

The Sixth Lesson

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I am going away, again, to write. Not to Wadi Ram this time, to another place. But this time too, like before going to Wadi Ram, for fear I might not be able to write, my mind yields to anxiety and a thick mist closes in. As if there wasn't something asking to be written through me. As if nothing has ever happened in the world. And like last time, a cosmic event attracts my attention and shakes me up, removing the web of fear from my eyes. My mind becomes instantly lucid, and I see straight.

A volcano erupts in Iceland. A cloud of volcanic ash spreads out. Airports are shut, the media reports worldwide turmoil and the public discussion is touched with something between surprise, astonishment and complaint. As if a periodic eruption of a volcano is unnatural. As if this is not the way of the world. This is a mistake, a blunder, an audacity, it's inconceivable, abnormal, a gross disruption of universal harmony.

A familiar pain clarifies in my transparent watchful heart.

How does world order turn upside down – natural phenomena are considered unnatural, the disorder which is an integral part of cosmic order, is seen as a severe betrayal of human beings by nature, whereas war, occupation, discrimination and other rotten fruits of human blindness, which Man has the power to determine whether they will or will not be - are considered laws of nature, the essence of cosmic harmony.

This is precisely why the raw sounds of Salem's children, with all their screeching of strings and beginners' dissonance, sounded like the purest and most harmonious melody I have ever heard. The children of Salem Village, near Nablus, were born into the Israeli occupation, them and their parents before them. And those whose parents' parents, or their parents, are still alive, can also hear stories from the Jordanian rule, and the British occupation, and even from the period of the Turkish occupation, childhood memories of the eldest.

With the looming long history of occupations, the children of Salem know the Israeli occupation. They grow up in its shadow as if it has always been and will always be there. As if trust in human beings is an unusual gesture and violence is a noble educational value without which one is nothing but a sucker. And I, who have been visiting this place with my friends for eight years now, see, understand, and my hands are tied.

About two years ago, Dafna asked me whether an old piano she'd come across could be of any use in Salem. Something in the connection between the word "piano" and Salem stirred the strings of my heart. My wild imagination betrayed me yet again – I literally saw before my eyes a whole feature in which the children of Salem were playing joyfully together and healing. I shared this mad dream with Ehud. We began looking for a partner for this vision of an orchestra.

Jubier, born in the village, is a trained musician and intuitive healer. He is younger than the occupation. He was a child during the first Intifada, an adolescent in the Oslo days. The

second Intifada found him in Al-Najah University in Nablus, studying at the music academy. Curfews, closures, arrests, roadblocks, shooting, soldiers in the streets and houses, the fatal cutting of the village from Nablus, its main life-line, humiliations at the checkpoints, closing off the village, beatings, funerals - none of these succeeded in shaking his belief in the spirit of humankind.

“I don’t want virtuosos”, he said when we began thinking about fulfilling the dream, “I want children whose hearts will expand by the music”.

We started looking for financial support that would enable us to begin. For two years we cast our bread upon the waters, no-one picked it up at the shores. “I have to control my visions”, I would scold myself, distressed by the vain hopes my dreams have instilled in Jubier’s heart. Dear Ehud would gather up my frustrations and resume action. A few months ago, a young woman picked up "the bread". Apparently, when it comes to matters of the heart, no place is too far. The longed for money arrived from Australia. The plans that Jubier had prepared in advance were waiting for the money like ripe fruit for the hand of the picker.

On Friday, the 9th of April 2010, we were in Salem visiting Yasmin, a young blind woman whose father was murdered six years ago by a settler from the settlement of Itamar. We brought her a computer with special software for the blind and came with a technician from Israel to install it. Tired and emotionally overwhelmed, we were preparing to go home. “The children are having a music lesson right now, why don’t you come over”, offered Jubier when we called just to say hello. Eleven children (half of the group) were playing, in a room at the Village Council building. It is only their sixth lesson. Two violins, an oud, two tablas, a drum, three guitars and two organs.

I stayed a long time. My heart overflowed, my eyes wept what my heart could not contain. They are playing. Beginners’ mistakes and screeches combined with a symphony of joy shining on their faces. A sensitive, loving and talented teacher is leading them with the modest wisdom of a true healer. We couldn’t tear ourselves away. I could have stayed there for eternity. A moment of victory. Love conquers all, I wanted to tell them. But I was silent. They asked us to sing something. I was able to manage the simple sounds of the song “We bring you peace” (“Hevenu Shalom Aleichem”). I managed to sing the words in Arabic.

The taxi driver, waiting to take us to the military checkpoint at the entrance to the village, honks with the characteristic impatience of taxi drivers.

We part.

My eyes meet Jubier’s eyes.

“Sometimes dreams do come true”, I whisper in Arabic. Jubier responds with his wise modest smile and the pre-dusk sun blinds his tears too.