

EPISODE SIX

IF I WERE A COLOR



AS I
AM



AS I AM

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FILM SUMMARY

People with disabilities are often more disabled by the societies they live in than by their bodies or diagnosis. In this episode, Nagat from Egypt explains how she and her brother faced societies' attempt to disable their humanity. Their lives were shrouded in a figurative and literal darkness. Though their circumstances improved substantially once they moved into the L'Arche community, both Nagat and her brother carried evidence of the trauma they endured. She could not stop crying and he refused to speak. Over time, Nagat found a way to achieve what she wanted for herself and for her brother.



"BECAUSE EVEN AFTER
I AM IN PAIN, I CAN
SMILE."

-Nagat Zaki

FILM THEMES

- **Abuse**

People with intellectual disabilities around the world are subjected to a wide range of abuses. In some places they are treated as animals or worse. Nagat talks about her own and other people's experiences of physical abuse (being hit, Agaiby being burned with hot spoons) and psychological abuse (confined to a dark room, bricked up window). Overcoming challenges is a common theme among depictions of people with disabilities. This story, however, does not sensationalize her triumph. The fact that her tears persisted inexplicably, helps us see that she continued to carry the profound pain of abuse even after her circumstances improved.
- **Sibling support**

Nagat explains how she was concerned for her brother Hany when he was left alone in the dark. Once they joined L'Arche, she was the only one who could interpret for Hany when he stopped speaking for 2 years. The support she gave him allowed him to flourish and that has made her proud. The link between the siblings is part of how they achieved healing.
- **Transformation**

The transformation from darkness to light is a repeated theme throughout the film. Hany and Nagat went from an experience of confinement to freedom. They went from not working to having paid jobs, from being considered a burden to being considered an asset, and from a violent environment to an environment of love. Though it is important to note that this did not make all of their troubles disappear, the transformation of their life was significant and overwhelmingly positive.

- **Labels**

Being labeled disabled has led to pain and power for Nagat. It meant that someone could abuse her with impunity, but it also meant that she could move into a new home and be offered work. When she says, "They say we are disabled" she seems to be distancing herself from that label. She is being simultaneously bold and timid with her question, "Can I say the ones who care for us?" She is presenting a kind of accusation but asking permission first. Her comment refers to how people who assist her make a point to announce her disability. Often times, this is done innocently to make passage through a checkpoint smoother or secure support. Her conclusion is, "They are wrong. They are right." She seems to hear it as a label that captures something true about her and something untrue about her. It is interesting that when given the chance, Nagat chooses not to name, not to label. For example, instead of identifying the person who hit her she says, "she knows who she is."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The footage of a baby goat is woven throughout the storytelling. In the beginning of the film, when Nagat refers to being hit, we see the baby goat knocked by a bigger goat. What are other scenes that use the imagery of the goats? What are the links between the experiences of the goats and the experiences Nagat describes?
2. What does it mean to be disabled by society? How could someone's humanity be disabled by society?
3. Think about the lives of the people in this film. What "abilities" make life harder? Easier? What "disabilities" make life harder? Easier?
4. Nagat says that her brother thinks if she were a color she would be the color white. How does this comment illuminate aspects of Nagat's personality that she does not reveal herself? What color would you be and why?
5. When someone cries, we expect they are sad. When they smile, we expect they are happy. However, tears and smiles can also be ways of expressing or suppressing the opposite emotion. Nagat smiles a lot these days. We see that in the montage toward the end of the film. Do you think Nagat's smiles are revealing happiness or covering sadness? Explain your response.
6. What are other ways to interpret Hany's silence and Nagat's tears?

BEHIND THE SCENES

Whenever the interviewer asked Nagat about herself she would talk about other people (Samah says, Mamdoh says, Marcel says, Hany says)...She was not used to reflecting on her own desires. She seemed to always be thinking of the needs of others. There were several occasions where she was asked, "What do you want?" This question stood out among the others because she had very poignant responses: "I wanted to stop crying... I wanted Hany to speak."

IMAGINE THE WORLD DIFFERENTLY

This is story about enduring the indignities brought on by the labels ascribed to you and finding ways to preserve your humanity. Nagat was able to help her brother Hany even as she was suffering. Hany, in turn, was empowered to help Agaiby. The injuries to his humanity did not disable his capacity to help another. What is something in your life that you felt stymied by but someone else stepped in and showed you the way? Have you ever been able to return that gesture by empowering someone else? Imagine ways to turn the help you receive into the help you share.