

**Yoga in Gaza:
A Conversation Featuring Hadeel Al-Gharbawi of Al-Jawad Camp**

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From Philly to Gaza: International Day of Yoga and Al-Jawad’s Practice of *Sumud*

It was the twenty-first of June. The summer solstice. I awoke eager to prepare for Yogis for Palestine’s (YFP) International Day of Yoga solidarity offering in Clark Park, a popular public space in West Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In concert with over 170 yoga practitioners across the globe who registered to participate in an International Day of Yoga for Palestinian Liberation (IDYPL) action coordinated by Yogis for Palestine and Tejal Yoga (Yogis for Palestine 2025), our founding chapter of Yogis for Palestine was organizing a local offering to fundraise for Al-Jawad Camp.¹ Located in Gaza, where Muslims make up over 99% of the population, and founded by Hadeel Al-Gharbawi in 2024, Al-Jawad Camp (Al-Jawad) is an educational space that offers art therapy and mental and emotional support, including trauma-informed yoga, for children who have been internally displaced during Israel’s genocidal assault on the Gaza strip (Ahmed 2025; Al-Jawad Camp 2025).

In 2024, the previous June, our Philly YFP chapter hosted the first International Day of Yoga for Palestinian Liberation action in Bartram’s Garden (Yogis for Palestine 2025). However, rather than celebrate International Day of Yoga (IDY) through the “soft power” diplomatic lens of its brainchild Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, as a weaponized tool for ethnonational, Hindu supremacist and anti-Muslim politics (Black 2020; Lakshmi 2020; Miller 2020; Puri 2020; Sood 2020a;), we reappropriated the holiday to call for decolonization and Palestinian freedom from the “Zionist colonial entity” (Jabareen 2013; Salaita 2024).² This year’s action sought to expand on this political effort to use IDY to call for Palestinian self-determination by inviting practitioners around the globe to join us in turning our attention toward the trauma and suffering, and hope and healing of Palestinian children. As a result, thousands of yoga practitioners – in Limerick, Ireland; Athens, Greece; Lima, Peru; Mayagüez, Puerto Rico, Berlin, Germany, and across the occupied territories in Canada and the United States – joined the global day of action and as an act of solidarity, vowed to raise funds for Al-Jawad Camp (Sood and Patel 2025). The action raised over \$22,000 USD for the camp, but what was perhaps the



Figure 1 – Philadelphia-based Members of Yogis for Palestine Embodying “peaceful warrior” Yoga Pose as they Participate in an International Day of Yoga Action for Palestinian Liberation in Clark Park (June 2025) (Photo Credit: Sheena Sood).

most touching act of solidarity to come from this action was the decision by Hadeel to facilitate a yoga program for the children of Al-Jawad that day.

As I opened my Instagram account that morning, I saw @jawadcamp had invited @yogis4palestine to collaborate on an Instagram post. I teared up taking in the images on my feed: young kids, approximately 8 to 12 years old, seated atop cushions placed directly on the earth inside a makeshift tent, practicing yoga with Hadeel, stealing moments of inner peace amidst the persistent backdrop of the US-Israeli drones circulating in the sky above (Al-Jawad Camp 2025). In one of the photos posted on Al-Jawad’s first Instagram account,³ 11 children are seated in a lotus pose breathing with Hadeel as their hands motion toward what looks to be a yogic gesture signifying inner wisdom. An additional photo captures the children mirroring Hadeel: as they raise their wrists, which are noticeably frail from the starvation campaign Israel has imposed on the besieged Gazan territory (UN OHCHR 2024; UN Staff 2024), their fingers appear to be tucking into their palms to make fists. In some photos, we see the children’s faces: a couple with their eyes closed, others with soft grins, and a few with enthusiastic hand and arm expressions. The remaining pictures depict the children holding or coloring in a hand-drawn sign that says, “21-22 June International Day of Yoga” (Al-Jawad Camp 2025).



Figure 2 – Children Sit in Lotus Pose While Closing their Eyes in a Meditative Pose (June 2025) (Photo Credit: Jawad Camp)

To this day, I struggle to comprehend how, in the midst of surviving the most horrific man-made catastrophe of the twenty-first century, the children of Al-Jawad reached for momentary glimpses of freedom with their breath and bodies, offering those of us participating in the global day of action an opportunity to witness how interconnected we all are and how desperately Palestinian children deserve to be free.

That Hadeel Al-Gharbawi has chosen to focus on trauma-informed healing during the Israeli ethnostate's genocide on Palestinians in Gaza is why the following interview highlights her and her work with Al-Jawad Camp. Before October 2023, Hadeel was training to be a journalist. After her first daughter was murdered in July 2024 and she sensed the conditions in

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Gaza becoming unbearable, she felt called to focus her energy on educating children. She started Al-Jawad Camp in the summer of 2024. In this conversation that Hana O., a fellow Philadelphia-based organizer and translator, and I had with Hadeel in August, we discuss Hadeel's decision to become a yoga teacher, her approach to sharing a trauma-informed practice with children in Gaza during an enduring genocide, and some of the ongoing challenges of sustaining Al-Jawad's programming amidst the ongoing displacements everyone has faced.

While the interview needs no introduction, I want to contextualize why I believe Hadeel's reclamation of yoga for children in Gaza remains critical amidst the backdrop of yoga's deep ties to fascist, ethnonationalist politics. Next, I share about my lineage and the origins of Yogis for Palestine and how this led me to Hadeel. Finally, I explain why Hadeel's commitment to the mental health and therapeutic needs of children suffering through the devastating conditions in Gaza and a relentless

state of indiscriminate psychological and physical violence embodies what Palestinians call *sumud*, a form of "stalwart" or steadfast determination to survive despite the deathmaking logic and policies of Zionist settler colonialism (Sheehi and Sheehi 2021).

The interview below illustrates the power of embodying yoga as a practice of freedom and transnational solidarity, but not all yoga practitioners believe in the Palestinian people's right to freedom. Earlier this spring, a Haaretz opinion piece entitled "Destroying Gaza with Love: Israel's New YogiNazis" fluttered my social media feed. Posing the question, "Who said spirituality and ethnic cleansing don't go together?," the Israeli opinion writer, Alon Idan, profiles Rivka Flair, an Israeli yoga teacher living in the Shiloh settlement in the occupied West Bank. As a healer who preaches personal growth through spiritual practices like "consciousness transformation," Rivka publicly advocates for the annihilation and expelling of two million Palestinians in Gaza (Idan 2025).

As hypocritical as it may seem, Idan is not profiling an outlier: yoga and fascism have been paired together quite readily across Israeli and other far-right societies over the last century. From religious supremacist and Islamophobic projects across the South Asian region, notably in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's India (Black 2020; Lakshmi 2020; Miller 2020; Sood 2020a), to the lineage of white and Aryan supremacist ones across Europe and the US (Home 2025; Imy

2016) to its growing popularity within the Israeli army and by the reservists who travel to India to decompress after their compulsory service (Hacker 2025; History 2025; Mohan 2024; Remski et al. 2024), dominant groups instrumentalizing yoga as a tool for oppression across a more than hundred-year arc capture this seemingly contradictory union. These weaponized iterations of “omwashing,” or of the global far-right weaponizing yoga for colonial, caste supremacist and ethnonational projects, are what I focus on in my research (Sood 2023; Sood 2024).

Although the mainstreaming of yoga toward global ethno-fascist state power is a patterned trend across the decades, on the other end of the spectrum lie examples of yoga being used as a tool for solidarity and healing from the brutality of oppressive contexts. I approach the publication of this interview through an activist and scholar-practitioner lens that situates yoga as a tool for transnational solidarity and anti-imperial feminism; this work, however, is not taken in isolation: it is part of a broader body of scholarship and activism on transnational solidarity and Palestine, developed by collectives and activist-scholars dedicated to dismantling US imperial structures (Alqaisiya 2024; Erakat 2020; Olwan 2015; Palestinian Feminist Collective 2025). As a South Asian yoga practitioner from an upper caste Hindu family, I used to think decolonizing

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yoga spaces meant increasing the representation of South Asians, especially Hindus, in mainstream yoga spaces. In previous narratives I published with *Race and Yoga*, I write about how I came to interrogate such Hindu nationalist, or Hindutva, assertions and began to disrupt its co-optation by colonial and caste supremacist projects, including by linking yoga to decolonial and anti-imperial struggles (Sood 2018; Sood 2020b). The founding of Yogis for Palestine (YFP) in 2021, in the aftermath of the Sheikh Jarrah uprisings that protested the forced evictions of Palestinians living in the occupied parts of East Jerusalem, is rooted in this lineage of repurposing yoga for decolonization and collective

liberation (Yogis for Palestine 2021). Years later, YFP’s decision to reappropriate the United Nations-recognized International Day of Yoga (IDY) into a day of action for Palestinian liberation is grounded in a similar commitment to transnational solidarity and internationalist politics. As utopian as it sounds, this is why Hadeel’s decision to teach yoga to hundreds of Muslim children in Gaza despite the Zionist entity’s attempt to annihilate them feels like an example of decolonial yoga.

I came to know of Hadeel in April of 2025 when a social media post from the first Al-Jawad Camp account came across @yogis4palestine Instagram feed: in the post were images of Hadeel sitting in a tent teaching children how to use their breath to regulate their bodies amidst the incessant bombardment of their land. I was intrigued: not simply as a co-founder and organizer with *Yogis for Palestine* but also as the founder of *Yoga Warrior Tales*, a kids yoga program that uses narrated educational videos to teach children mindfulness through a social justice lens.⁴ I started following and messaging Hadeel about her offerings and the children’s response to them. Yogis for Palestine had been organizing yoga offerings to fundraise for Palestinian solidarity; still, it was hard for me to conceive of children in Gaza practicing yoga during a time of catastrophic loss. Not even a month into the US-funded Israeli genocide on Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip, a UNICEF report observed, “Gaza has become a graveyard for thousands of children” (UNICEF Staff 2023).

Despite this reality, during the initial “ceasefire” period from January to March 2025, Hadeel joined *We the Mindful’s* online training course to become a trauma-sensitive yoga teacher. She wanted to equip the children in her camp with breathing techniques to cope with the psychological toll of living through a genocide that was intensified by catastrophic famine and unimaginable loss. That summer, as I continued following Hadeel’s work and was co-organizing Yogis for Palestine’s second annual International Day of Yoga for Palestinian Liberation (IDYPL), our global initiative invited practitioners to organize donation-based online and in-person yoga offerings in their communities.

It is now December 2025, and one of the latest UNICEF press releases shares that in the last two years, more than 50,000 of Gaza’s children have been murdered or injured by Israel’s brutal siege and incessant bombardment (UNICEF Staff 2025). Thousands more have been injured and orphaned, creating a new acronym: “wounded child, no surviving family” (WCNSF) (Borger and Tantesh 2025). Despite the latest declaration of a so-called “ceasefire,” which arguably manufactures an illusion that the bloodshed has stopped, the Israeli army has made clear that it will not stop murdering children in Gaza: two of the latest victims include Jumaa and Fadi Abu Assi who were struck by a missile fired by an Israeli drone while searching for firewood earlier this month (Borger and Tantesh 2025). For the over one million children in Gaza who have survived the massacres and are living through the next apocalyptic stage of this holocaust, the occupied territory that mimics the surface area of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (the city where I live) continues to be a place of unfathomable horror: according to an August 2025 UN press statement, the enclave is home to the highest number of child amputees per capita of anywhere in the world (UN Staff 2025). Children are being raised in a climate where they are contending with some of the most debilitating, life-changing disabilities (UN Staff 2025).



Figure 3 – Children of Al-Jawad Camp in Gaza Pose with Small Gifts as they Celebrate International Day of Yoga with their Teacher Hadeel Al-Gharbawi (June 2025) (Photo Credit: Jawad Camp).

Beyond the ongoing physical injuries to their bodies, Gaza's children continue to suffer from severe mental trauma, a man-made starvation campaign, and the agonizing uncertainty of whether humanitarian aid will arrive and whether the fragile ceasefire will last. Speaking to the environment of panic that now encapsulates the strip, a recent *Al Jazeera* piece cautioned that the period when the bombs are no longer incessant is when many begin to feel the traumatic impact of massacres that have stolen their loved ones and relive such haunting memories, adding that "more than 80 percent of Gaza's children likely show symptoms of severe trauma" (Al Jazeera Staff 2025). How children, living in what UNICEF regional director Edouard Biegbeder regards as the "world's most dangerous place to be a child," will work to address the acute trauma of their past and present realities remains a pertinent concern for the future of Gaza (Al Jazeera Staff 2025; UNICEF Staff 2025). Although the October 2025 multi-stage "peace plan" mandated that Israel scale-up the allowance of food, water, shelter, and medical aid, Israel has enforced severe restrictions on local and international organizations seeking to provide said aid (Aydogan 2025). As the Israeli army has a decades-long track record of violating ceasefire agreements with Palestinians, this pattern has continued with Israel already violating the latest "peace plan" on a nearly daily basis since it was signed, raising the Ministry of Health in the Gaza Strip's death toll estimates of 71,269 by 377 people (Shurafa and Magdy 2025; Magee 2025; Staff 2025).⁵ In other words, although major news corporations have scaled back on their reporting in Gaza since October, Israel has not stopped bombing the people there. Despite the auspice of a ceasefire agreement, the genocidal war has not ended, and neither has the famine.

Those of us who have been bearing witness to the atrocities that our own political leaders have been co-signing on the Palestinian people in Gaza often resort to feelings of hopelessness and despair at the capacity of Palestinians to move through such severe trauma. After witnessing Israel bomb nearly all the hospitals, universities, schools, and municipal buildings across the Gaza strip, I, too, have felt this anguish. Still, what has kept me committed to advocating for and supporting the right of Palestinians to resist their occupation and fight for self-determination have been examples of their resilience and stalwart commitment to fight for their freedom in the face of catastrophic violence – what Palestinians refer to as *sumud* (Sheehi and Sheehi 2021).

I first learned about the concept of *sumud* when a solidarity activist shared about the liberation struggle of the "Gilboa 6," a group of Palestinian political prisoners who used rusty spoons to momentarily escape from one of the highest security Israeli prisons in 2021 ("Six Spoons of Sumud" 2024). *Sumud* invokes a commitment to liberation despite the Zionist entity's attempts to annihilate Palestinian life and culture (Sheehi and Sheehi 2021). *Sumud* has fueled the Palestinian people's steadfast determination to resist the occupation of their homeland for over 77 years: it is what has allowed Palestinians to persevere toward freedom even during the latest holocaust.

I believe Hadeel's commitment to sustain learning spaces for children while also teaching them therapeutic practices like trauma-sensitive yoga in the face of catastrophic violence is another example of *sumud*. In addition to teaching the children at Al-Jawad Camp yoga and mindfulness, Hadeel also teaches them the Palestinian national curriculum, arts and crafts, and uses the funds she raises to prepare and offer the children food, school bags, and stationery. Hadeel is not alone: just weeks after the ceasefire was signed in Sharm-el-Sheikh in October 2025, despite their educational buildings being destroyed in the rubble, several universities in Gaza returned to serving their students. Elementary school teachers and educators have also reopened schools, often calling on the world to lend their solidarity and support toward the process of rebuilding (Barakat and Phipps 2025).

While Hadeel’s efforts were featured in an article in the *New Arab* and a recent piece in *The Guardian*, I wanted to expand on profiling her work and her practice of *sumud* in this intimate conversation (Ahmed 2025; Osman 2025). As Palestinians in Gaza were approaching the twenty-third month of genocide on Gaza in August 2025, I reached out to Hadeel to learn more about her journey with yoga and her idea to bring the practice of yoga to the children of Al-Jawad Camp. Hadeel agreed, and a friend and Palestinian organizer, Hana O., offered to translate the interview from Arabic to English. Our conversation weaves through themes of trauma and healing, yoga and Islam, and the struggles of bringing yoga to children who are exhausted from surviving a genocide. In one part of the interview, Hadeel explained that she had to shorten the sessions to 10 minutes of physical activity because many of the children who were attending Al-Jawad were also responsible for searching for water and food for their families, an often hours-long process.

As sad as it is to imagine children struggling to have the energy for more than 10 minutes of focused attention toward their bodies, it is also necessary that we bear witness to these stories: the suffering, the resilience, the determination to be free. As a fellow yoga practitioner and educator who has a children's yoga program, I felt connected to Hadeel and even shared my *Yoga Warrior Tales* videos with her. However, what inspired me to conduct and share this interview with her for *Race and Yoga*’s special issue on Yoga and Islam was a sense of moral duty.



Figure 4 – Children of Al-Jawad Raise their Wrists in Unison with their Teacher Hadeel Al-Gharbawi as they Learn Yoga Poses to Calm their Minds (June 2025) (Photo Credit: Jawad Camp).

As the tax dollars I contribute to the US government continue to bankroll the weapons that Israel has been using to massacre and impair the physical and mental ability of Palestinians to live their fullest, most self-determined lives, I understand it is also my duty to share their stories. While I am moved to share this profound narrative of Hadeel fusing yoga with her practice of Islam to help Gaza's children find even an ounce of healing from this cruel world that has left them traumatized for generations to come, I am reminded that the desperate need for aid and solidarity with Palestinian self-determination has not gone away. As you read the conversation below, if you are moved by Hadeel and her practice of *sumud*, please consider following and supporting her work with @jawadcamp2 on Instagram.

Sheena Sood: Hadeel, we first connected before Yogis for Palestine organized the International Day of Yoga Global Day of Action for Palestinian liberation. Since then I've been able to witness the work that you do for children in Gaza who have been displaced to camps by Israel's genocide. One of the activities you've been sharing with children at Al Jawad Camp is trauma- sensitive yoga. I'd love to ask you more about your relationship to yoga and your life in Gaza. For starters, can you share more about why it was important for you to practice and learn how to teach yoga? And when did you start teaching yoga to the kids at Al-Jawad?

Hadeel Al-Gharbawi: I started practicing yoga about 6 months ago, and it was primarily for mental health reasons – to take care of the children that were sort of under my care in the educational tent. They had already been doing a lot of art work and educational exercises with me because I wanted to offer them psychological support, but I realized I wanted to offer them more activities to help them recover from the trauma they were facing, so I started practicing yoga with them as well. It was pretty challenging at the very beginning because there was no space to learn. I'm not necessarily referring to physical space here, but in general, in the Gaza Strip, it can sometimes feel as if there is little space to learn new things. It was challenging for a few reasons, obviously because the resources to do something like this are lacking, but also because of religious acceptance of a new practice by more traditional Muslims who were unsure if accepting yoga practices would conflict with their observation of Islam.

But then I had a friend from Syria who lives in the US: her name is Leila, and she runs an organization called *We Are Mindful*. She sort of reassured me that a lot of the people that she had been working with were also Muslim, and they had been reporting how good the breathing exercises and movement were for their spiritual and mental health. It was during the brief ceasefire period in February 2024, and Leila felt like this could be really good for the kids. So Leila started training me, and then I started teaching the children how to do breathwork. I shared with them how the breathing exercises can help them with shocks and trauma in a way that can help regulate their body and mental health. So, this is how it started, and how it has continued for the last six months. Although the educational and art programs have been ongoing for over a year, the yoga practice itself emerged no more than six months ago.

Sheena Sood: Can you share a little more about some of the mental health concerns and challenges you see the children in Gaza and at your educational camp experiencing? Why

and how do you use yoga at Al-Jawad Camp? How have the children responded to practicing yoga there?

Hadeel Al-Gharbawi: I started the Al-Jawad Educational Camp two years ago, after the outbreak of the war. This was due to the overcrowding of schools with displaced people and the lack of education. I decided to set up an educational tent to help children continue their education. I noticed while working with the children that they were experiencing widespread psychological problems, including severe depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and trauma. Many of the children who come to the camp have lost their mothers, fathers, or siblings and are unfortunately living difficult psychological lives, in addition to the difficulties of life during the ongoing war.

After completing the training with Fedaa and Lelia, I was excited to bring it to the kids at the camp. When I first started, although the kids were very excited about the prospect of learning a new skill, I found it difficult to practice with them, not just because it was a non-traditional way to exercise, but also because they seemed really tired. Most of the kids that I am working with are about 8 to 12 years old; these are the kids who are generally in charge of grabbing food parcels and water jugs for their families. They are really exhausted due to a lack of basic nutrition and the ongoing starvation, which makes even the simplest yoga exercises pretty challenging on their spent bodies.



Figure 5 – Child Sitting in Al-Jawad Camp’s Makeshift Tent Holds a Sign that Says “21-22 International Day of Yoga” while Looking at Camera and Sitting Next to Kids Learning Yoga (June 2025) (Photo Credit: Jawad Camp).

So, I innovated the curriculum by limiting the exercises to 10 minutes per day. Now, I put soft music on during the exercises, and even though they still get tired, over time, it’s become a joyful exercise for them. I also try to get them a little snack afterwards to keep their energy

going, like a piece of cake or something. Since then, I have been encouraging the children to practice yoga twice a week, and many of the children and families have responded positively and thanked me for implementing it. Over time the children have gotten used to it and have begun to love it very much.

Sheena Sood: Incredible. Thank you for sharing all that. I think you may have answered this, but just in case you want to share more, I'll ask again. How would you say your religious practice and your connection to Islam influence how you connect with yoga?

Hadeel Al-Gharbawi: Yes, I am Muslim, and in general, there is a social taboo around yoga when it comes to practicing it in the Gaza Strip because some people feel like it's a non-Muslim thing. Initially, I encountered opposition from the children's families, but I explained to them that it is like a sport and does not have to conflict with Islam. It is simply an activity we practice to alleviate psychological trauma, as we unfortunately suffer from many psychological crises in the Gaza Strip.

At first, there actually was also a lot of backlash on social media when I first posted about it; people were telling me this is not Islamic, but I didn't really care too much about these negative comments. I didn't let them get me down. For me, when I actually dove deeper into the practice, it really gave me a lot of relief. Those exercises were especially important for me while I was pregnant. I only gave birth last month to my son Fares. And this entire time, I was practicing yoga while pregnant, and those exercises really helped me in that process.

So I felt like even though there are a lot of assumptions, I think that religion, Islam, and yoga can go hand in hand. Especially for the breathing exercises, I weave in some things from Islam, so like you know, mentioning God as we take a breath in or out, and asking for mercy from God as they breathe out. So I have found a way to weave in Islamic practices like prayer with the breathing exercises that come from yoga and sort of put it all together. And while all of the kids in the camp might be Muslim, a lot of them still come from different families, backgrounds, and values, so I try to ensure that the yoga I offer is inclusive and weaves in some aspects of Islam so that they are more open to accepting it. It has been really rewarding to see that this model of weaving Islam with yoga has generally been accepted and encouraged by the families too.

Sheena Sood: I saw one picture of your son Fares. It is such a beautiful testament to your strength and your brilliance how you're able to weave your devotion to Islam into the yoga sessions with these children, just such a powerful testament to the offering. They are so lucky to have you. So Hadeel, I'm also wondering, because of the forced displacements and occupation that you and other Palestinians in Gaza have faced, you have had to restart the camp multiple times, often in different locations due to the multiple displacements. Why did you feel like it was important to start this particular camp? Even in the midst of the utter devastation and the state of emergency people are in, why did you start a camp that chose to focus on art and mental health?

Hadeel Al-Gharbawi: So the camp first opened when we were displaced the first time. All of the children here cherish schooling and getting an education, two things that, despite Israel's occupation and siege, had been stable and widely available prior to October 2023 thanks to the steadfastness of Palestinians in Gaza. I wanted to build a free educational camp that provides

services to displaced children living in tents and to children who were still able to live in their homes. I didn't just want to provide them with the basic curricula. I also wanted to provide them with meals, stationery, and various sports and activities.

For me, there's nothing more important than mental health right now. Everything really has been taken away from these kids, who are basically living in hell for 24 hours of the day, whether it's grief, fear, starvation, you name it. They're living in really horrible and hellish conditions. And so, even an activity for 30 minutes, whether it's art or just providing something for 30 minutes for the kids makes them light up and be happy for just that moment. And really, I would do anything to keep these children happy, even if it is short-lived.

Since we first began and opened in the South, there have been even more restrictions on movement. Ever since Al-Jawad Camp began, despite the blockade, the massive displacements across the Gaza Strip, and the restrictions on movement, the camp has moved locations (at first we were in the south but now we are near the sea), but it has never ceased to teach and educate the kids. Even when there wasn't a seat up for a tent, we found a way to bring it back.

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Sheena Sood: At the time of this interview, we are nearing upon 23 months of you living under Israel's genocide. I'm not sure where you are in relation to Gaza City, but Israel is threatening a ground invasion of Gaza City. I realize you've been suffering and living under hell for 23 months, but even prior to October 2023, people in Gaza have been living under Israeli occupation for decades. Describe daily life in Gaza prior to 2023 and after it: how have conditions changed since the beginning of the genocide?

Hadeel Al-Gharbawi: Life before October 7 was relatively more normal, stable and secure. Now, there is no security at all. Everyone is targeted and could die at any moment. All homes, schools, and hospitals have been destroyed. There is no food, drink, or shelter. Everything has been destroyed. Life has been reduced to dilapidated tents, lacking privacy and cleanliness, and unfortunately, there is no life there. Children used to have their own homes and schools, but now they are huddled with multiple families in a single tent, suffering from high temperatures and the spread of disease. And currently, I'm relatively close to the sea, a little west of Jabalia and Gaza City, so we are relatively less affected by the pending invasion.

However, there's a very high chance that the Israeli army will drop leaflets anytime to evacuate our area, so there is a lot of uncertainty and fear in knowing that anytime I may need to pause everything and move my tent further south. Honestly, the conditions are bad, but what is coming next is probably worse. At the same time, you have to have some hope, so I'm hoping for a ceasefire soon. It's going to be challenging to once again move everything. And moving is really

hard and expensive. Just for the moving part, it's \$700, and honestly, if any of your readers are able to mobilize support for the moving expenses, that would be very helpful.

Sheena Sood: Well, we [Yogis for Palestine] will definitely continue to organize fundraisers for you... as long as we need to and we really appreciate all that you do for the children of Al-Jawad Camp and Gaza. Many of us with Yogis for Palestine were also really touched that you and the children at Al-Jawad joined us for International Day of Yoga, and I'm wondering if you can share how did the children respond to the practice that day, knowing that it was International Day of Yoga and that other people around the world who support Palestinian freedom were practicing with them. What did it feel like to participate in the International Day of Yoga action for Palestine, while knowing that the Global Day of Action was oriented toward raising funds for your camp? How did the children respond to knowing it was International Day of Yoga?

Hadeel Al-Gharbawi: The children were very happy on International Day of Yoga. Obviously, they had wished to be in an organized space where they could hold a really big celebration with a full buffet of food, dance and yoga, but obviously, they weren't able to do that. But they were still excited to be part of the only school that was conducting yoga activities in the Gaza Strip. They were also grateful that I provided them with gifts and cake, and new yoga practices, and it did make them feel happy that everyone was together. Also, a lot of journalists visited to highlight the event, so that was really great.

Sheena Sood: I guess the last thing is, what is your message to the world? What more can the world do for you and Jawad Camp right now?

Hadeel Al-Gharbawi: My message to the world is that support and solidarity with Gaza is really important right now, so please continue to maintain solidarity. In some ways, the solidarity that we have been receiving from the West is sometimes more palpable than the support we have been receiving from the Arab world. So please continue to stand in solidarity with us. Even a simple word makes a difference. Please continue to support Al-Jawad Camp, even if it is by sharing the page and supporting my activities with the children. Salam.



Figure 6 – Recent Image of Al-Jawad Camp's Tent Destroyed After the Winter Flooding (December 2025) (Photo Credit: Hadeel Al-Gharbawi).

Thank you for reading this interview featuring Hadeel Al-Gharbawi of Al-Jawad Camp. As I prepared the interview for publication, and the winter solstice has come and gone, freezing weather, heavy rains, and inadequate shelter have unfolded and accompanied life in Gaza. As the current conditions of the “peace plan” take hold, genocide endures in a different form. In Hadeel’s most recent words from December 21, 2025, she wrote, “a deadly cold grips the tents, stealing the breath of children ... without witnesses”: as Israel refuses to let life-saving aid into the enclave, babies in Gaza are dying of hypothermia (Kelliher 2025). Since conducting this interview, Hadeel has been displaced at least two times. She rebuilt the educational tent for Al-Jawad, but it flooded in the second week of December. Her capacity to sustain Al-Jawad’s work and tend to the healing and therapeutic needs of Gaza’s children remains precarious – especially as they face deadly conditions imposed by the Israeli ethnostate.

Still, Hadeel continues to strive for *sumud*, and she is committed to sustaining the mission of the camp so long as she is alive. The need of children in Gaza remains dire, and Hadeel is fundraising to rebuild her home and a school for Al-Jawad Camp. Consider following Al-Jawad Camp’s work online at @jawadcamp2 and supporting Hadeel’s efforts to help Palestinian children in Gaza find healing and freedom during the US-armed Israeli genocide.

Notes

¹ I first learned about Tejal Patel, founder of Tejal Yoga, in 2021 through their “abcdyogi” platform. In April 2025, Tejal invited Yogis for Palestine to collaborate on a program together to address the ongoing occupation of and genocide in Gaza. Having organized a local International Day of Yoga Action for Palestinian Liberation in Philadelphia the previous year, I pitched the idea of collaborating to invite practitioners around the globe to organize their own local IDYPL action to support mutual aid initiatives in Gaza and fundraise for Al-Jawad Camp in Gaza.

² As Palestinian scholar Steven Salaita (2024) reminds us, there has been even more debate about language and vocabulary since the acceleration of the genocide in Gaza. Hassan Jabareen (2013) explains that in the decades following the 1947 UN Partition Plan for Palestine, the nation state members of the Arab League challenged the legitimacy of Israel and denounced its right to exist by referring to the nation in the imaginary as the “Zionist colonial entity.” Since the 1993 Oslo accords, the question of Israel’s right to exist among Arab states became less of a question of legitimacy as treaties with Arab states paved the way for the nation to be recognized (Jabareen 2013). Many Arabs, however, continue to use “Zionist entity” and “Zionist colonial entity” as a form of rejection. Salaita writes, “the term is disrespectful in just the right measure and implies that ‘Israel’ is a temporary phenomenon haunted by something older and more lasting. It evokes Palestine even when describing the occupier” (2024). I have chosen to lift up the terminology of the “Zionist entity” and “Zionist colonial entity” here because it is the language Yogis for Palestine used in events and actions, and also because it is a gesture of refusal that “keeps the idea of Palestine alive” (Salaita 2024).

³ As Al Jawad Camp’s first Instagram account was deleted by Meta in July 2025, the original post from June 21, 2025 is no longer available. Hadeel has since created a new Instagram account and reposted the same images in a series of posts dated after June 2025.

⁴ For free online access to a full season of these Yoga Warrior Tales videos, see our YouTube account (Yoga Warrior Tales n.d.)

⁵ In December 2025, the Ministry of Health in the Gaza Strip estimated the official death count since October 2023 to be 71,269 Palestinians, but the reality is that an inestimable number of Palestinians have been killed since the acceleration of the genocide. Over a year ago, in July 2024, a Lancet study warned that the death toll of Palestinians in Gaza is likely more than 186,000, suggesting the confirmed number of deaths by the Gaza Health Ministry to be a drastic undercount (Khatib et al. 2024). This underestimate is important to keep in mind as we consider the impact of the war on life in Gaza.

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Acknowledgements

Hadeel Gharbawi - Al Jawad Camp

Hana O.

Palestinians who continue to resist for their freedom

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