



★ Freedom and Despair: Notes from the South Hebron Hills

David Shulman

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“Some risks are worth taking, but it’s better not to ask why,” writes David Shulman. “Then there are the risks that you *have* to take if you want to feel human.” This reflection comes after another long day of resistance in South Hebron, where he gathers with Palestinians and fellow Israelis to protest the relentless settler takeover of Palestinian land.

It is an often discouraging process. On more days than not, settlers and police forces beat the resistance back, sometimes making arrests, sometimes landing bone-breaking blows. But Shulman, whose family background includes pogroms and persecutions and whose sensibilities are rooted in a decidedly fair-minded Judaism, knows that he has to persist. The tide will turn, he believes. More and more, soldiers will put down their guns, abandon the side of the oppressor, and join in the fight against oppression.

Shulman’s text is affecting, not only in its portrayals of state-supported violence and injustice, but at a sensual level. He recounts meals shared between allies in mouth-watering detail, the smell of wild herbs on warred-over hills, and the unmistakable cool of water drawn from a commandeered well. He conveys despair and hope in reasonable measures, and captures the humanity of the Palestinian owners of the stolen land, whose rights to “home” he tirelessly defends. He determines that his own freedom is tied up in affirming theirs.

There will undoubtedly be those who read Shulman’s philosophical, thoughtful, often musing account of peace activism and dismiss him as naïve. In climates where any criticism of Israel constitutes betrayal, his words will be read as such; his calls for peace and his fair critiques of settler cruelties could conceivably be corrupted and used against his own community. It has happened before.

But what-ifs are not Shulman’s concern. He sees injustice perpetuated by his neighbors, he sees his government defend the indefensible, and he knows that he must act, speak, and fight for better. His righteous sensibilities carry throughout *Freedom and Despair*, a persuasive, moving, and crucially needed account of resistance in these contentious times.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (University Press 2018)

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