

Until Further Notice

Sami Al-Kilani

To the residents of the town and the surrounding camps: By the order of the Military Governor, you are hereby under curfew until further notice.

The recurrent and abhorrent phrase, arousing pessimism and depression, is heard again from the loudspeakers on the jeeps and from the loudspeakers on mosques and minarets. It repeats with an annoying interference until you would be unable to differentiate between the words had you not known them by heart. You know without listening to the words. Your skin feels it, your clothes feel it as do your pajamas, which you wear day and night until they are so attached to you that you don't know whether you are wearing them or they are wearing you, or if something else with a repulsive colour, smell, and feel is wearing both of you.

You stand on the porch of your home looking towards the city's neighborhood that spreads to the north and south. The words continue to resound from all minarets, but instead of a unifying call-to-prayer, comes the unifying chorus of curfew and imprisonment, homes destroyed, hunger, screaming children, and all that unites people in misery. The echo that reverberates between both mountains to the north and south envelops the town and screams destruction. This same echo distorts all shapes and colours.

.....Until. Further. .. notice. .. further. ..notice. .. further... The curfew is imposed until further notice, and is lifted until further notice. Two hours ago the echo blurted out another until "further notice". This "further notice" was like a huge key opening the lock of a giant cell, the city and the surroundings. Young and old rushed out of their houses into the streets like birds from a suddenly opened cage. The adults rush to the bread and vegetables in the market, forming a human traffic jam — those with cash-in-hand with dignity, and those buying on credit with difficulty. Large and small cars rush out followed by the donkeys from the nearby villages, carrying cucumbers, yoghurt, and figs. The children fill the empty streets with their screaming and jumping.

Further notice and "further notice" of a different kind. It's like currencies where identical numbers denote different values. The values of these currencies go up and down with the same result, destroying the house of the poor. And you, Sir Anis, belong to the poor. Even though you console

yourself by feeling rich in spirit, education, and knowledge, this changes nothing. And the price of the “further notice” also destroys one’s home and one’s nerves. The curfew notice usually lasts for three days (could we ask for more?), is then lifted for two hours, and even that decision is placed in the fidgety hands of a monkey and is subject to cancellation for any reason. The price of the further notice goes in one direction — depriving every one of this sacred freedom. Curfew and imprisonment go hand in hand.

*O prison darkness, spread around
 We love darkness
 O curfew darkness, spread around
 We love darkness
 O guards slow down
 Listen to our words
 Allow us to enjoy the air
 Which is forbidden to prohibit us*

Sir Anis had decided to spend the reprieve of the last “further notice” in a new way. The curfew had become routine; the house had become routine; unfairness had become routine. He’s been waiting for something new for a while. Renewal, O` God, renewal! Even a new kind of oppression, even if the innovation is only a new way of destroying houses. He decided to kill the monotony by forsaking the short freedom. He told his wife and children: “Go wherever you wish while I stay home”. People looked out from their porches. Some friends passed by. He invited them to drink coffee and watch people together, particularly since the house was well stocked. In the previous reprieve he had luckily managed to get all he needed, and this time there was no need to shop for anything — other than a few luxuries that his wife could get from the nearby groceries.

The reprieve passed by without his noticing it. He was caught unaware by the announcement of the curfew and surprised by the high price of the “further notice.” A fatal error! He had been tricked and lost. Three more days within the walls, within the pajamas. No, this curfew would not end before the next national commemoration. Such are the thoughts of the one who imposes curfew: as long as you have started the curfew, extend it to include all the upcoming occasions. A demonstration of the Arabic proverb: if you feed someone be sure he is satiated; if you beat someone be certain he is in pain. They are trying to prove that they are indeed our cousins.

Imagine that the enforcer of the curfew is a big general who appears on the television screen with the title “General in Charge of Prohibitions”. Imagine him declaring, with artificial equanimity: “For the welfare of the population and in order to control those who disturb the peace, we have taken necessary pre-emptive measurements — such as curfew. Those who disturb the peace will bear the full responsibility for all the damages and inconveniences caused to population in the territories”.

Three days! You General of the Curfews! Do you understand what does it mean to me, “...The curfew starts now and will be in effect until further notice”?

The repetition of the message that came from the loudspeakers of both the minarets and jeeps presented one face: the face of the General of Curfew. Sir Anis did not pay attention to his wife and children who were coming towards their house from the edge of the street. Under the hammers of the alternating sound and echo, the house was a tube of toothpaste. Each squeeze pushed the twisted paste through the narrow opening.

With every “further notice” Sir Anis becomes stretched thinner and taller. His head emerges from the porch. With another “further notice” the shoulders come out. With another, one of his arms; with another, the waist, then the knees emerge. He becomes a tall, slim ribbon dancing in the air in front of the porch. With every “further notice” he becomes taller and slimmer, twisting north and south.

Sir Anis’s eyes were surprised at the appearance of the General of Curfew. He turned around and tried to reach the porch but the handcuffs found his hands first. Big hands pulled him to an army car. He tried to resist, but the force of pulling him was much too strong. He found himself in a hall filled with military personnel of all types and colours. The judge came and asked his name. He replied, while thinking — in a helpless state of reliance on God — what do they want from me, and why did they pull over here?

“You are accused of breaking the curfew. Do you admit to the accusation,” he was asked? He replied in shock, “I didn’t break the curfew, in fact I.” He was not allowed to continue. The judge said something and waited a bit. The captain whom he had seen in the army car came in, stood on a wooden platform and made a gesture Sir Anis understood as taking on oath. He remembered the courts and judicial system and thought to himself, he

must be saying, "I swear by great God to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the whole truth".

The captain spoke, the translator translated: "We arrested the accused while out of his house during a curfew". The captain left the platform. From the other side another captain rose at greater length than his predecessor. The translator translated: "The prosecution requests the imprisonment of the accused for one month with an additional three months of suspend sentence and an additional fine of 1,000 shekels".

He told the translator that he wished to speak. The latter transmitted his wish to the judge, who permitted him to speak on condition that he be brief. He said: "I was standing on my porch and my head extended from the porch under the pressure of the echo and sounds. I did not leave the porch".

The judge spoke. The translator translated: "The person is where his head is and not where his feet are. The human being is the brain. Are you opposing the will of the Creator?"

Sir Anis lost his mind.

The judge rose. The high-ranking military personnel withdrew. The soldier pulled him, cuffed his hands by the entrance of the hall. He wished that he had been granted an additional time to say a final word: "Before you dragged me over here I was thinking about a son of one of our neighbours who had just completed his 16 years in prison. I was thinking about the coming three days of the curfew when he passed me. He bore the imprisonment and emerged strengthened. I envied him for his strength, and here you are granting me the opportunity for a similar experience".

The soldier pushed him into the army car where a few youths were seated. One of them welcomed him with "Hello Sir Anis." One of his students recognised him. From them he learned that they were awaiting transfer to prison.

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