

To begin a conversation about magic, there is nothing more appropriate than breath. Therefore, for the first tale of magic, I want to tell you the story of the first breath I took as a young adult.

Breathing for the first time

I broke my nose when I was seven. Ran into another boy's forehead during lunch-break, and smashed my nose. I remember vividly going to hospital with my dad, and being told my pyramid bone was broken and I needed an operation.

I had two operations. They didn't work. I can't remember why, but I do remember hearing the surgeon says I needed another one. I held tightly to my dad's arm and squeezed him. General anaesthetic with ether wasn't my favourite way to pass on time. I hated it. But the second one didn't work either. I had a twisted bone that blocked my left nostril and most of the right one too.

So, from the age of seven until I was seventeen, I didn't breathe very much. Sinusitis was a matter of habit, and I consumed antibiotics for the constant inflammation like others consumes cokes. There was a strange quality to having a constant nose-block – the world seemed somewhat less real, you heard sounds coming from afar, voices were not completely there; taste, smells, food was there in a distance, blur and hinting.

And breathing. When I could breathe a little through my nose, everybody knew – for it made a funny, almost ultra-tonal shriek. Did dogs hear it miles away waiting to meet the strange looking whistle, or obey its master? Did secret agents receive it on their hidden monitors, disturbing important messages? I guess I'll never know.

Anyhow, when I was seventeen I decided to go for round three. I had enough of antibiotics, I had enough of numb taste buds, and of kissing only to find that the soft things we were toying with were not tongues. This time, the surgeon told me she would take out some cartilages out of my nose, so I could have breathing space.

I was in this hospital for two weeks. It was an old hospital, amidst an orthodox Jewish neighbourhood in Jerusalem. My head was constantly aching, because my sinuses were stuffed with pads and medical-tampons. There were some complications, so although I was supposed to be released after a couple of days, I needed to stay longer. It was an utter joyous experience.

And then the day came. I sat in front of Dr. Edri, the kind surgeon who took a pair of long and sturdy tweezers and started to pull. Long cotton pad came snaking out, stained and absorbed with blood clots and mucus. It took about half an hour, and was pretty painful and when it was finally out I wasn't prepared for the surprise that waited for me.

I took a breath.

It was piercingly painful. It was so painful my head pounded, my eyes flickered and I think I saw some dots flying all over the room. The air was stabbing me. I held my breath. I held my breath, swearing to myself that never again will I breathe. Nevertheless, my body's will has yet again taken over. I breathed again.

It was so painful. My head pounded, my eyes flickered. It was unbearable but slightly less so than in the first time; and again, still piercingly painful, just slightly easier. I sat there, and for long minutes just played hide and seek with my breathing. And it was slowly clearer and clearer to me: I can breathe.

The second nostril was not as painful experience, not so much because of lack of pain but more so because I was ready for it. I remember sitting there and gradually feeling that a new dimension has been added to my life. Things were clearer, my eyes were clearer, my ears could hear. And, god, I could breathe.

When I left the hospital for a walk, a whole new world has opened before me. Alongside the filthy pavements of Ha-Nevi-eem Street I was walking, the heavy sweat of people around me, the polluted air of far too many cars, and the thickness of a hot summer day. I was walking. Smelling the sweat of men and women, I haven't breathed in nearly ten years, like the luring enchanting songs of Jasmine bushes in the evenings, come and smell me. I inhaled those cars, that smoke, the cracking tarmac of a big city with the joy of a baby kangaroo emerging intact from his mother, ready for the world.

I walked in the filthy streets, magic all around me.

Magic in my ears, cars honking;

Magic in my eyes – clear – the blackness of their suits, the hats, the tree lanes;

Magic in my nose – breath

Magic in my nose – breath.

I walked in the streets flying, was I really flying?

Magic in my eyes, magic in my feet.

Magic in my nose, magic in my lungs – breathing.