Truce!

War makes you see, feel, and hear things that no one else in history has ever experienced. Has any of you ever seen a country—its people, its streets, its breath, its buildings, its stories, everything in it—*moving* while remaining in the same place?

Since the beginning of this war, I have walked through the Deir al-Balah market every day. Because of the overcrowding—almost as if all the people of Gaza now live in Deir al-Balah—every street has become filled with sellers offering whatever goods are available through coupons or merchants.

Yesterday was Friday. As usual, I went to the market, after the announcement on Thursday that a deal had been reached. All the sellers—without any prior agreement—were calling out their goods in what felt like a funerary carnival that defies description. For example, instead of naming what they were selling, each began by shouting at the top of his voice: *"It's over, we're going back—ten shekels!"* Another yelled: *"The war is over—five shekels a kilo!"* A third: *"Get yourselves ready—twenty shekels!"* That is how they advertised their goods and supplies.

The most painful and terrifying part of the scene was the body language—the atmosphere—something that all the great writers and geniuses of the world would fail to capture. You could feel everything pulling northward, toward the people returning to their homes—to Gaza City, which never left their imaginations for a single moment, despite all the ruin and destruction that befell it.

I tried with every ounce of imaginative power to analyze, interpret, to express what I was seeing…but impossible, impossible, and again impossible. The wild, charged energy that dominated the place made you weep blood from the sheer magnitude of the catastrophe, the suffering, the pain, the oppression that everyone had endured. Rarely did you see anyone standing still. There was a kind of meaningless movement among almost everyone—someone stepping forward then back to where he was, someone turning halfway around himself then returning to his original place, someone glancing up at the sky then down at the ground, repeating this absent-mindedly, unaware of what he was doing.

(I hope my friend, the visual artist **Faiz al-Sarsawi**—who reviewed and edited most of the texts I published here throughout this brutal war—may one day capture the inspiration of these difficult moments and immortalize them in an artwork that future generations will remember.)

Yes, my beloved ones—wounded and tormented—whose souls have been hollowed out by this massacre, whose lives have been stripped of their dearest memories, replaced by a new memory filled with grief, sorrow, and heartbreak.

I am the son of bitter, forced displacement—the actor and theatre director **Ali Abu Yassin, Abu Fadi**, from the alleys and lanes of Beach Camp, now living by force and anguish on the beloved land of Deir al-Balah. I speak to you with the grief of loss and sorrow, telling you that I have seen everything as no one before or after me has seen it.

Everything here is preparing to return, or is moving north—toward the city with a shattered heart, toward Gaza. I don't know how tears filled my eyes under the weight of what I witnessed—not only on people's faces, but settled deep within every cell of their bodies.

I tried, and I still try, to describe what I saw, but I cannot capture all the details. I cannot. What I witnessed yesterday cannot be described, but it reveals the boundless suffering of the people.

I hope with all my heart that everyone returns to their homes—or to whatever remains of them—whether stone or flesh. Mercy to all our righteous martyrs.

May we be granted return to homes that were once homes, so we may gather the scattered pieces of our wandering souls and salvage whatever remains of our dreams.

May you—and we—remain safe.

Ali Abu Yassin
18 January 2025