



"pain is very lonely" by Billy Moscona-Lerman, 2013 "About Feelings" Magazine, Natal – Israel Trauma Center for Victims of Terror and War. (Translated by Michal Shalev)

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As Galit and I were driving to meet Tsila Hayun in her office in Abu-Gosh, we discussed the terrorist attack, the physical injury Tsila had suffered and her recovery. One question, though, remained unasked: What does Tsila look like? How does she walk, or move?

I glanced at Galit Liss, the artist behind *Tsila*. "What does she look like? Is there a wheel chair? I want to be prepared," I asked fearfully. Galit looked at me and said nothing. Then she smiled. "You'll see," she said. We rang the doorbell. The woman who came to open the door was whole. Whole and elegant and standing high and tall, and smiling, and her face was not furrowed by pain. No sign of pain on her face. "This is not her," I told myself when she extended her hand and said "Pleased to meet you, Tsila." "I felt the same thing," says Liss, "and the first thing I thought was: how many people like her, ridden with pain and trauma, are around us, and we know nothing about them? We continue with our aggressive, automatic routine of survival, never pausing to raise any questions, neither to ourselves nor to our surroundings." "In recent years," says Liss, "a personal trauma made me struggle with existential questions, questions concerning the road itself, concerning our ability to choose, to find our paths. I was fascinated by Tsila's story, by her inspiring struggle to live, not just to survive, not to "stay alive", but to live. It wasn't easy to convince her to open up to me. We are talking about inner worlds, which usually remain hidden. But she agreed, and allowed me to listen, to feel, to share the "voices" of worlds which are entirely concealed from the eyes and ears of anyone observing the rehabilitation process from the outside. In that sense I was lucky. 'Because pain,' as Tsila puts it, 'pain is very lonely.'"

The Power of Life in Your Veins

How much is there in common between the Tsila in the performance and Tsila Hayun, the actual woman on whose life story it is based? Is it even possible to use a private, terrible tragedy, so terrible that it may be one of a kind, to separate it from its particular, concrete, unique nature in order to discuss our common existential pain? And how can a work of true art build a bridge for people to walk on, so that they can find in each other the comfort and strength required to face life's unexpected hardships? Then we have the viewer – the witness – standing in front of that person who was injured and is bleeding and hurt. They came to see a dance performance, unsuspecting, but when they leave the room they are no longer the same person. They were transformed by the power of life. That same power of life that was miraculously injected into their veins and remains with them as they leave the performance hall, supporting them in their personal journey up the mountain.

Tsila Hayun had a good life, a fascinating career, a warm and loving family. In 2003 she and her family were on their way home from a vacation in the Sinai Peninsula. They were targeted by terrorist gunfire as they were driving up the Gillo Mountain, and Tsila was critically injured. The dry facts, recorded on her medical sheet in the Trauma Unit at the hospital, said eight bullets penetrated her body at once. Prof. Avi Rivkind, who received her in the trauma room at Hadassah Medical Center, is quoted in Galit Liss's performance as saying: "she had something that is typical to critically wounded patients when they enter hypothermia, and she had what we call the 'triad of death': low body temperature, bleeding and acidosis."

For three days Tsila's soul hovered between life and death on the operating table, then her body remained sedated, on a respirator, for an additional 23 days, which were followed by a painful awakening. "I felt like my entire body was a chunk of meat, sliding from one side of the bed to the other, only the metal bedrail stopping it from falling. The body was nothing but a bleeding amputated wound, at whose center a belly was open up till the groin, and a lifeless foot which wasn't connected to the leg and wasn't moving."

"The thing that amazed me," says Liss, "was Tsila's ability to be attuned to herself in an extreme situation, and to understand what was right for her at that moment. She did not reach the top at once, neither did she know whether she would reach it at all. She examined her abilities at that specific moment, and then took a small step forward. Those small steps resulted in a tremendous change. Her first motivation was choosing life. Coping with traumatic injury is no simple thing. Even years afterwards, the body keeps generating physical pain. The rehabilitation process, Tsila explained, required continuous work of the mind, spirit and soul."

"I realized that the cure for pain is inside of me," says Tsila. "To deal with pain, you must first agree to observe it and to understand what it is in life, and then you can start working. For example, when it happens you can use the power of concentration to replace it with different associations, to divert the thought to another part of the body, or to concentrate on a positive or intriguing thought." "I, too, learned from her way of coping with trauma," says Galit Liss. "In a society which values the final product over everything, Tsila's story taught me to pay even more respect to the journey in the artistic process, to allow time for contemplation and questions, in my personal life as well. In this sense it was an encounter between two women and three wonderful artists: Iris Nise-Hadar, Hadas Gertman and Tal Avni, and in the meeting place between them, each with her personal baggage of pain, this work of art was created."

The brain's ability to change

In the recovery and artistic process Galit Liss made an interesting and unusual choice, to involve Dr. Yossi Chalamish, a doctor, neuroscientist and hypnosis therapist, "who could provide me with a scientific explanation for Tsila's amazing intuition. He explained how Tsila's brain created the neural bypasses required to get her out of bed and restore her ability to walk. And I wanted to transmit this capability of the brain, the power of our ability to change, to everybody."

Liss recorded 24 hours of Tsila describing the moments in which her life was shattered to pieces and the way she recreated herself. A year and a half later she invited her to watch a rehearsal. It wasn't easy for neither of them. Tsila had trouble letting go of her personal story, and every rehearsal brought back the memories and pain. Then, on opening night, just before the curtains went up, she met Buddhist scholar Naama Oshri. Naama said something simple yet deep that struck a chord with her: "Let it go, it is no longer your story". And indeed, Liss managed to tell a broader story, a story of coping with something that seems utterly unbeatable, insurmountable at first. A reality where death is only a step away. Yet Tsila won; she won by making her brain and intuition join forces, by using her willpower, and Liss turned this victory into art which injects pain – and willpower – into every viewer.

As we sat and talked, I asked her what she revealed about herself. "I do not possess the words to describe the pain I experienced," says Tsila, "It was like walking on sharpened knives. But I made an amazing discovery about myself: my desire to walk again was stronger than my desire to make the pain stop. Or when I got home from the hospital and discovered that the kitchen's door was not wide enough for my wheelchair. I sat and watched my kitchen, and couldn't go inside and perform the simplest, perhaps the most routine actions: making coffee, placing dishes in the cupboard, wiping the counter. Today, when I wake up in the morning, go into the kitchen and stand there quietly, emptying the dishwasher and replacing the dishes in the drawers, I feel how great this small-big thing is, I feel it every day. I love what I have, I appreciate the moment, life's fragility. I do not leave anything for tomorrow because there might not be one. I know today is today, that all each of us has is now, and truly understand that nothing is more important than your love for the people around you."