

Chapter 12

*I too, like the Sun, am alive with Love
Every morning, when I look at this magic mirror,
It is all me; I am all it... (Moshiri)*

I am forty-three years old and feel more at ease and content in my life now than ever before. As witnesses to my story, you can testify that my current state of mind has not been handed to me on a silver platter. I have walked through my pain and suffering and been relentless in examining my life and its losses. I didn't know any other way.

Trying to explain how this current state feels is like struggling to tell someone what a rose smells like. Let me try anyway. I feel less tormented, less haunted, less pressured, less tense, and less constricted.

As I travel down my path, I don't pull in and out of the "American" lane or the "Persian" lane like a driver on a freeway anymore. It seems to me that I have *integrated* these two parts of me in such a way that I feel more comfortable staying in "my own lane".

Please don't misunderstand me. My work is far from finished. I am still living in this culture, and at times, feel quite challenged to stay true to myself in my role as a mother, or a woman in America.

As I am typing these words, my daughter is at a friend's birthday party. When I dropped her off, I saw a glimpse of the Sleeping Beauty cake, piñata in the balcony, a table for T-shirt painting, another station for cupcake decorating, hot tub ready for a dozen 6-8 year

olds to jump in, and of course music and food. The Sleeping Beauty was the theme for the invitations and the tableware as well.

Sometimes I dread being a mom in this cultural climate.

I have already bet with myself that when I pick up Roshan tonight, before we are both buckled in our seats, she'll ask whether she can have a sleeping beauty cake and cup cake decorating booth for her next birthday. Who can blame her? I have also bet with myself that she will want to know why Melissa has a TV and a computer in her own room "and how old do I have to be before I have my own computer in my bedroom?"

A few years ago, I would have got more tangled up in the web of these questions and tried to defend myself. Now, I respect that Melissa and her parents have to make their own choices and I, mine. So if I get cross-examined tonight as I expect, here is what I think I will say.

"Could I have a Sleeping Beauty cake for my next birthday?" Instead of butting heads and criticizing the dreadful cake, I will get into her desire and say: "Yumm! What kind of filling would you like? ... Is it going to be one layer or two? And then I'll tease her and ask what will happen if I decorate her cake and accidentally make a mistake that will turn Sleeping Beauty into Ugly? Knowing my daughter, she'll go for the playfulness and the issue will evaporate for a while.

As for the computer and her own TV, I will say: “I too can’t wait until you are old enough to have whatever you want in your own room in your own house. How do you think you will decorate your house? ... Can I come visit you?”

Again, I won’t budge from my values but I don’t have to fight with her about it either. If Roshan persists, which she often does, I will walk over to her, hold her hand in both of my hands, look her in the eye and say: “Roshan, I love you very much. I try and give you everything you *need* and only some of what you *want*.”

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Not a day goes by that I don’t feel challenged as a woman in America. How many personal products do I have to be told to use before I even get out of the house every morning? I used to debate that question a lot more. A cleansing facial bar is fine, an occasional facial is fun, but a chemical peel is out of question for me. I brush and floss my teeth faithfully but I would not want to ask my dentist to bleach my teeth. I ask myself whether a product enhances my beauty or condemns who I am as a natural woman. For me, a chemical peel or bleaching my teeth would imply that what is younger or newer is better. I don’t really believe that. So I don’t feel pulled to use such products.

There are other ways in which I have to “hold onto myself” as a woman in this culture. Some of my friends almost laugh at me when I say that I *enjoy* cleaning my house and doing household tasks. Have I not “liberated” myself? To them, it is odd that a professional woman would not only do this without complaining but also actually rejoice in it. No chore is better or worse than the other for me. Washing dishes, dusting, folding

clothes, ironing, preparing food, wiping the counters, and doing them all over again are ways that I anchor myself to my deep, feminine soul. It is how I center and calm myself in the nest of my home.

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Deep in my heart, I not only feel that I don't belong to this culture, it is clear that I don't even belong to this century. Events happen too fast around me. I like to handwrite notes to my friends, lick the stamp, mail it, and wait a few days or weeks for a response. My soul needs this time lag to adjust and process my feelings. When e-mails fly back and forth all within the same hour, especially on personal matters, I feel "dizzy" and want to crawl into a hole. When I am talking to a friend and her cell phone goes off, as she hurries to take the call, I ask myself what did just happen to us?

I don't want to get a coffee "to go". I like my friends "to come" and have tea with me at home. I enjoy serving tea to them in some beautiful teacups--the kind you can't put in the dishwasher. My friends always offer to help with the dishes before they leave. I often decline. It is not because I am a martyr and have a hard time letting go. No. I like to wash and dry the cups myself because it gives me a chance to think about each friend and the time we spent.

Deep in my heart, I do not believe that more is better; faster is better; younger is better. I find it challenging to live in a culture that is deeply afraid of death, decay, and slowing down. I remember an American friend had dropped by my house for a visit. She noticed

a vase of roses on the entrance table with many petals scattered around the vase on the tablecloth.

“These flowers have had it”, she said. I said: “I know. Sometimes I keep the flowers a few extra days just so Roshan sees the full cycle of life, not just the blooming part.”

“Oh, me too”, she said. “I hate to have my flowers die too early. I cut them and change their water every day so they last as long as possible.”

After she left, I said to myself that what we had said to each other had nothing in common. In fact, we were expressing opposing values. My friend doesn't like to see the death of her flowers, so she stretches their life by taking extra good care of them. I don't mind their death, or their appearance as they are decaying. Maybe East had met West in that twenty-second exchange.

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In the sanctuary of my heart, there lives a woman who looks out the window and remembers

the turquoise-blue sky of her land,

the scent of jasmine traveling down the winding alleys

the sky filled with sequins at night.

She lights a candle and listens to its story of separation as the candle cries itself to sleep.

She listens to the wailing of the flute and the ritual in the whirling around a still-heart

where tears are given the Seal of Silence.

She prays to poetry. She Longs for her Land.