

The Poetics of Spaces: Because I Am Alone With the Desert, I Will Never Be Alone

written by Shoshana Seidman | April 28, 2014



I wrote this the morning after leaving Palm Desert, California where I had gone for three days on a solitary adventure. In the desert I had some sort of spiritual awakening, a cathartic moment of sorts, a revelation – and I don't use these terms lightly or frequently or ever. This is all entirely true, for what it is worth. It is also all entirely imagined, perhaps, but that is fine with me.

Sometimes I want to hold the facts close to me. To keep them safe. Sometimes I remember it doesn't matter whose hands or minds they enter. They will always be safe. They will always be nourished and loved, because the space is a prop. The space is an imagined land.

It is only what we say and do inside of these spaces that is real. And even then. Even those words and actions are themselves infinite imagined spaces full of negotiation and shape-shifting. And yet there must be a hope. A place we can count on. Coming to terms with the need for a permanent body, a home, and yet the understanding that I would and could not seem to have that has never been an easy journey for me. This trip gave me some clarity. On the eve of my 31st birthday, at the end of Passover, on a day dedicated to the Earth, I began again.

I am a desert creature, born in a room full of nomads. I like to roam but stay tied to the earth. At night, in the stillness of palm trees and a haunted moon, I hear voices of the dead and undead calling to me. When the desert mountains stand starkly hand in hand with the sky, I feel like I have known the answers all of my life.

The first time I touched down on Israeli soil after 16 years of being away, I cried. There were no cognitive memories per se, but there were visceral ones. I could feel the sinews of muscles, the aching of a suddenly-remembered bone. There was a magic bubbling, curdling in my blood. I don't live there now. I live in another city, far away, but still though my body is disjointed and restless, I know that all of it does not lie there in the palpable. A person can disconnect from a body, the way layers of sand and soil leave with the wind, but still the land remains. The heart, the true heart, has an unshakeable homeland.

My father is building a boat. He will sacrifice many things, many human comforts to attain the highest place of dreams. He wants to live at sea, and sail away from the land. Maybe he is a water creature, but the heart is a

heavy anchor that will keep him safe. This I know.

Sometimes people tell me I have an accent. Sometimes my skin turns dark and I feel completely powerful, like I have all of the sun inside of me. Nobody can take this away from me, because the land is somewhere they cannot reach.

The other day I walked alone in the dark but I felt an energy reverberating through the ground, through the dusty air. The night had been held still for me. I realized then that my feet were shaped flat so I could completely touch the earth. Whether I had to walk for 40 days and 40 nights, or an entire lifetime, this was the life I was meant to lead. My heart was heavy with a fullness, a magical mixture of complete grief and absolute joy. More than that. A consciousness that was completely natural. A suspended consciousness. I sang an entire album of song lyrics that suddenly came to me, and as I pushed the notes from my throat the birth was easy, because the desert cradled me, it soothed me, it was a midwife that kept me safe. Nobody will take this from me. This I know.

Perhaps this is the truest thing I've ever written.

