

October 20, 2023

Trying to Imagine the Unimaginable

When one reaches elder status, three score and ten in my case, one has experienced many things. I am now an elder woman, and as I watch the multiple tragedies in Israel-Palestine, I try to imagine myself in such a circumstance. What would I do if bombs were exploding around me, and flyers telling me to leave my home were floating down from the sky? I think about the moment in my life when I got a call from my dad telling me that my mother was in the hospital. I knew I had to get in my car and drive the five hours between my apartment and my parent's house. I pulled down the small suitcase that I usually use to travel. I went to my closet, trying to decide what to pack. I stared at my clothes for a long time. I could not think. Finally, I decided I was wasting time. I pulled out one of the largest suitcases that I had, grabbed everything that I thought I may need, threw it all in without folding, without organization. I was on my way, knowing that I would be back before the season changed, knowing that I would probably return to my apartment intact.

What would I take if I did not know where I was going, if I did not know when I would return and had no idea whether or not my house would be intact when I returned? Would I wear a heavy coat in late summer? Would I wear boots rather than summer shoes?

In my life, I have experienced power cuts for various reasons. I have experienced the water being shut off when my city was making repairs. I was given warning. I could fill up the tub and buckets and pots. I expected the situation to be over in a day. What would I do if I was going to lose power and water and food shortages all at the same time? This on top of being told to leave to go to an unknown destination with no idea if I would find shelter when I arrived. Now, suppose I did not have a car. Blessedly, I am a healthy elder woman. I could walk the ten miles, but it would take a while. When I arrived, I know my body would be sore to the point of being barely able to move, especially if I could not properly hydrate. I image that I would not be traveling alone. How would I put my own fears aside so that I could help calm the children and younger adults? On top of all that could I even get out of bed if one of my children or grandchildren were killed? I stretch my imagination as far as it will go, and I cannot imagine what the elder women in Gaza are going through.

Now, what about the elder women in Israel who have lost their children and grandchildren who may be taken hostage or injured or dead. I confess that I cannot stand the thought of one of my children dying before me. I do not know how mothers who survive their children get out of bed, let alone put one foot in front of the other. I have no words. I have tears that refuse to fall, locked behind eyes sore from watching images of suffering upon suffering. I watch young Muslim men on YouTube who believe that the dead are happy in the afterlife, yet they still shed tears. I, however, can raise my voice in lamentation. I can easily be one of the wailing women, one of the mourning women whose purpose is to lament until everyone's eyes run down with tears.

For some of us, tears help us to see clearly. They are transcendent, helping us to have empathy for other human beings who are also in mourning, whose tears are flowing. Tears have no color, no ethnicity, no nationalist, Ideology, no religion, no class, no gender, no age. Tears connect us to the rivers and lakes and oceans, to rain, to cleansing, nourishing rain as well as to rushing waters flooding creation. Tears connect us to birth waters, with the possibility of bringing forth a better world to live in. So, let us weep with the hope that we can find a way to end the killing and the dying and the cycle of violence that brings us to a place beyond imagination.