

**MY LOVE FOR
GAMAL ABDEL NASSER**

In this world, there are two circumstances in which no man can escape from his ego. These are war and imprisonment. In Cell , I confronted my ego. We were together day and night, for the loneliness was terrible and that was the only way I could escape it. I did indeed live with my ego, but in spite of this, I was never able to reach it completely. It was as if something stood between us—a darkness from which I had long suffered, but which I had not fully recognized, for I was unable to expose it to light.

When we were allowed books, magazines, and newspapers in prison, I turned to them devouringly, discovering something new in every line I read, something that opened up horizons I had never previously known. My vast readings not only broadened my mental and emotional scope, but they also helped me to become better acquainted with my ego. I managed to overcome a nervous disorder that had been troubling me for some time and which had been brought about by my arrest at : a.m. in the bitter cold of the winters of both and .

I did not know the nature of this disorder but sensed it taking its toll of my spiritual well-being. After I was imprisoned and began to live in isolation, the problem rose to the surface. One week in prison is enough to do just that.

Thanks to an article written by an American psychologist, I managed to overcome this disorder. The theme of the article, which was the result of twenty-four years of experimentation by the psychologist, was that a human being is apt, at any stage in his life, to experience a shock that may give rise to a sense of being closed in, as if in a prison to which there is no door. The first door to this prison is to know the cause of the trouble; the second door is faith. What is meant by faith? It is to look upon any painful experience as destiny that must be confronted and borne. Only afterward can the effects of such an experience be overcome. One must not think that there is no solution to a particular problem, for the solution is always there. What is to make you believe this? Your faith that God has brought you into this world for a purpose. The God who created you cannot be evil. On the contrary. He is very good—not at all tyrannical and awful as sometimes depicted. The ideal relationship between man and God is not founded on fear or on reward and punishment. It is built on a value more noble than any other—truth. For mercy, justice, and love are among the qualities of the Creator. He is almighty, for He is the Source of all things. If you take Him as a friend. He will bestow peace upon you, for whatever the circumstances, you love Him and He loves you.

Not only did the psychologist's analysis help me to overcome my nervous disorder, but it also revealed in me an infinite capacity for love in my relationship with creation. This capacity had lain dormant in the vast ocean of my daily life, to be awakened by the trials and tribulations of prison. As of then, love became the chief springboard of all my actions

and feelings. Because of this, and because I was so full of conviction and calm, I did not for one moment falter in the midst of the turbulent events that accompanied every stage of my life. Love never once forsook me—it invariably prevailed at the end.

That is the story of my relationship with Gamal Abdel Nasser, or at least one aspect of it. In the eighteen years I was with him, there were moments when I could not understand him or account for some of his actions. Nevertheless, my feelings toward him remained unaltered. They were feelings of love and love alone.

Some have wondered in perplexity how it is that I spent such a long period with Nasser without falling out with him as did his other colleagues. Equally baffled, a foreign journalist in London finally concluded that I had been either of absolutely no consequence or so cunning that I managed to avoid quarreling with Nasser. Of all the men of the revolution, I was the only one who had remained untouched. In fact, upon Nasser's death, I was the only vice president of the Republic. If the naive perplexity of those people is proof of anything, it is simply proof of their ignorance of my nature. For I was neither inconsequential during Nasser's lifetime nor shy or cunning at any point in mine. The matter is quite simple. Nasser and I became friends at the age of nineteen. Then came the revolution. He became president of the Republic. I was glad, for the friend I trusted had become president and that made me happy. I felt exactly the same way when Nasser became a hallowed leader of the Arab nation. At times we would differ, and then we would become estranged, sometimes for two months or even more. This would

be due either to our differences of opinion or to the machinations of those with influence on him, for Nasser had a natural tendency to lend an ear to gossip.

Regardless of the matter, I never once put myself in a position of defense. It was not in my nature to do this, whether in my dealings with Nasser or with others. No matter how long it lasted, our estrangement would of course be put to an end when Nasser would telephone me, asking where I had been all that time, and why I had not been in touch with him. I would reply that I had assumed him to be busy and had therefore preferred to leave him to his work. Then we would see each other as though nothing had occurred. This happened many times, but whatever Nasser's actions, they would always be met with sincere love on my part.

At the end of _____, Nasser took over the Free Officers' Association.

Under his leadership and in the span of six years, the organization made great headway. During that period, I was in and out of various prisons and detention camps. When I left prison, I felt an urgent need to return to the army and join Nasser and his colleagues. I wished to contribute to the efforts I had helped to start and which they had continued after me. This I did in _____ when I returned to the army.

The military bulletin announced that, as of January _____, I was to return to the armed forces with the rank of captain—the same rank I had when I left. In the period that I had been away, my colleagues in the army had twice been promoted, first to the rank of major then to that of colonel.

The first to pay me a visit of congratulations was Gamal Abdel Nasser accompanied by Abdel Hakim Amer. I learned from Nasser that the Free Officers' Association had grown, gaining in power by the day. As though to prove this to me, or perhaps to put this power to the test, Nasser asked me to sit for the promotion examinations in order to obtain the promotions that had passed me by while I was out of the army. He told me to ignore the difficulties that I would encounter for regardless of their nature the organization would help me. This is indeed what happened. In a short time, I was given the rank of colonel.

Nasser asked me not to undertake any obvious political activity, for due to my history of struggle, it was only natural that I would be watched. This, however, did not prevent Nasser from revealing to me the list of supporters in the different army units. I would visit them and talk to them, but the conversation was always casual, bearing no relation to politics. For, in accordance with the regulations of the organization, I was not supposed to reveal myself or allow them to suspect that I knew they were among the Free Officers.

This was a fundamental principle laid down by Nasser the day he took over the organization, following my arrest in the summer of . The make-up of each unit was to be a secret known only to its members.

My second-in-command before I was arrested had been Abdel Moneim Raouf, who had kept contact with Sheikh Hassan al-Banna, the head of the Moslem Brotherhood. Sheikh Hassan al-Banna had been in total agreement with me that the Free Officers' Association should be

independent of any other organization or party, for its aim was to serve Egypt as a whole rather than a particular group.

When I entered the detention camp, Nasser was still in the Sudan. He was sent down with his battalion toward the end of . As soon as he returned to Egypt, Abdel Moneim Raouf was in touch with him in order to draw him into the organization. For Nasser was an outstanding officer, and that had been one of the criteria I had set: that no one be included in the organization unless he excelled in his work in the armed forces. After all, an outstanding officer was in a position of trust and was easily followed by others. Nasser responded immediately. After that, it was not difficult for Nasser to remove Abdel Moneim Raouf and to take over the leadership of the organization himself.

Nasser's leadership of the Free Officers' Association differed from mine. He created secret units in the army, each unknown to the other. The numbers increased daily until the organization included members in the entire armed forces, especially sensitive departments such as the army administration.

In , Nasser felt the organization had attained maturity and required a particular kind of leadership. Many of the members had begun to wonder about the leader or leaders of the organization. At that time, there were five secret organizations in Egypt: the Political Police, the Criminal Investigations, the Army Intelligence, the British Intelligence as well as the American CIA, which had come to Egypt after World War II; these were in addition to another organization controlled by the king and directly responsible to the palace.

Great care was therefore required in the formation of the Constituent Committee. Nasser began to select the members from among those he had known personally in the Palestinian War, those who were his friends and those who had been the original leaders of the organization before he took over.

Nasser's choice of me might seem to be proof of his loyalty. It is true that I had founded the Free Officers' Association, but I had been away for eight years, from the time of my removal from the army in until my return in . Nasser did not rank among those who are motivated by their feelings toward others, unless those feelings stemmed from a very firm friendship such as his with Abdel Hakim Amer.

Even though we had become acquainted at the early age of nineteen, I cannot say that our relationship was anything other than one of mutual respect and trust. It was certainly not one of friendship. It was not easy for Nasser to establish a relationship of friendship in the true sense of the word, for he was the eternal doubter, cautious, full of bitterness, high-strung. I do not mean to divest Nasser of the element of loyalty in his choice of me as a member of the Constituent Committee. However, I add to this another element, that of intelligence. From my conduct in the armed forces as well as his knowledge, ever since the early age at which we met, that I was a man of principles and ethics, it was not difficult for Nasser to realize that he could depend on me, and that his act of loyalty in selecting me would make me, in turn, loyal to him for life.

There can be no doubt that Nasser, who was by nature cautious, was fully confident that I would stand by him. I represented a force with

experience and history behind it, a power which would support him in the struggle that began in the Constituent Committee even before the revolution. Because of this, Nasser would hasten to me whenever I would return to Cairo, describing the difficulties he was encountering with some of the members. I recall those far-off days. I do not exaggerate when I say that Nasser would spend five whole days of every one of my holidays with me, and those holidays were never more than a week.

We would, on each occasion, examine the position of the organization and the difficulties and problems that confronted us. Nasser had great respect for my experience. In _____, for example, it was proposed to him that the revolution begin with a series of widespread assassinations. Nasser asked for my opinion. I replied: "Wrong, Gamal. What would be the result? Where would it lead us? The effort expended on the assassinations would be equal to that exerted on the revolution itself. Let us take the direct and honorable road. Let our immediate goal be the revolution."

Then came the _____ revolution in which I took part. My participation was not in itself a matter of importance to me.' Of more import than anything else was the fact that the revolution had been carried out. The dream that had taken hold of my life ever since I was a child of barely twelve years had come true.

It is that which made me live with Nasser for eighteen years without strife. For I wanted nothing. I had no demands of any kind, no matter what my position, whether as a member of the Revolutionary Council, or secretary of the Islamic Conference, or editor-in-chief of the newspaper

al-Coumhouria, or Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, or even Speaker of the National Assembly. My love for Nasser never changed; my feelings toward him never altered. I was by his side whether in victory or in defeat. Maybe that is what made Nasser look around him after eighteen years and wake up to the fact that there was one person with whom he had never once fallen out.

I lived with Nasser forever in his debt. For I shall never forget that he drew me into the Free Officers* Association upon my return to the army, after I had been away for eight years—a period spent in prisons and detention camps. I am not like some of Nasser's colleagues who accused him of ruling Egypt like Lord Cromer, or who rose to heights during his lifetime. I bore the responsibility, announcing that I had been responsible for every decision taken by Nasser during his rule.

That is why I said that love conquers at the end. It was not easy for the film over Nasser's eyes to be removed, while deep inside he was full of contradictions known only to God. It is my duty as a friend not to reveal them, but they were there. Nasser died without having enjoyed his life as others did, for it was spent in one fit of agitation following another. He was eaten up with anxiety, doubting every man in advance. The natural consequence was that Nasser left behind him an awful legacy of rancor, whether among the associates closest to him or at all levels within the country itself. It is for this reason that some of those who were wronged gave vent to their bitterness after his death, accusing him of feathering his nest. I testify, as do all those who knew him well, that Nasser was wholly innocent of that charge.

As I said and still reiterate, love conquered at the end . . . this love born of bitterness and pain in Cell . . . There is nothing like suffering to burnish the spirit, removing the rust from it and revealing its true metal. I discovered that I had a natural inclination toward good. Love is the real motive behind my every action. In fact, without love I cannot function.

Most people are impressed by outward success, by social standing, by the money or power they attain. If, for one reason or another, this image changes, they are shaken and break down. They do not know resistance, for they know nothing of honesty with oneself or with others. To them, the end justifies the means.

As for myself, I grew up to believe that the image of myself in my own eyes was more important than my image in the eyes of others. To me, the presidency of the Republic is not of greater consequence than Anwar el-Sadat. Whatever the situation, Anwar el-Sadat is the same: a man with no personal demands. And he who is in need of nothing is his own master.

A few weeks before his death, I visited with President Nasser and he was talking to me about the process of transferring power, both world-wide but especially at home. It seemed evident that Nasser was not feeling at ease about this issue and was worrying about what would happen when his time came to go. He looked as though he sensed his own time was near, and his worry and concern had become acute.

He had been greatly impressed by what happened in Great Britain in the summer of 1979, when the ruling Labor party was defeated in the elections and the queen called upon the opposition Conservative party to

form a new Cabinet. "Look, Anwar," he said, "only a few simple words were exchanged and power was transferred from one party to another. There was no fuss, no political crisis, no military coup d'etat, no convulsion or clamor." This is the usual process in mature countries, but in immature states the process is entirely different, and the people usually have to suffer a great deal each time there is a transfer of power.

While we were talking about this, it did not cross my mind that Egypt would soon experience a similar transfer of power. In fact it happened in the very same month. We both shared the same fears about what might happen in Egypt after Nasser's departure. Nasser concurred with me that great burdens were awaiting his successor, and I laughed and told him: "Allah will have to help the poor fellow." Strangely enough, I had been convinced for a long time that I was going to die before Nasser. Even more strangely, Nasser thought so as well and had promised to take care of my children after my death. This was after the heart attack I had about that time. It certainly never crossed our minds that Nasser would die in that very same month, or that I would be taking over in a new process of transferring power. But that was the will of Allah.

Nasser was afraid of a group of high officials who wanted power to pass to the Marxists, but fortunately their plot failed. At the time, I held the post of the one and only vice president and was naturally entitled to assume full responsibility following the announcement of Nasser's death. But poisonous snakes made an attempt to move against me as soon as the announcement came on the radio. Nasser died on a Monday and I had a

violent struggle with them from Monday through Thursday evening, as they and their Marxist friends sought to take over the country.*

* Editor's note: This refers to the Alt Sabri clique which attempted to topple Sadat and take over Egypt in September .