

PERSONALITY OF THE MONTH



Taher Abu Al Kalbat

Forty-three years ago, Taher Abu Al Kalbat performed his very first circumcision. In 1973, Al Kalbat began his career as a roaming *motaheer* (the person who performs circumcisions) in the streets of Nablus. During the past four decades, he has set every child who has come to him on the path to a new life.

His career as a roaming *motaheer*, which he inherited from his ancestors, is on the verge of extinction. Today you can find his little clinic in the corner of the old city amongst hundreds of vegetable, fruit, spice, and butcher shops. Al Kalbat inherited the profession that his family has been practicing for seven decades. His father taught it to him, and he taught it to his son Shareef.

Every male in the Al Kalbat family takes pride in this profession, and he and his son talk about the tools used in classic circumcision and how this job requires historical certification rather than medical.

Passersby do not notice the ruckus that Al Kalbat and his son experience in their little clinic in the old city. The *motaheer* used to roam the streets of villages in Palestine carrying a little black suitcase, a scene which now exists merely in memory. Today, women bring their newborns to him. Al Kalbat claims that he can perform the procedure before the baby bats an eye, a sign of his pride in his expertise.

Religions, including Islam and Judaism, have recommended circumcision; and the Samaritan sect in Nablus also circumcises their children eight days after birth. Even though the circumcision

process is incredibly sensitive and specific, the *motaheer* doesn't need more than an electric iron and a smooth iron vise. Al Kalbat has all of his tools in a small box.

A traditional circumcision for children doesn't require a lot of time, and Al Kalbat can perform it in less than two minutes, but for adults it takes more effort since they need to be anesthetized. Al Kalbat tells the story of a man in his forties who he circumcised in a village near Nablus. He laughs a big laugh of compassion for a man who decided to perform such a painful procedure so late in life!

Shareef, who does all procedures when his father is away, is just as good as his father in storytelling. He takes a lot of pride in his family and profession, and confirms every story his father tells.

There are also little "circumcision parties" that happen at Al Kalbat's modest clinic, that produce material for stories every time. Sometimes the children pee right after their procedure, which always makes people repeat the famous saying, "The baby who pees on his parents will be wealthy." The day of circumcision is usually one that is referred to in a person's history.

After the procedure is over, Al Kalbat hands the child back and says, "Take back your child exactly the way he is, except circumcised!" Al Kalbat, who circumcised thousands of children, says that many of them have become influential people in society.