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"A revolutionary poem ... reminds you (for you have known, somehow, all along, maybe lost track) where and when and how you are living and might live—it is a wick of desire. It may do its work in the language of images of dreams, lists, love letters, prison letters, chants, filmic jump cuts, meditations, cries of pain, documentary fragments, blues, late-night long-distance calls...

'Any truly revolutionary art is an alchemy through which waste, greed, frozen indifference, 'blind sorrow,' and anger are transmuted into some drenching recognition of the *What if?*—the possible. *What if?*—?—the first revolutionary question, the question the dying forces don't know how to ask."

Adrienne Rich, *What Is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics*, 1993.

may 25, 2024

Yazan's yard  
st. John's, ktamkuk

## poetry for solidarity and liberation

Prompt 4:

### Conversation

If you open up this page, you'll find four poems by Palestinian poets on the back: "If I must die," by Refaat Alareer, "Fuck Your Lecture on Craft, My People Are Dying," by Noor Hindi, "The Deluge and the Tree" by Fadwa Touqan, and "Things You May Find Hidden in My Ear" by Mosab Abu Toha.

Choose a poem and read it. What emotions does it bring up in you? What questions does it leave you with? Who is the poet to you: are they your kin? A teacher? A neighbour? A stranger? What do you want to say back to them?

Write about it!

### "We teach life, sir."

You may have seen this quote in posts out of Gaza. It comes from a 2011 poem by Palestinian-Canadian spoken word artist Rafeef Ziadah.

The phrase "we teach life, sir" has come to represent Palestinian determination, ingenuity, strength, generosity, and humanity in the face of oppression.

"We teach life, sir.  
We Palestinians teach life after they have occupied the last sky.  
We teach life after they have built their settlements and apartheid walls, after the last skies.  
We teach life, sir."

(The complete piece is easy to find on YouTube! You should look it up if you haven't seen it before.)

Poetry is powerful! Poetry can be a tool of liberation for oppressed people, and a way for allies and co-conspirators to give our solidarity a voice.

Prompt 3:

### A poem can be a prayer

Poetry can be a powerful form of incantation. Repeating lines (for example, "We teach life, sir.") or the beginnings of lines (for example, "to tell... to sell... to buy..." in "If I must die") helps us tap into something beyond just the words on the page. If prayer isn't a concept that resonates with you, try thinking about a poem as a spell, a plea, an entreaty (or, if your poem comes from a place of righteous rage: a hex).

What do you ask of the universe right now?

Write about it!

Prompt 2:

### One image

People have referred to siege on Gaza as being the world's "first, 'live/instreamed genocide.'" We've seen images of horror and dehumanization, and also images of community, connection, love, and support. What's one image from the last eight months — from online, or that you've viewed first-hand — that you'll never forget?

Not a visual person? What about a sound you've heard? Something you've tasted? A smell? A tactile sensation?

Write about it!

Prompt 1:

### I know this much is true

What is *one true thing* you have learned from the struggle for Palestinian liberation?

Maybe it's something about global politics, or maybe it's something about your community. Maybe you've learned something new about yourself, or about someone you care about. Maybe it's a skill or a technique or a recipe or a song.

Write about it!



**If I must die**  
by Refaat Alareer

If I must die,  
you must live  
to tell my story  
to sell my things  
to buy a piece of cloth  
and some strings,  
(make it white with a long tail)  
so that a child, somewhere in Gaza  
while looking heaven in the eye  
awaiting his dad who left in a blaze—  
and bid no one farewell  
not even to his flesh  
not even to himself—  
sees the kite, my kite you made, flying up above  
and thinks for a moment an angel is there  
bringing back love  
If I must die  
let it bring hope  
let it be a tale

قال بد أن تعيش أنت  
رفعت العرعر

إذا كان لا بد أن أموت  
قال بد أن تعيش أنت  
لتروي حكايتي  
لتنبع أشيائي  
وتشتري قطعة قماش  
وخبوطا  
(فلنكن بيضاء وبذيل طويل)  
كي يبصر طفل في مكان ما من غرة  
وهو يحرق في السماء  
منتظراً أباه الذي رحل فجأة  
دون أن يودع أحداً  
وال حتى لحمة  
أو ذاته  
يبصر الطائرة الورقية  
طائرتي الورقية التي صنعتها أنت  
تخلق في الأعلى  
ويظن للحظة أن هناك مالكا  
يعيد الحب  
إذا كان لا بد أن أموت  
فليأت موتي بالمل  
فليصبح حكاية  
ترجمة سنان أنطون

Translation by Sinan Antoon

**Fuck Your Lecture on Craft, My People Are Dying**  
by Noor Hindi

Colonizers write about flowers.  
I tell you about children throwing rocks at Israeli tanks  
seconds before becoming daisies.  
I want to be like those poets who care about the moon.  
Palestinians don't see the moon from jail cells and prisons.  
It's so beautiful, the moon.  
They're so beautiful, the flowers.  
I pick flowers for my dead father when I'm sad.  
He watches Al Jazeera all day.  
I wish Jessica would stop texting me *Happy Ramadan*.  
I know I'm American because when I walk into a room something dies.  
Metaphors about death are for poets who think ghosts care about sound.  
When I die, I promise to haunt you forever.  
One day, I'll write about the flowers like we own them.

**The Deluge and the Tree**  
by Fadwa Touqan

When the hurricane swirled and spread its deluge  
of dark evil  
onto the good green land  
'they' gloated. The western skies  
reverberated with joyous accounts:  
"The Tree has fallen!  
The great trunk is smashed! The hurricane leaves no life in the Tree!"  
Had the Tree really fallen?  
Never! Not with our red streams flowing forever,  
not while the wine of our thorn limbs  
fed the thirsty roots,  
Arab roots alive  
tunneling deep, deep, into the land!  
When the Tree rises up, the branches  
shall flourish green and fresh in the sun  
the laughter of the Tree shall leaf  
beneath the sun  
and birds shall return  
Undoubtedly, the birds shall return.  
The birds shall return.

**Things You May Find Hidden in My Ear**  
by Mosab Abu Toha

For Alicia M. Quesnel, MD

i

When you open my ear, touch it  
gently.  
My mother's voice lingers somewhere inside.  
Her voice is the echo that helps recover my equilibrium  
when I feel dizzy during my attentiveness.

You may encounter songs in Arabic,  
poems in English I recite to myself,  
or a song I chant to the chirping birds in our backyard.

When you stitch the cut, don't forget to put all these back in my ear.  
Put them back in order as you would do with books on your shelf.

ii

The drone's buzzing sound,  
the roar of an F-16,  
the screams of bombs falling on houses,  
on fields, and on bodies,  
of rockets flying away—  
rid my small ear canal of them all.

Spray the perfume of your smiles on the incision.  
Inject the song of life into my veins to wake me up.  
Gently beat the drum so my mind may dance with yours,  
my doctor, day and night.

**LINKS:**

<https://inthesetimes.com/article/refaat-alareer-israeli-occupation-palestine>  
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/154658/fuck-your-lecture-on-craft-my-people-are-dying>  
<https://www.pij.org/articles/94/the-deluge-and-the-tree>  
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/155510/things-you-may-find-hidden-in-my-ear>