



An Appeal for Compassion to All

By Motti Lerner

From this podium of the Alternative Torch Lighting Ceremony 2020 on the eve of Israel's 72 Independence Day, I appeal to you all, artists of Israel, writers and poets, and particularly to you, the writers of theater and film, of which I am one. We, who have suffered a terrible blow from the coronavirus pandemic and are unable to stage plays, screen films and exhibit our works; we, who during this enforced shutdown look around us and see human suffering escalating before our eyes; we, in whom this suffering arouses compassion for those near and far, we – the artists of Israel – are obliged to make the strengthening of this compassion the purpose of our work. It is incumbent on us to show audiences

and readers that without this compassion we will not have lives as individuals and we will not have life as a society. This compassion is the source for the empathy and solidarity, without which we will not survive. And it cannot be discriminatory. Our compassion cannot differentiate according to race, origin, religion or gender. We, the artists of Israel, need to engender compassion for all human beings. True, it is easier for us to see the suffering of our families, our neighbours and those closest to us. Many of us also see the suffering of the ultra-Orthodox Jews in their towns and neighbourhoods. But few of us see the suffering of the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, who have lived under occupation for fifty-three years; an occupation which has inflicted on them a horror that, year by year, becomes our horror, too. Only few of us see the distress of the Palestinians inside this country, against whom discrimination is rooted in racist legislation. And even fewer see the terrible distress of the refugees who fled to us from Africa to be saved here. During the overwhelming and difficult moments in which we weave our artistic pieces, we must not close our eyes and harden our hearts to all those around us who fight for their human rights. This is our moral duty to the society that enables us to create. I call on us all, artists of Israel, to see political, social and moral reform as the purpose of our art. The vile governments that rule over us want us to entertain the masses and stupefy them with nonsense, so they can continue ruling. It is our obligation to refuse – despite the politicians who slander us and call us traitors. We must not submit to the pressure of a regime which is intent on censoring and emasculating us. The compassion that is aroused in us by the coronavirus can and must strengthen us to be true to our conscience and our art; to create, for the sake of peace, for the sake of equality, for the sake of fraternity, for the sake of justice – and now, more than ever – for a worthy democratic society that has compassion for all.

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