

A Prisoner's Best Friend

By Abou Elkassim Britel, 2014

From the first day in prison, I had no right to a mattress or a pillow, to a watch, or books, or a radio, or the library, or to training courses. Even certain foods were forbidden: olive oil, olives, butter, dates, particular types of fruit. Everything was eaten cold because it was forbidden to reheat food.

From the first moment I set foot in the cell at 11:30 p.m., I instead had the right—and how!—to the company of a tribe of roaches. An invincible army—I couldn't leave even a tidbit of food—invaded everything, infiltrated anywhere and everywhere. It was impossible to keep hidden anything from them. And yet they were my company; maybe this was their way of making me understand, who knows?

Seeing these creatures that I had never had the occasion or opportunity to meet—or perhaps to enjoy—so close as this, I devoted all my attention to them: while I ate or went over a chapter of the Quran, walked in the cell, or performed ablutions, in short, I was condemned to the life of the roaches!

How sad! After having been treated like a roach, to imagine abandoning their world one day is very sad, no?—an army that surrounds you with affection, and that would never abandon you!

Who knows how many of these critters—drowned in food—I might have eaten without realizing it?

You will not believe it, but the cockroach is in fact a domestic insect; that is to say, if it knows you won't kill it or hurl it away, it will get into the habit (Glory be to Allah) of not escaping. You will see it takes its time to look around and eat. It's not bad as an "animal friend"!

The cockroach is a pure insect (*taaher*) that eats pure food: cheese, butter, sweets, oily food... continuously hopeful of finding more food, an army of one hundred members if not more. These roaches are not like cockroaches in the sewers.

It was asked of a few scholars if roaches are harmful, and they responded no. So to adopt a "roach family" is not a bad idea!

In closing, it was only a part of my life in prison, which I wanted to share with you.

P.S. I was subjected to kidnapping, physical and psychological torture, CIA rendition, secret detention, and long years in prison far from my loved ones, all in the absence of any legality. There is a campaign in progress to seek an apology and to redress the injustice that has devastated my life. Please sign the petition in support of this request and invite your friends to sign it. It is a gesture of solidarity and activism!

A heartfelt thank you to those who have already signed, to those who decide to do so, and for those who are interested.

To sign, here is the link: <http://bit.ly/Britel-Apology>