

## The Happy Business

*Seated in front of the electric fan in a darkened room, the summer is towards its end and at its peak. My aging, stored like heavy marrow, from the tin head to the loins: my life, what was it? My aging, stored like heavy marrow, from the tin head to the loins: my life, what was it?*

My name is Leah Moshe and I have been working in our family business, which sprouted like a wild growth in one exceptional evening that turned the fate of our family on its head, for almost fifty years. A wild growth that ripened with the years to become a widespread tree. It is its history that I wish to tell here: About a year after the Six Day War the Israeli television started its broadcasts. After a stately opening with the military march, the broadcasts were random and some programs were presented a few evenings a week, mostly gifts, it seems, from various countries to the young television authority. I remember a program I liked then, of songs by Yves Montand, in which he walked through ornamented gates erected in the studio, gliding away to appear again, at one moment peeping out like a shy suitor, at yet another like a singer who knows his own charms. Other memories are of short, witty plays of the English Armchair Theatre. But nothing in our life prepared us for what was briefly described as Traditional Japanese Theatre, a personal gift from the Emperor, so the announcer promised.

At that time we were living in our second apartment in Rishon LeZion, where we moved two years earlier from Ness Ziona, the town in which I grew up. A quiet street of relatively new three storied buildings with gardens in front, near the city center. It was in this apartment that our family life disintegrated. My father, with his office still in Ness Ziona, plunged into love pursuits with his secretaries and into games of tag and hide and seek with his creditors. Sometimes he wouldn't leave his bed all day, sending my mother to negotiate with usurers. On other occasions he wouldn't come back at all to sleep with us at home. Immersed in the poisoned aura of our home and in the strong odor of my father's aftershave that lingered on even in his absence, each of us lived then within himself, morose and full of shame. On the nights he didn't come back, my mother would scream in her dreams, and we, the girls, would sit up in our beds, our mouths agape. We adapted ourselves to an existence of ignoring and turning a blind eye so as not to see our parents in their failure.

Since times unknown my father's moods were like a pendulum, depending on the toys he bought for himself – sophisticated photo equipment, up-to-date electrical appliances or huge flower pots directly from the nursery. For some time he would rejoice in these and show them to others, full of pride and vanity, but before long his interest would shrivel, and he'd become wrapped up again in the bitter dreariness of his life. For my mother and for us, the girls, he was the moon with which we flowed and ebbed.

Still, none of us could refuse the temptation of the new television, and on the evenings when there were broadcasts, we would sneak from our rooms to the blue light of the living room. On that singular evening the despair was especially heavy and nobody expected anything. The houses in Baron Hirsch street stood in a straight line with their petit-bourgeois gardens and their square balconies turning blue in expectation of the broadcast. At once and in high volume the roar of the Japanese theatre poured down on the plain and innocent Israeli street. Roar, howl, shriek, grunt, it's hard to find words. Something far more immense than our gloomy fate descended and landed upon our heads, and for the first time in months we were released from the heavy stone that grabs you down down, our constricted hearts unchained by an enormous astonishment. How should I describe it? As if from the belly of a far off and quavering earth, the crowing of a horrible rage, greater than ours, was coming, a profound mournful complaint, punctuated with cries, reminders of primordial days, of ancient modes of existence. As if these stage songbirds learned their mastery from crows, or as if jackals were applying for the synagogue choir.

The natural response should have been hysterical laughter, but no laughter could be heard, nobody stirred. I was afraid to look around me and my body was not in my possession anymore. What emerged from the television box gripped our necks and launched our house from the small awe-struck street, to be set among celestial objects.

The whistle of the flute split the room in two and the drums stoned it with pebbles, beating in unfamiliar intervals, as if saying: crush, crush! whilst the drummers themselves yowled and howled with their mouths pointed and pushed forwards: Iya, Yoi, Ya ha! Ya Ha! like summoning who knows whom from the far ends of the land and following his arrival with cheers, warnings and acerbic mocking, as if saying "Lo and Behold!" in a beastly and ceremonial, vulgar and awe-striking manner. And indeed from the

far corner of a bridge to the left of the stage, through a lifted curtain, sliding while dragging its feet extremely slowly, as if the air itself had congealed and become too thick to pass through, or as if crossing a barrier between two unbridgeable worlds, the figure of an actor emerges and approaches, or is it an actress? On her face she wears the mask of a young woman and her body is a mountain of attire unmatched in luxury. When she opens her mouth to sing and a close-up reveals the bulky jowls around the mask and the protruding Adam's apple that moves with the syllables, it becomes undoubtedly clear that the actor is an old man. His voice quivers, as if stretched on a trembling thread. It is accompanied by a lower pitched sound from the back of his throat, like a murmur from a deep and hollow well, and topped off by shuddering echoes from the attached mask. Who could imagine an age-old man and a young girl merging into an amalgam in which the opposites have melted away, an age-old man and a young girl becoming two tree crowns sharing a single trunk?

An unmasked actor with his face pointed sharply towards his mouth to form a shape like the lips of a bottle, apparently the narrator, recites in a rising and falling intonation which sometimes sounds like a capricious child's protestation and sometimes like the agitated rebuke of an adult. And in the background of his speech the streaming and bubbling of water is heard, a shrilling shriek, hiccups of a baby after crying. Someone expresses affirmation, doubt, amazement and astonishment, sleep-mumbling or a seizure of some sort. The rhythm of the drums hastens a moment and a moment later advances at large intervals, hesitating, tumbling down reluctantly to who knows where. And then calm, prolonged cessations not any the less loaded and demanding. As soon as you get the rhythm it slides away beneath you, changes direction, and dissolves, not to be trusted.

On the stage, in contrast to the daring voices, the movement was so minute and so slow as if time was measured in terms of eternity. The few limbs seen from under the costume seemed to be operated by the power of a mechanical apparatus – the palm of a hand and a forearm incline towards the forehead, an arm is lifted to be dropped, a foot imitates walking. Even while dancing, the body is spread out in segments, passive like a fan, but not flimsy, on the contrary, it is condensed and fully laden, bigger than life. The heaps of brocade heavily embroidered in silk are suffused with contained immensity, as though they were the embodiment of the soul and its radiance. The slight body of the actor seems to disappear inside them; they grow him a wing or a sail. Man is an elegant vessel, swaying upon an unsteady ground, intending

to take its leave, but then regrets and turns back on its heels, as if something was forgotten, some business remained that did not reach its completion.

Most of the play was performed seated. The stagehands, seated in back, didn't get up at all. To move, they stretched like monkeys sliding on their bottoms. And when an actor was in need of a prop or a change in his attire, he would come and face them and they would take care of him, just so, in front of the audience. The end was marked by a muffled stamp of a foot on the wooden stage after which, in a sudden release of tension and in a complete hush, the actors turned their backs and left slowly like a procession of ghosts.

At the sound of the beep marking the end of the broadcast, with the screen flickering in stripes, our bodies still tense as a spring, my father started howling, imitating the cries of the drummers: Iya! Iya! Yahaaa! Yohoi! And again Yaha! Oya! Hiya! Ya! My older sister, the first to rise to the occasion, hurried along and brought two pot covers to bang like cymbals, and at the same time pulled from the closet an African fabric, that had served her in her adolescence as a Japanese costume, and wrapped herself in it as a kimono of sorts, lifting up her hair with two pencils. My father covered himself with the synthetic sheepskin rug from the bedroom while hiding his face behind a fan he had folded from the unpaid electricity bill, and put to his lips the green Cloisonné vase to give an echo to his voice. This was a signal for my little six-year old sister to strike her miniature xylophone with its thin sticks ending in tiny wooden balls, striking and pausing gently; she had absorbed something of the spirit of the play, of its irregular, changing rhythm.

My mother, seizing the opportunity, flattened the yeast dough that lay in a cloth-covered bowl in the kitchen with her fingers. Punching three holes in it she put it on her head and on her face. She plucked from the wall a photograph of my father as a child, and holding it in front of her hollowed eyes with her dough dripping fingers, she recited: "How distasteful! When we were married, I believed it would be forever, like a camellia growing for a thousand years and a pine tree for eternity. Gentle lovers snug beneath duck covers we were, pillowed side by side. Why did you push me aside? Empty vows! What madman could call you true? When we were married you said: our home is where we are together. How can I enter your home now, but I am a worm, and no woman." And my father joined in with a wailing voice: "I thought I'd go with you wherever you wandered, but man's is a wretched, undependable heart." And my mother continued, along with

the childish sound of rolling laughter, fresh as bells, of little Daniela: “I to be alone, how I to be, sad to be, pity to be. All night long I make my bed swim, I water my couch with my tears. How many sweets have you swallowed suffused with my tears? Mine eye is consumed because of fury, a resentful grudge like fire against your other women. My face, O shame, is the very face of desperate clinging. Anger, creeping like a vine, Anger, creeping like a vine.”

With time I learned that the Noh play we’d watched was “The Damask Drum”: an old gardener catches a glimpse of the young lady of the house and falls in love with her. When this knowledge reaches her ears, she orders a drum to be hung on the branches of the laurel tree near the pond in the garden - if the gardener will beat the drum, when its sound will be heard at the palace, she promised, he would see her again. He beats the drum but no sound is heard, did he turn deaf? He’s beating and beating. But the drum has damask linen stretched where skin should be. He realizes her mockery and in despair jumps into the pond and drowns. In the second part of the play he crawls out of the pond as a vengeful ghost and urges the lady to beat the drum. She is full of regret but that is not sufficient to appease the gardener’s spirit and, still full of rage, it sinks into the deep pond.

And me, with my vigorously throbbing heart, and my mother, beating and beating, and my older sister on the cymbals and my younger sister on the xylophone, will our voices be heard? The evening ends with my mother jamming into our mouths quickly improvised bananas fried in chocolate. My mother believed in chocolate education, handing me a hundred-gram bar daily after lunch. And when my father was drinking too much she would always mention the Cadbury brothers’ idea to replace alcohol with cocoa for the masses.

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*In adolescence, the skin on my head and face is tight, and my features – eyes, nostrils and mouth – are freshly cut. When shut, I’m a perfectly inflated ball, all preparedness. When shut, I’m a perfectly inflated ball, all preparedness.*

In the morning we woke up in a house of total disarray. To the armchairs, always covered with dust, oil stains and cake crumbs, sticky dough chunks were now added, and on the filthy carpet made of upright woolen threads, brown chocolate stripes were drawn. Scraps of paper everywhere, all kinds of objects scattered around. And the television we had forgotten to turn off was still beeping with its twinkling stripes. My mother showed up in a

wrinkled shirt of my father's, weary, but a new spark could be detected in her eyes, the reflection of yesterday's midnight sun.

That weekend my father did not return. It's true that weekends at our home were the worst of all, but so far he had always come back for the Sabbath. What was it with him this time? When my father left his office on Friday afternoon, dejected by his economic situation and the many creditors that lay in wait, he decided to visit his father's old factory that had closed down due to the father's illness and death about eight years before. The factory, in the industrial area of Ness-Ziona, was on a lease and stood useless, neither to hold on to nor to leave. It had been many years since he visited there. He could hardly open the rusted locks and with much effort pulled up and lifted the heavy iron rolling door that dropped down noisily behind him after he entered.

Underneath the smell of mold and dust, the familiar smell, that of the wool from which the carpets were woven, still stood in the dark space. Why had he come here? The selling of the property surely wouldn't succeed, and in any case it won't cover his debts. Did he hope to receive guidance from his dead father's spirit in the hopeless situation in which he was trapped? At the age of forty five he had lost control over his life, hurling him into who knows how deep an abyss. He groped for the light switch and a single fluorescent bulb lit up. He was surprised to see half-woven carpets still lying in the looms, their colors turned wan from the layers of dust. How familiar and reassuring were the structures of the looms with their characteristic devices and parts that he remembered as far back as his childhood in Hungary, where the family had a business weaving Torontal folk rugs. He tried to disturb some of the dust to have a better look at the designs, some of which were ethnic, with motives of toothed stars, herringbones and swallow tails, others geometric, De-Stijl style, designed by himself.

He opened a brown cardboard file that stood on his father's work desk, full of designs drawn on checkered folio pages. He had never held his father's work and profession in high esteem, but now he could discern a certain charm in the yellowing pages and the wandering pencil lines with the names of colors written in Hungarian and beside them the catalogue number of the hue.

Nevertheless he measured the space in big strides, checked and made sure there was running water, wrote down the number of looms and leafed

through some ledgers and old documents in the drawers. He took a moistened rag, wiped away the dust from one of the looms and seated himself in front of it. He was seized by a deep longing to hear the clack of the looms, the beating of the reed battenning the weft. And to see the up and down motion of the heald frames with their heddles, into the eye holes of which the warp was threaded, while the treadles are pressed. With a hesitant hand he took the shuttle and thrust it into the fell, leaping through the sheds. Does he still remember the craft? He gently slipped into his dead father's world. Pedaling away slowly, he let the loom, like a faithful vehicle, carry him back to the past, to his parents' home. Then, coming round, he started for home. He turned off the light, but when he tried to lift the rolling door it didn't stir a bit. He put on the light again, found an iron rod, tried to insert it under the door and lift it, but all in vain. He rested a while and tried again, he started beating his fists against the metal sheet, but the Sabbath had already begun and the workers in the nearby factories had left by then.

It seemed as if he had fixed up a prison for himself for the weekend. He wanted to bang his head against the wall, climb up to the ceiling. He punched the door again with the iron rod, overcame his shyness and started to shout: Anybody there? Anybody there? He had a look at his watch, it was probably already evening outside.

As he ran from corner to corner, the voices of the Japanese theatre suddenly came to mind, he heard them inside his head and in a throttled voice tried to imitate the ongoing monotonous lamenting sound and then the yowling of the drummers: Iya! Ya ha! sharpening his memory and tuning his throat accordingly. Immediately after the show it was relatively easy to repeat the voice pattern, but now, in spite of the impressive echo in the large open space of the factory, he missed something, could not grasp the right pitch of the exhilarating duality of dead earnestness and mocking incantation. Maybe later the howls of the jackals from the nearby hills would be heard and he would be able to join them. He tried to calm down. It might be for the better that his fate was so decided and at least for the time being he was free from responsibility and released from the effort of untangling the muddle of his life. Indeed, he was given a free vacation and a real repose. If only hunger didn't pester him. Except for coffee and cake with his friend the pharmacist Mr. Katzenfeld at the Espresso in the bus station beneath his office, he hadn't had a morsel all day.

He made a bed for himself from packages of wool yarn. He would try to sleep and so the time would pass faster and he wouldn't have to deal with his hunger. He tried to arrange his body somehow, turning to this side and that, but no, sleep doesn't come when invited. He sat up, leaning against the wall, and kept sitting there staring absentmindedly for who knows how long. He had never fasted on Yom-Kippur. In his childhood his mother used to feed him bacon behind the synagogue where his father joined the Kol-Nidre prayer. He was now up for a private and especially long Yom-Kippur. He tried to detach himself from this body that yearns for food. He will suspend responsibility for it. He has no obligation to provide for its needs. He will exit his body. How can he be sure that it is he being hungry? He doesn't wish to be himself. Why should he be Alexander Moshe? Why shouldn't he be this bobbin rolling around on the floor? He will be that bobbin with remnants of bluish wool still wound around it. It was imprisoned here for years and never asked for anything and never complained about hunger or loneliness. It has no worries, no wife and children to feed and to report to. The life of things is pure and simple, and he so much would like to enter into a thing and rest.

And altogether, his thoughts were rolling on, why did he cling so much to himself all these years? Why didn't he see the world through the eyes of others, such as the eyes of his little daughter Daniela? He deceived himself into believing he was unique, one of a kind, but after all he is only one pick in the weave, shoved between his father and his little daughter. If he let others come inside he might be able to pass some of the responsibility onto them. Here, his eldest daughter Dvora, she has a good head on her shoulders and even some sense for business. Recently, in view of her approaching wedding, she put down the first payment for the purchase of an apartment, money she earned giving private lessons. And in her youth she used to set up a craft fair before family gatherings, attaching a price tag to each item. She would even charge entrance fee. After all, at home, after watching the Japanese play, they all were eagerly willing to participate, craving collaboration. That evening he didn't feel banished as on other days, and his sins were overlooked for a moment.

It had not escaped his architect's eye that the stage had a roof of its own in a more antique style beneath the roof of the building, thus creating a house within a house. The play had a separate house for itself, which led him to remember a kind of an alcove in Japanese homes that he had once seen in a German book about Japanese architecture, inside which you were not



allowed to step. He even remembered that the alcove was called Tokonoma in Japanese. In the Tokonoma they used to put a hanging scroll, set up a flower arrangement or a display of artifacts, according to the seasons. When he will return to his office he'll find the book and have a look. It's been a long time since he leafed through books.

The alcove too is a small symbolic house within the house. And to further the idea of replacing himself with the bobbin, he thought it useful to miniaturize life in general so as not to give way under its endless demands. His wife had no talent whatsoever for cleaning, immersed in her cooking and baking and in the flock of her fluttering abstract thoughts. The house was as neglected as a pigsty. If he built a Tokonoma in which you cannot set foot, a miniature house, easy to clean, then at least one place at home will be kept shining and immaculate, the way he likes it. Such a tiny niche even his wife is able to clean and she'll be enthusiastic about the artifacts. The Tokonoma is actually a picture frame that expanded and grew larger and in which the painting is living in a house of its own. He remembered that the Japanese houses in the book were empty and wonderfully spotless, nevertheless at his house, the Tokonoma will take on an opposite role, one that is needed even more: it will stand empty and elegant in midst of the filth and the clutter.

When he awoke his watch showed nine. It had been years since he slept so late, a vacation indeed. He washed his face in the sink and drank some water. Went over to the desk and found some blank checkered folio papers and a pencil stub. He felt a new urge to draw some shapes the likes of which are not to be found in his father's drawings. He remembered the large prominent designs and the bold compositions in the costumes of the Japanese theatre. If he could draw a shape that starts with a familiar object and then opens itself to abstraction, let's say the handle of a cup, a spool or the boat shape of a shuttle combined with or expanded into simple geometric forms. He had always loved French curves and he had quite a collection of them in his office. They are that rare fusion between the concrete and the abstract, the angular and the curved, the practical and the ideal, the modern and the long established and long lasting. In their roundness they resemble a body, but one forged by mathematical order, therefore suitable to serve as dolls for architects. He let his hand glide along the page but at the same time it was guided by the grid. It had been a long time since he did his own thing, freely. It might be the right thing to do, to resume work on the looms, to produce rugs with patterns never seen before. Filling page after page, matching one shape to another, couples of shapes, triplets and quartets.

Suddenly some voices were heard outside. He ran to bang on the door and shouted again: Hello, Hello! But the sounds faded and disappeared. That night he dreamt that his whole life was made of patterns. A long fabric made of protractors and compasses was stretched from the looms, oozing like dough under the door of the factory, swelling to cover the street and the passersby, woven into the weft of the crosswalks. Receipts and checkbooks were entwined in chocolate threads and in my mother's golden hair. Huge black telephones, out of which reverberated the voices of his creditors, made a pattern on his trousers, that were wide and flat as sails like the ones in the Japanese theatre. In his dream the shapes were set harmoniously into magnificent and accurate patterns that carried clues to every problem and predicament.

Enormous warping wheels were revolving and supplying threads in an infinite number of hues to the forming and changing patterns. A miraculous order was prevailing over the myriad of configurations which arranged themselves according to circumstances, and their mere existence was the solution.

Early Sunday morning the first workers in the factory nearby lifted with shared effort the rolling iron door to the height of half a meter. When my father crawled out from underneath, a bit shorter than he used to be, his assets consisted of three decisions:

1. He will leave his ego with the bobbin.
2. Inspired by the Tokonoma he will construct a miniature world.
3. He will resume work in his father's business and, concerning life, he will follow the teaching of the patterns.

And as a symbol of the transformation he had undergone, he accepted the workers' invitation and sat down with them at a table they brought out to the pavement, covered in newspaper, on which they set coffee and pita bread, olives and hot peppers.

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*From within my tangled hair, if I may ask for anything, then it would be to look into the lucid eye of form. Then it would be to look into the lucid eye of form.*

When he came home at lunch break, my father drew from his shirt pocket a yellow folding ruler and measured here and there at the entrance hall. Two or three days later he arrived with the contractor Mr. Sheikh-Udah whom my mother used to call Shayhuda, thus bringing his name closer to the name of

the hard-to-prepare sweet Hungarian delicacy Shuhaida, made of chocolate and nuts cast in paper moulds. They were carrying along some cut-to-measure wood boards and working tools, and after considering and assembling, and sawing and hammering, reconsidering and removing, and shifting and hanging again, there it was, standing in our vestibule, the first Israeli Tokonoma. Crouching on all fours my father meticulously cleaned the slightly elevated podium and scrubbed each board on the wall. In the newly formed alcove he hung a drawing of a French curve.

My mother, who loved anything she didn't understand, and in this respect was a modern soul, clapped her hands, or just almost, because my mother solved the koan of the one hand clapping simply and naturally – one hand raised, she meant the other to join it, but while on its way she was distracted by a new thought and a single hand remained in the air, orphaned.

In spite of my father's explanations about the Tokonoma and his warning not to set foot in it, on one of the evenings back from work he found Daniela sitting still in a perfect Lotus position on the low podium, and under his greenish quivering mustache he didn't know whether he should scold or smile: here we have a fully fledged Buddha flower of our own.

The business was gradually set up. In a family meeting conducted by my father and my older sister it was decided to resume work in the factory and to consider the rugs as part of Tokonoma structures that my father would integrate into his plans, and which people, my father's clients and others, would be able to add to their homes. First ideas about the function of the Tokonoma and the way it should be presented to customers were suggested, like the possibility of the rugs and the artifacts on display being changed and replaced according to Jewish and national holidays, family events or just when you felt like it. In a consultation about the brand name for the business, after rejecting "On The Beam" and "Recess & Revival" (ideas of my sister Dvora) and also "Recess & Repose" (an idea of mine, that my father thought more suitable for an undertaker's business) we remained with "Alcove and Beam" that paid due respect to my father's profession, and which my mother would later rhyme with "Almond & Cream". Tokonoma became a native Hungarian word in our home, but occasionally behind my father's back she would dub the one we have "Glaucoma" or "Török öröme" i.e. "The Turk's Joy" in allusion to Túrkeve, my father's birth town in Hungary.

Dvora was given a desk on the balcony, where she would sit long evenings, coloring my father's designs carefully, preparing schedules and making calculations for saving money and economizing. Concerning finances, it was decided to mortgage my father's office and to persuade the creditors to wait on the premise of our sincerity. I joined my father on his visits to the weavers, former employees of my grandfather, to ask them back, and in this we were relying on my grandfather's personality and his candor. I was also appointed the courier, and as quick as mercury, I would run around effortlessly in endless assignments. Little Daniela was our philosopher, embarrassing us with her acute and clever questions.

The life of us all revolved around the business and, though never stated explicitly, it was clear that the business came before any personal considerations or wishes, that its growth, by way of relinquishing any personal inclinations and desires, would eventually bring forth the desired Good. At the same time it was clear that the business depended on the personal development of each of us and upon the products of our minds and any spark of an idea was taken seriously and more than once gave birth to new ideas and to much enthusiasm. The family and the business became a perfect equation, with no remainder. The family came to be the business and the business became a theatre in which each of us was given a role that served the play. But just as the in the Japanese theatre there are hardly any common rehearsals and each actor prepares himself separately as best he can, so the business did not limit the circumference and the extent of the growth of each of us. My father remembered somewhat nostalgically the first sparks ignited in the two days he was imprisoned in the factory, and used to say that they were unbearably long but also too short. That first inspiration that descended upon him in the shade of the looms fuelled and motivated us all, and together with the evening of watching the Japanese play, became the myth of the business which we fostered.

And since the business was born from ruins and in extreme circumstances, we knew we must stay in the proximity of the abyss for it to be built time and again. And the Tokonoma, like the whistle of the flute in Noh theatre that makes you shudder, is indeed a reminder of the abyss. It is a rupture, a gaping cavity in midst of the continuum of the house, a house within a house (in the archetype of the Israeli Tokonoma planned by my father, there is a triangular roof inspired by the Japanese theatre), or, more accurately, a no-house within a house. Like an overcoat in which something went amiss and the rough wool it is made of sneaked inside, into the soft silk lining, so the

Tokonoma should be coarse, bruised, estranged. If it be pleasant to the eye, it would be absorbed in the house and be forgotten. It should be an alarm clock calling you to your morning tasks. You let it into your home the way you admit a stranger, like in that Italian movie in which all the family members, from the head of the family to the maid, fall desperately in love with a casual visitor and his stay shakes up the house and transforms each of them. In order for it to perform its role, the Tokonoma cannot be in your possession, it is not a property, it is an unbridled consciousness, deviating and even perilous. In one of my mother's humorous pieces, she turned our alcove into a pit into which our unbearable neighbor, the eternal complainer, is dropped.

In order for it to be just like that, the objects displayed in the Tokonoma should be what we call "Awakening Objects". Like the mask in Noh theatre that abolishes the features and the natural expressions of the actor only to be annulled by him, in its turn, when he perceives it as being carved into his flesh. And in the tension between the repression of the real face and the absorption of the new, those subtleties of emotion and expression you wouldn't conceive of without the intervention of the mask, are created. So, we, in the business and in the family, saw the objects as partners and intermixed with them, they were our equals in fencing matches. And through them, as if through prisms, our thoughts were focused and fractured. In order to live and work fully, we learned from objects how to still ourselves, as if a mechanism was installed inside us, and at the same time we strained to listen to the wakefulness of objects. The communication in our family took place in a kind of an "object language". We loved to see how, arranged so as to fit each other in their minutest details, they are assembled to utter something, a meaningful sentence, and their manner of speech has its own wisdom and is far more pleasing than man's. To our patterns we always brought raw chunks of life hard to digest, ones that interfere with the rhythm or skip a beat. We didn't allow our shapes to wilt, to retreat to the background, otherwise they would burden us as heavily as if we were carrying a corpse.

Like the Noh theatre which doesn't flow along the stream of accepted habits and is not conducted in accordance with the tune of common sense, and where even the last of the servants wears magnificent costumes, because in the star system of the stage he too ought to shine, so we have drawn the sky of our business to be separate and apart, its orbits respond only to those pulls that intensify the extent of its radiance while bypassing external expectations and imperatives.

After graduating from art school, I didn't follow my teachers' advice and chose not to launch an independent career but to go on serving the family business. In spite, or probably because of my rebellious character and my stormy spirit, I've learned to appreciate the beauty of the idea of service, and like other things we borrowed from Japanese culture, I would willingly adopt the custom of bows. Luckily, during my life I've met several people in front of whom I would willingly recline and perform a deep bow. One of these is of course our king Yoel Noy who was crowned in 1970 after an appeal from the people. Thanks to all kinds of convoluted coalition considerations in which each party objected to the candidate of another, and under the auspices of good fortune, our beloved king, unmatched in his modesty, tolerance, wisdom and kindness, was inaugurated. With his great talent he turned the return of the occupied areas into a festival that engulfed the whole country with enormous enthusiasm, even greater than the ten year jubilee celebrations. In the business we had to hire extra hands to keep up with the flood of orders. Each home wished to designate a corner to dedicate to the big event and prove it with mirth.

Our product caught on. The Israeli home embraced the Tokonoma. The people of the land, having arrived here only recently to build their homes, were willing to assign a segment of them to the mere idea of the house, a dwelling place for its self-consciousness, which forces one to think it afresh time and again. And since the alcove is an exterritorial area in one's own home, it enables the practice of relinquishing possession that carries a reward: in each and every home where a corner was dispossessed, it was as if a hand was stretched out to the alcoves in other homes and thus a kind of cooperation was created based on freshness and vigor. No wonder that so many of our clients were from the kibbutzim.

With time my father would shed his big shoes and Daniela who followed him and learned his profession would step into them and they would fit her feet perfectly. Thanks to Dvora's clever management, the calming rustle of money flows on continuously in the background of our lives. My sisters' children will join too and bring to the business the novelties of the computer and the wonderful printers. Following their initiative we developed a new product of long and narrow printed screens, with their rolling devices attached to the ceiling in parallel rows. When not in use they are coiled around the device, ready to be pulled down in changing combinations at the appropriate occasion. To those of our customers who were fed up with the flickering pictures of television that lead a life of constant flutter while

chasing after current affairs, these taciturn screens can provide a solemn background to life, in front of which the participants may see themselves as taking part in a *Tableau vivant*, a romantic pastime that centers around still and frozen theatricality.

As for myself, like a character from one of my mother's satires, a fellow who married a French curve, I got married to the business and I have nothing in the world besides it. I set up a bed for myself in the office and don't other to go home at all. I go to bed and awake with the majesty of the shapes and the splendor of the colors and my head is swarming from morning till night. I once heard about a family that had been in a situation similar to ours, but there, the father went bankrupt and departed to another country without taking leave of his wife and daughters. His wife was left with no means of livelihood and no dwelling place and had to plead with grocery stores to sell her cakes. Later, so I heard, the elder daughter was killed in a horrible car crash with her husband and two of their children.

But with us the windmills turn turn, they utter speech and show knowledge. How lucky we are to be given such happiness. Lucky we are to be given such happiness.

Translated by the author  
Edited by Jenifer Bar Lev

A link to the illustrated e-book is on the 'publications' page of this site.