though some of the cells have two concrete platforms and in some cases hold two prisoners.

The detainees receive the same food the soldiers get. Three times a day, soldiers open the door, bring in a dish and then close the door. The procedure is that before the soldier enters he knocks at the door, at which point the detainee must place a black sack on his head and turn around with his hands raised. The warders, members of the Military Police who are seconded to the facility, are not armed. Weapons may not be introduced into the facility, to prevent a situation in which one of the prisoners might seize a warder's weapon. The warders are only allowed to open the cell doors in pairs.

Once a day the detainees - those whose interrogation has ended - are allowed out for one hour in a small inner courtyard of sand and vegetation. The conditions of imprisonment, says a person who served in the facility, are relatively reasonable. Similarly, attorney Zvi Rish, the lawyer of Obeid, Dirani and many of the other Lebanese who were incarcerated in the facility in the 1990s, confirms that his clients had no special complaints about the conditions - referring only to the period after their interrogation had ended. What goes on during the interrogation process is another story altogether, one that sheds light on one of the darker corners of Israel.

Let George do it

On Friday evening, July 28, 1989, the adrenaline was coursing through Camp 1391. In a well-planned operation, Sayeret Matkal succeeded in grabbing Sheikh Obeid from his bed in the town of Jibsheet, about eight kilometers north of the Israeli border. Obeid was considered a spiritual authority in Hezbollah, but despite the high hopes, his abduction did not further the search for Ron Arad, who had been missing since his plane was downed over Lebanon three years earlier.

Soldiers who served in the facility at the time say that in the course of time they developed good relations with prisoner no. 801260. They taught him Hebrew - he reached an impressive level of fluency in the language - and he taught them Arabic. Obeid is described as the spiritual mentor of the prisoners and even of the warders. "With him everything was done quietly and with restraint, with grace and decorum. Even the warders treated him almost like 'your honor the rabbi,'" recalls an officer who served at the facility.

In May 1994 an honorable guest joined the order of the Lebanese prisoners at Camp 1391: Mustafa Dirani. He was another bargaining chip from whom Israel hoped to extract information about Ron Arad, or even to exchange for Arad, but he, too, proved a disappointment. Many months of planning preceded the abduction of Dirani, who was head of the security division in the Shi'ite movement Amal, and as such had been responsible for holding Ron Arad for about two years.

A few days before he was seized and brought to Israel, the interrogators of Unit 504 were given all the intelligence material that had been collected about him. When he arrived at the facility there was a feeling of an imminent breakthrough. In the first days of the interrogation all the ranking members of the defense establishment turned up at the facility - prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, the chief of staff, the director of Military Intelligence and officials from the Mossad espionage agency and the Shin Bet.

Dirani's interrogation began seconds after he was grabbed. In special cases interrogators from Unit 504 accompany a force that operates across the lines, with the aim of taking advantage of the abductee's initial shock. The interrogation continued in the vehicle that brought Dirani to his cell in Camp 1391 and then for the next five weeks continuously around the clock. The chief interrogators were the unit commander, career and reservist personnel - the latter were mobilized especially for the mission -and above all a major who introduced himself as George.

George, who is now 43 and lives in a small community in the center of the country, is dark with cropped hair, brown eyes and a solid body. He is considered one of the unit's toughest interrogators. The relationship that developed between George and Dirani was the stuff of quite a few newspaper headlines. It will continue to engage the courts during the years to come.

Still pending in Tel Aviv District Court is a suit filed by Dirani against the State of Israel and Major George concerning two incidents in which Dirani says he was subjected to sexual abuse. In the first case George called in four of the soldiers who were doing guard duty in the facility and one of them allegedly raped Dirani at George's orders. In another case, Dirani says in the suit, George himself inserted a wooden stick into his rectum.

The court will have to decide whether these events occurred. A perusal of the affidavits that have been submitted to the court, testimonies of officers and soldiers who served in the facility and evidence given by other detainees who were there paints a picture of a horrific routine in the interrogation rooms of Camp 1391. Within the framework of that routine the interrogators of Unit 504 have no compunctions about making use of extreme measures in order to extract information - information that in a large percentage of the cases was not in their possession.

"I know that it was customary to threaten to insert a stick," says T.N., an interrogator at the facility, in testimony he gave to Military Police investigators. "The intention was that the stick would be inserted if the subject did not talk ... I remember one case when something in that style was done ... George was interrogating one of the prisoners ... He called in S. and me. We came into the room and S. dropped his pants and remained in his underwear or he made clicking noises with his belt as though he was opening it ... S. did this during the interrogation, when George told [the prisoner] that he would be raped in the ass ... I remember for certain that the situation was threat of rape ...

"I want to add about that prisoner that he arrived in the room naked, handcuffed and with his head covered. S. and I were in the room and one of us led him around the room and the other held the stick next to his rear end, with provocation and threat, that because he had been caught lying the stick would be shoved up his ass. When I say the stick was moved around next to his rear end, the idea was to touch his bottom with the stick and maybe even to shove it next to the rectum so he would think we were really going to stick it in."

Dirani's complaint, along with other testimonies about what was going on in the interrogation rooms of Camp 1391, opened a Pandora's box in the army. George's line of defense was clear: The system, he said, abandoned me; everything I did was done with authority and authorization. Everyone knew, everyone gave their backing, and now everyone denies it all. To reinforce his case, George brandishes a petition that was signed by about 60 reserve officers and soldiers of the unit, in which they say it is wrong for George to have to pay a personal price for using working methods that were standard in the unit for many years.

What, according to George, did he in fact do with authority and authorization? He denied the rape and the abuse with the stick, but confirmed many details that were reported by Dirani and other prisoners. For example, the fact that they often stood naked while being interrogated. The State of Israel also denied the rape charge in its response to Dirani's suit, though in the legal hearings the representative of the State Attorney's Office, Yael Tennenbaum, confirmed that "within the framework of a Military Police investigation the suspicion arose that an interrogator who questioned the complainant threatened to perform a sexual act on the complainant." The denial notwithstanding, George was dismissed from the career army, in which he had served for nearly 20 years, by order of the IDF's judge advocate general. He claimed the system was trying to silence him and the episode and filed a petition to the High Court of Justice to be reinstated into service. The petition was rejected.

Today George sits at home, declining to talk about the case. But stains that will not soon be erased continue to hover in the skies above Camp 1391. Another example is the testimony of A _____ B_____, a Lebanese citizen who was brought to Israel and interrogated in the facility on suspicion of smuggling an anti-helicopter missile into the former Israeli security zone in southern

Lebanon. B _____ was convicted on the basis of his confession but afterward submitted an affidavit to the military court in Lod stating that the confession had been extracted under torture. He said he had been beaten with a wooden stick between the legs, forced to sit on a wooden stick until it penetrated into his body, made to drink coffee mixed with ashes from cigarettes and force-fed with large amounts of onions and water.

In a rare judgment, the military court in Lod, under the president of the court, Lieutenant Colonel Elisha Caspi, found in April 1998 that "a certain doubt remains as to whether it can be asserted with the certainty required in a criminal trial that his statement was made by the defendant and signed by him." In other words, the court did not reject B_____ 's account of the horrors that occurred in the interrogation rooms of Camp 1391, and he was released.

The new population

Since Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon more than three years ago, and certainly since the eruption of the intifada in September 2000, the unit has actively employed agents among the Palestinians in the territories, an area that until then was the almost exclusive preserve of the Shin Bet. Along with the change in the character of the unit's activity, the population that is now brought to the facility has also changed. As far as is known, in the past the main, though not the only, occupants of the facility were citizens of foreign countries - a term that does not include the inhabitants of the Palestinian Authority. They included Lebanese who were captured or abducted and brought to Israel, Iraqis who defected from Saddam's army and hoped to find political asylum in Israel, and there are also stories about an Iranian or two who were held at the facility in the past. In the past year, and perhaps in earlier stages of the intifada as well, Palestinians too were incarcerated there at times. The most senior of them, as far as is known, is Marwan Barghouti, who was interrogated at the facility for a few days.

"Barghouti sat on the same chair you are now sitting on," the interrogators said to one of the Palestinian detainees and made fun of the modest dimensions of the famous prisoner - "his legs didn't even reach the floor."

The fact that Palestinians were being held at the secret facility was revealed almost by chance in legal discussions between the state and Hamoked - Center for the Defense of the Individual, a Jerusalem-based human rights organization. Hamoked, which helps Palestinians locate relatives who have been arrested by Israel, wanted to know what happened to _____ Shahin, who was arrested last October 5 at his home in the village of Salfit, near Nablus in the West Bank. The IDF control center replied that "he is not on any list."

After Hamoked and Shahin's relatives petitioned the High Court of Justice, the state referred them in its response to a policeman at the Kishon detention facility. However, when they contacted the policemen they were told that "Shahin is being held in a secret facility that is annexed to the Kishon facility." With that response they went back to the court and argued that the law and a series of legal precedents oblige the state to inform a detainee and his family of his exact place of incarceration.

The case of Shahin was the first in a growing list of Palestinians who "disappeared" as though they had been swallowed up by the earth. Through the veteran attorney Lea Tsemel, Hamoked continued to press the state for answers - which arrived in bits and pieces. Yes, the representatives of the State Prosecutor's Office finally told the court, the state operates a facility whose name and location are security secrets. The state attorneys went on to say that even though the facility belonged to the army, the Palestinians had been interrogated there by the Shin Bet. However, the facility "served the Shin Bet only temporarily, this being due to a shortfall in places of detention ... Recently, though, the situation changed and it was decided that the Shin Bet no longer needs to make use of the facility in which the petitioners were held as a detention facility, and accordingly [the Shin Bet] removed from the facility the detainees it was holding there."

However, within weeks of this statement to the court, Odit Corinaldi-Sirkis, a senior deputy to the state prosecutor, stated that the facility had been revived: "I wish to inform you," she wrote on June 4 to attorney Lea Tsemel, "that since our responses were submitted the circumstances have changed, and the security people have informed us that detainees are currently being held at facility 1391."

A few days later, in her response to the court, the representative of the State Prosecutor's Office added more details: In the past five years "only a few detainees" were held at the facility, but because of the shortfall in places of detention in the wake of Operation Defensive Shield, in April 2002, the Shin Bet had made use of the facility, holding residents of the territories there for brief periods during their interrogation. Now [two months ago] a few detainees were being held there. The court was also told that the facility had been subjected to a review to ascertain the conditions in it, and according to the State Prosecutor's Office it met the accepted criteria in the facilities of the Prisons Service.

Hamoked was not satisfied with this response. What began as an attempt to locate a few detainees soon became a matter of legal and democratic principle: What is the legal authority for operating the facility? Is the fact that its location and name are secret, and that it is not open to external, public and international review consistent with the letter of the law? The state, by the way, submitted to the court an interesting document, according to which then defense minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer on April 16, 2002, signed an order declaring facility 1391 to be a military prison. Even if this document makes it legal to imprison people at the site, what does it say about the legality of the activity that was carried out there in all the years that preceded Ben-Eliezer's action? The answers to all these questions will have to be provided by the High Court of Justice, which is scheduled to take up the issue next month.

It's very difficult to get substantive comments about facility 1391 from officials in the political, security or even legal spheres. A great many politicians, some

of them with a rich security background, refused to say anything. Amnon Shahak, who was the director of Military Intelligence at the time of Sheikh Obeid's abduction, and later chief of staff, and was at one point briefly a candidate for prime minister, says he is "not interested in commenting on the subject." Oren Shahor, the chief intelligence officer at the beginning of the 1990s and today a program presenter on radio and television, says, "I can't help you with that."

MK Zahava Gal-On (Meretz), who has put in a request to visit the site but has yet to receive a reply, says, "The fact that such a facility exists, whose location no one knows formally, is one of the signs of totalitarian regimes and of the Third World. It is inconceivable that detainees do not know where they are and that their relatives and lawyers don't know, either; that under the auspices of the army, the State of Israel is violating elementary rights of detainees. Even prisoners have rights. There are international conventions. It is inconceivable that the state abducts people and that there is no review or supervision. I visited all the interrogation facilities of the Shin Bet and there was no problem. So what's the problem here?"

One big garbage pail

R___B___, a 38-year-old accountant who is married and the father of two, was arrested last December at his work place - an engineering consultancy firm in Nablus. At 9:30 A.M. soldiers arrived at his office, but he wasn't there at the time. When he got back, he decided to wait for the soldiers, and they returned in the afternoon and took him away. His wife says he waited for them because he was convinced he had done nothing wrong and wasn't worried. She adds that he was asked by his interrogators about his ties with wanted individuals. Today he is in administrative detention - arrest without trial - at Ofer Camp near Ramallah. As he has not been brought to trial, it is very difficult to know what he is suspected of. What follows are extensive excerpts from his testimony about the 42 days he spent at facility 1391. He gave the testimony to attorney Lea Tsemel on June 12 at Ofer Camp: "I was arrested on December 10, 2002. After being interrogated by the Shin Bet for 31 days in Petah Tikva, I was taken to a secret military facility. Those who took me there wore army uniforms.

"I was blindfolded and black glasses were placed on top of the blindfold to prevent me from seeing anything. I was handcuffed and shackled. Soldiers sat me down on the floor of the car and the soldiers then covered me with a black cloth. I couldn't see a thing the whole time and I was kept on the floor of the car for the entire long trip.

"I spent about 40 days at that place according to my count. I was never told the name of the place or where I was. I received different replies to my many questions. Sometimes I was told or they hinted that we were in Atlit, someone said Acre Prison, one interrogator said a 'submarine,' and many times the answer was that we were in 'space' or 'outside the borders of Israel.'

" There are two types of solitary confinement cells that I got to know. At first, for the first 11 days - according to the count I tried to keep - I was held in the worst of the solitary confinement cells. By my measurement, the cell is 120 centimeters wide (a bit wider than a mattress) and about 2.5 meters long. There is a damp mattress (all the mattresses are always damp) on a platform about 30 centimeters high and there are damp blankets. The blankets have a terrible smell; the mattress, too. There is a large black plastic garbage pail in the room, a small pitcher for water, and a rag.

"The room is completely black. All the walls are painted black, and I never saw the ceiling. When I looked up, I saw only darkness. Light of candle brightness penetrates weirdly from one side of the room, from a device that seems to be almost above the ceiling, and the light is filtered through three thick pieces of glass. The light in the room is so faint and illuminates such a small part of the room that if I had had a book it would have been totally impossible to read it. You can hardly see a thing.

"Of course the room has no windows. You can't tell whether it is day or night or when day becomes night. I had no way to know when it was time for prayers, I could only guess.

"There are one or two pipes in the ceiling, which are apparently for ventilation. I say apparently, because I could never ascertain where there was ventilation. Most of the time and in all the solitary confinement cells I felt I didn't have enough oxygen, and sometimes I thought I was about to pass out.

"I spent many days in that solitary confinement cell and in others like it, and hour after hour I would talk to myself and feel that I was going crazy, or find myself laughing to myself. I would sit on the mattress, get up and walk around in a circle, and sit down again. The only thing that kept me sane was thinking about my wife and children.

"What sets this solitary confinement cell apart from the others is the fact that it has no toilet facilities and no source of water ... I remember the first time I had to relieve myself. I thought about what to do, and in the end I removed my underpants, placed them on the floor, relieved myself into them, tied them up and threw them into the garbage pail. The pail remained with me in the cell as it was. On other occasions I had to stand on my toes so I could aim my droppings into it and not tip it over onto myself.

"I myself did not wash during all these days and no one offered me a chance to wash. Of course I did not brush my teeth or wash my face. Three times a day they brought a little water in a pitcher into the cell.

"On my ninth day in this stinking cell, when one of the soldiers had to come in or take me out, he almost threw up and rushed out of the cell. As usual, I stood

against the wall with my head covered by a black cloth. He called another soldier and they made arrangements and plans for removing the garbage pail. They told me drag it. I told them I couldn't do that while blindfolded, and I dragged it but it was too heavy and I couldn't get it out of its niche. So they agreed to remove the blindfold and let me drag the garbage pail out the door, and then they blindfolded me again and one of the soldiers grabbed my shirt and pulled me while I was still dragging the stinking pail.

"They led me to another solitary confinement cell, made me enter it with the pail and told me to empty it into the hole of the 'Turkish toilet' [a hole in the floor] in that cell. The soldiers were in control of water outside the cell, and as I emptied the pail they turned on a powerful jet of water and I and my clothes were dirtied.

"They made me wash the pail. I demanded to wash myself and I told them I was a worshiper but I would not be able to pray while I was dirtied with excrement. That was the first time I saw running water there. I spoke so angrily that they agreed to let me wash myself. I asked for a towel and one of the soldiers went to my cell and brought the rag, which had an unbearable stench.

"I asked for a new set of clothes and for a real towel but I didn't get them. All the behavior of the soldiers was coarse and filled with threats, and this time again they threatened that if I didn't use the opportunity I was being given I would not get another. I undressed as they watched through the opening and made insulting comments. I stood naked under a hole in the concrete from which water emerged. The soldiers turned on the water but didn't let me enjoy it for even five minutes and then shut it off from the outside.

"It was winter and cold, but I had no choice other than to put the soiled clothes on my wet body, and I was taken back with the sack on my head and an empty pail into the stinking cell. I stayed there for another two days.

"After spending 11 days there I was upgraded to a cell with a Turkish lavatory. That isn't really a higher level, because the soldiers control the water no matter what and they decide when to supply it ... After I got to this cell I was given the chance to shower once a day. The way the shower works: a soldier declares the possibility of showering. I have to undress as the soldier watches through the crack in the door. When I am naked I have to stand above the toilet hole and pin myself against the wall so that the soldier will turn on the water of the 'shower.' The water comes from one hole in a concrete protrusion that is about 15 to 20 centimeters from the wall and about 1.5 meters from the floor. To get flowing water you have to stand right against the wall and wait for the water.

"I declare that the soldiers never turned on the water for more than five minutes. They can control whether the water is hot or cold and they make use of that as they please ... To illustrate the soldiers' control of the water, I will tell you that one time I had soaped myself and the soldiers decided to shut off the water. I

yelled, I pounded on the door and after my shouts and demands the soldier acceded and turned on freezing water.

"Everyone knew about these conditions. Obviously the soldiers who did guard duty at the cell knew. So did the paramedic who saw me every day and the doctors who saw me once or twice a week. Of course all the interrogators, to the last of them, knew about it and apparently gave the orders for it. The paramedic and the doctors, who I would have expected would be compassionate men of medicine, saw me day after day in the same clothes, without underpants, smelled the stench that came off me day after day and said nothing, as though this is the way of the world.

"The interrogators truly suffered from the way I smelled. The interrogator Yoni had to suffer my stench day after day. I remember that one day Yoni approached me and looked as though he was about to pass out. He said 'Rihtak hara' [You smell like shit] and told me I had to finish the interrogation. Many times, when the questioning was over, he and the other interrogators would say, 'Arja listal al hara' [Go back to the shit pail].

"When I was in Yoni's interrogation room he would turn on the air conditioner right over me. It was winter and cold, and many times I told him I was cold, but he went on doing it. I understand why, because my smell was intolerable.

"It's also clear that the judges could know, too, if they bothered to ask why people who are filthy and stinking are brought before them. For my two remands in custody I was brought from that facility to the Kishon Prison (Jalama). When I was brought before a judge after 22 days in the facility I complained to him, I showed him my undershirt and I told him that when I was arrested it was white and now it was yellow, and I told him I had no underpants. I asked him to smell me and told him that I couldn't wash without a towel and clean clothes. The lawyer who was there told me that the judge told the soldiers to give me clothes.

"That night, at about 11 P.M., in the facility, they brought me clothes that were used but clean. They didn't bring a towel. When I asked for a towel in the days that followed I always got the same answer: 'Quiet.'

"During the whole period I was given food in the cell and made to eat sitting down. The food arrives on a fairly small dish. Three meals a day. The food was tastier than in the Shin Bet interrogation division in Petah Tikva. The problem was with the cleanliness. In the filthy solitary cell the soldiers would place the portion of food on the garbage pail, and in the second cell they put the food right on the toilet. Once I went on a hunger strike because of that and I refused to eat the food and complained to the Shin Bet agent, but no one was the least impressed. I did not get any hot drinks other than once in a while insipid tea that I had to spill out. I lost 14 kilograms during my stay there.

"There is no opening to the light or the sun and no daily walk. There is no possibility of getting a prayer book."

Cakes in jail

Haaretz Magazine submitted to the IDF Spokesman's Office and to the Prime Minister's Bureau a list of some 20 questions about facility 1391 - its history, conditions of detention, criteria for incarceration and the legality of what goes on there. The Prime

Minister's Bureau replied, "The questions should be referred to the IDF Spokesman's Office." A strange reply, given that representatives of the State Prosecutor's Office informed the court that in the past year the Shin Bet (which is accountable to the Prime Minister's Bureau) made use of the facility. The Shin Bet interrogators also bear responsibility for the harsh conditions in which the detainees are held, which constitute part of the psychological pressure that is applied during the interrogation.

The IDF Spokesman's Office declined to comment.

Meanwhile, in the textile factory where he works in Nablus, earning NIS 1,400 a month, _____Jedallah this week described the events that occurred around the time of his last birthday. He turned 31 on January 2. A few days earlier he was arrested in his home, apparently in the hope that he would be able to reveal something about his brother, who had been arrested a few weeks earlier on suspicion of being a Hamas activist. Jedallah doesn't know how many days he spent at facility 1391, and has no idea where it is. During each meal he took a bit of bread and hid it under the mattress in order to keep track of the days, but didn't succeed. He describes shameful conditions, exactly matching the descriptions of other detainees at the facility during the past year.

In his few weeks at the facility, Jedallah lost 11 kilos (he says he was weighed at the start and occasionally during his period of detention there, when he was examined by a physician or a paramedic) but says he was not tortured during the interrogations. On the contrary: he was treated almost cordially. Ahead of his birthday they told him he could expect a surprise, and it duly arrived:

"After I had lunch, they took me to the interrogation room. A few of the interrogators were waiting there, and suddenly one of the soldiers came in with a cake and candles and cups of tea, and they all sang "Happy Birthday." One of the interrogators, who was known as Abu-Habib, even blew up a balloon and hung it in the room. I asked them why they were being so nice and they told me that I was a nice guy and that I would get other surprises, too. And sure enough, they later brought my brother - who was also locked up in the facility - into the room and they ordered another cake for everyone. They asked me if I was happy and I told them I would be happier if I were celebrating at home with my wife and three children."

A few days later, about a month after Jedallah was arrested, he underwent a lie detector test and after another nerve-jangling wait was released in the middle of the night next to the IDF checkpoint outside Jenin. All the way home, to Nablus, he tried to understand the meaning of the events he had experienced, and where he was. As yet, he doesn't have any answers. ■