

Pinhas Sadeh: Life as a Parable
Opening (The Architect or the Silence of the Earth)

Selective translation by Dan Tidhar & Marius Usher

The day passes and the night (like Jacob, who grasps Esau's heel) comes. The night, too, passes; the day comes. Day and night, night and day.

And I hear the silence of the earth. I walk in streets that grow empty. I walk slowly, because the silence of the earth terrifies me and seems to pour lead into my feet, pulling me down, down. Who can understand what terror is hidden in the being of the broad, mighty, heavy, opaque, nocturnal, mute earth upon which we walk!

I walk and hear the silence of the earth, and I also hear some human voices around me, but I know that they are merely chance occurrences. For they have no true essence. I walk in the nocturnal streets slowly, slowly. My hands are in the pockets of my well-buttoned coat. In some places the yellow light of the lamps shines; other places have no light.(...)

Time passes.

Time passes, and I am passing with it. Why worry? Where time will arrive, I will arrive too.

An old, small man, wearing a big hat, addresses me and asks that I buy something – probably apples. He hands them over to me in a paper bag and says in a soft, begging voice:

Very good apples, mister. Apples. But I have no one to buy them for. I am a lonely man without a wife children, or sister. A man who hears the silence of the earth.

But a brother and friend am I, to every man: to the night dealer, the poor, the passer by. Although, no one understands my language, although, my voice is a lonely voice in the desert. I am not angry about it any longer, because since I was angry, time has passed, and I began hearing the silence of the earth. And he who hears it, will no longer be angry. (...)

It is now midnight. I am walking along deserted streets. And I understand how arbitrary it is, that I am walking above the earth and not buried in its belly. But with each step it seems that I am buried here, heavy, silent, and dead.

Up above, light and transparent clouds are floating. And above them, the moon shines. Its light is tender and beautiful, but it is nothing but light borrowed from the sun. And so, the light of the face of the beloved, the light of world's beauty, and the light of all things, are nothing but light borrowed from the soul. And the light of the soul is nothing but light borrowed from God.

One night, when I was stationed with the army in the field, I heard from afar, from across a village, the voice of a mooing cow, mooing again, mooing with sadness.

This was the only time I seemed to hear something like the voice of the earth.(...)

This tree is wonderful. I don't know its name; indeed, I am a total ignorant in all that relates to Botany. To Sciences. He stands naked. Almost all naked, and only a few leaves are still hanging from him. Every few moments, a leaf falls off, floats for a little while, and falls down. Silently, onto the yellow, golden, round carpet of leaves beneath the tree. I have never heard something more silent than a leaf falling down. I am standing and looking at it for a long while. But even if I

stood there all my life, I wouldn't be able to understand the essence of its wonder, I wouldn't be able to express the mystery of its existence, its loneliness in an autumn night, the beauty of the golden carpet at its feet, the sound of the thin silence of the of the dead and beautiful leaf falling. (...)

I am walking and walking and I listen and listen to the silence. This is the answer of the Earth to all questions.

Men talk: rich men talk of finance, generals of the organization of armies, women of their husbands, statesmen of state-business, sailors of young ladies, merchants on money, writers on literature. They talk, but really, what good do they get. If the Earth stays silent. She observes them without a movement, indifferently, with sadness, like a gigantic cow.

When I was a young lad, I liked to sang/write about death, since it hold a kind of secret for me and this secret caught my heart. Later, when I moved to a distant country, I sang/wrote about life, because now life hold a secret for me, and this secret caught my heart. ...

Now I'm only walking in the night, and I hear the silence of the Earth; because I have nothing more to ask, nothing to pull my heart, no one to tell me something I didn't know. The silence of the Earth, holds all the answers.

I'm not knowledgeable, I'm not educated, I'm not smart at all; but the silence of the Earth, I truly understand. I'm a genius in understanding the silence.

Day and night will pass, day and night. And what will come and will be – all the experience, all the doing, all the pain, all the beauty, all the song – is what will be. But all is lost, all returns, all is eternal, all is said in the silence of the Earth.

One after midnight, and I'm walking on deserted streets, and I remember again.

I remember snow, and I remember how (when I was toddler) I walked in the snow, in the main piazza of my birthtown in the North. The chant of monks is echoing in my ears. I then remember a village with orange groves in the Sharon, and lots of sun, and oranges arranged in wooden boxes. Once I lived in a small village in the Izrael valley. There I loved a girl. One night I spoke to her love words. And she said:

But I don't love you. But then, already then, the Earth kept silent. And love passed, but the silence of the earth remained.

I lived in an attic in Jerusalem. I used to sit in the mornings to the sunlight, and at night, to the light of an oil lamp, writing poems. I wrote about the valley in autumn, about death, about the ten virgins that came towards the groom, about the birds that bleed when being watched by God, about the fruit, about time, about life. Time passed, and life passes.

I loved a beautiful girl, and she too loved me. One day (it was raining) she came to me with narcissus flowers in her hand. She stood at the door, standing and crying.

I also loved another girl, and married her. She was good and understood my heart. She wasn't very strong; but she did her best. Let life pay her back in its mercy. (...)

I have moved across sea and land, have lived in foreign cities, rejoiced with the happy, been tortured with the tortured, cried over the bitter fate of men. I shared the sadness of an old virgin in a godforsaken restaurant in London. (...)

There were nights when I wished to die... Nights of terrible sweetness! Nights of great abyss! In the morning, I woke up with the sun to new life. There were moments when a mysterious happiness erupted out of my heart, an unbearable happiness. (...)

On my way I encountered suffering. But I didn't turn away: because suffering is the centre of God in this world.

On my way I saw a lot. But no one has ever truly seen me. God sees me. Maybe even the Earth and the plants. But they keep silent. So no one has ever seen me. (...)

Once (when I was still a boy), I was wandering day and night in Haifa, a city unfamiliar to me. I was wishing for death and for love. I stayed alive, and found no love. Although I was wishing for death, sang to it and contemplated about it, I know nothing about death. And indeed, sometimes I think so: it's impossible for us to do something that God cannot do; and God cannot die. (...)

My great desire is to talk about God, or at least to accomplish this by talking about the world. And talking about God is possible only by foolishness, that is, by what is considered foolish by human beings.

Human reason is a sandy way; he who takes it, knows where he will arrive, but will not get very far, because there little power in his feet. God's wisdom is a river; he who surrenders to its flow, doesn't know where he will arrive, but for sure will get very far. On his way, the first one will hear human talk and will understand it. The latter, will pass through strange forests and flowers, and will hear birdsong without understanding it.

And so, days and weeks pass and I stay silent and talk to no one, till I'm totally cured from talking. Not long ago I read the words of a certain philosopher about the "situation in which the individual wants to save the collective by hiding himself and keeping silent"...

I read once (I don't remember anymore where) a Chinese story about an architect, the greatest of architects, who was commanded by the Chinese emperor to build him a palace. After a very long time the architect announced that he has accomplished the palace building. The emperor came to see it. The architect welcomed him into his work-room, opened a big paper-sheet and showed him the drawing of the palace. The emperor was amazed and very angry. He told to the architect: as you have fooled me, I'll command to cut your head.

The architect went towards the drawing, opened the door to the palace, entered inside, and closed the door behind him. No one ever got to see him since.

Time passes; its three passed midnight. Three passed midnight. This hour, like at all hours, is the last one for someone, somewhere on this Earth. At this hour he departs from this world.

Three passed midnight. Beautiful is the faint yellow light of the streetlamps that rests gracefully on the trees. Beautiful is the sight of Jerusalem in its sleep, beautiful is the lonely and unique existence of all things. But the silence of the Earth is terrible...

...

God (says the soul), you created me out of the chaos and void. On the first day, you woke my up so that I can see myself, and separated between the darkness and the light within me.

On the second day you created my blue sky and my yearning.

On the third day, you created my earth and the beautiful flowers of my love.

On the fourth day, you created the distant stars, in which - lonely but not lost (because nothing can be lost while being within you) - I reside.

On the fifth day, you created you created the monsters and the strange fish of my dreams.

On the sixth day, you shaped my image as a human soul, and situated me, single and naked, in front of you.

Now, the sixth day has passed. Now, the sixth day has passed, and the night comes. It is therefore time for you to give me the Sabbath, God. Give me the Sabbath. Give me, my father in heaven, the Sabbath of Sabbaths!

On of these nights (yesterday? The day before?) I had a dream: in my dream I am wandering in a foreign city, lost and confused with no escape. Actually, the city was Jerusalem, and those streets were in the market area. But, as it often happens in dreams, all things were altered, such that I couldn't find my way. I was exhausted and desperate; but I somehow knew, that all was merely a dream. I knew, that when wake up in the morning, I'll find myself in my bed. If that is so, I told myself, why torture myself for nothing? I laid down on the spot and waited for the end of the dream.

Some by-passers were indifferent, some nodded, some were whispering, pointing at me, and mocking me. But I was tranquil, as I knew that this was all a dream; and the by-passers were nothing but creations of my imagination that populated my dream. I was lying silent, waiting for the end of the dream.

This is the end of the opening.