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Jane and Eve in the Holy Land

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Fonda only complained a little about the photographers who would not leave her alone. From time to time she hung her head down or hid her face in her hands, or quietly and politely asked them to stop taking pictures, although to a large extent she came here precisely for this - to draw attention to the matter she wants to promote.

For a moment she also expressed displeasure with the attitude of Sari Raz, the reporter for Channel One: "A woman with hostility shoved a microphone in my face," relates Fonda on Thursday to an audience that had come to Hadassah University Hospital on Mount Scopus in Jerusalem, in an evening of homage to the medical teams, "and she said to me: 'So what? You came here to give us answers to our problems?'" Somehow I answered her: "No." She said: 'Then what did you come here for?' But she didn't wait to hear the answer. I came here to listen."

And indeed, perhaps once or twice she grimaced in disgust upon hearing things with which she did not agree. For example, at one of the meetings, an exceptional participant (the only one of all the Israeli women who met with Fonda

and Ensler to express hawkish views) uttered the cliché "It's all about honor with the Arabs." Fonda retorted: "That's universal."

When that same woman, in the thick of a discussion about the Israel Defense Forces roadblocks, which embitter the daily lives of the Palestinians and humiliate them, said, "Those roadblocks protect the Israelis, and it sounds like you are protesting against the fact of their existence," Fonda retorted: "You bet!"

Like Fonda, Ensler, a petite, energetic woman imbued with a sense of mission, protested only rarely. For example, she expressed astonishment because the American Fox television network reported only the violent reception the two received upon their arrival in Israel from members of the right-wing Women in Green. These women shouted at Fonda and called her names like "traitor."

Now and then it was also possible, to catch Ensler, for a brief moment, sighing wearily.

But overall, in a very impressive way, the two visitors mostly listened quietly, patiently, politely and with interest during three whole days of discussions, tours (inside a minibus, the windows of which were fogged by the rain and the steam), meals, and more talks. Perhaps one factor in the pleasant and friendly atmosphere that prevailed during the visit was the exclusive participation of feminist and leftist women, among them playwright and publicist Anat Gov, playwright and author Edna Mazya, novelist Zeruya Shalev, artist Diana Alarchik, Knesset Members Naomi Chazan, Yael Dayan and Hussniya Jabara of Meretz, as well as representatives of women's organizations and various leftist organizations.

Fonda and Ensler nodded, asked questions, demanded practical answers and shed tears, hugged and kissed the women they met and also laughed and joked. They liked to hear, for example, about the idea of a "sex strike," from Anat Gov's adaptation of "Lysistrata." They cried when Dr. Rachel Picard, a senior gynecologist at Hadassah, related that her son Aran, "for whom liberty and equality were his guiding lights," was killed this year in a terror attack. "Every day, in my work as an obstetrician, I help bring new life into the world," she said, "and in every one of those tiny faces, I see my son Aran. In his memory, I ask you to continue to bear his life's aspiration for peace and brotherhood."

Hadassah production

They laughed when the actresses of the amateur theater at Hadassah performed extracts from Ensler's play "The Vagina Monologues" with great charm, and they shed tears when Shoshana Gottlieb, a woman of 44, in a wheelchair, told about the shooting incident from which she came out alive, barely. "The bullet hit my left lung, and there is still shrapnel near essential organs of my body".

Fonda and Ensler were also moved when peace activist Dr. Daphna Golan, a law lecturer at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, wept - she told them how in her youth she had hoped that she would not grow up to be like the older women who were peace activists, with gray hair, whom she would meet at demonstrations, and week after week, year after year, continue to protest against the occupation, but nothing changes. On another occasion they emerged emotional and sad from a meeting with teenage girls in care, who have been separated from abusive parents and told them their personal stories.

Fonda, the film actress who celebrated her 65th birthday on Saturday (the international star has won two Oscars - for "Klute" in 1971 and for "Coming Home" in 1978), was married during the 1970s to peace activist Tom Hayden and during the 1990s to media mogul Ted Turner and is known as the woman who launched the culture of aerobic exercise videos in the 1980s. She herself is a veteran political activist who uses her huge publicity to promote humanitarian messages against war and for the welfare of children and youth.

Thirty years ago, Fonda traveled in the midst of the Vietnam War to Hanoi and from there broadcast to soldiers: "This is Jane Fonda speaking from Hanoi, and I'm speaking particularly to the U.S. servicemen - I don't know what your officers tell you, but your weapons are illegal and that's not just rhetoric." At the end of the 1980s, in an interview she initiated with Barbara Walters, Fonda apologized to the American soldiers, whom she had called during that broadcast "war criminals," and said that her intentions had been good: She had simply wanted to do what she could to bring an end to the slaughter.

During the weekend, Fonda told the Israeli women: "I came here several times - once for the premiere of "On Golden Pond," once to meet Ida Nudel and once I went to talk with the soldiers in Lebanon - but I never thought I'd come here as a soldier of the Vagina Army."

Fonda never ceased to praise Eve Ensler, the dramatist who not only wrote the "Monologues," but also founded the V-Day organization, which is active in preventing violence toward women around the world. Millions of dollars in profits from the hit play, which has been in production around the world since 1995 (it has been performed by, among others, Susan Sarandon, Callista Flockhart, Oprah

Winfrey, Glenn Close and Jane Fonda) are transferred to numerous countries to help women who are victims of violence. Among other things the organization has set up an orphanage and schools for women in Afghanistan, a first-aid center for rape victims in the Balkans and a shelter for 50 battered girls in South Africa.

On the one hand, Ensler's visit to Israel took place in this context, and it is only one in a series of visits to areas of conflict around the world. Just as she met here with, among others, girls at risk in care, victims of domestic violence, and spoke with them at length, and with representatives of various aid organizations, she has done exactly the same with girls and women in Bosnia and Afghanistan and on reservations for Native Americans in the United States.

"I close my eyes and I'm in a refugee camp in Pakistan, in Bosnia, in the territories," she said at one point. From the stories she collects during these conversations she creates plays, articles and essays. From the meetings with the activists, the connection is created and the donation is transferred.

On the other hand, visiting Israel accompanied by Fonda is a special visit, Politically, Ensler sees Israel as "the center of the world.

"What happens here," says Ensler, "will affect all of us." Therefore the conflict here is of magnified importance. The encounter with the activists in Israel will perhaps give rise to an international peace conference of women in a neutral country (but only if it influences the reality, stipulated Fonda).

Personally, Israel is also important to Ensler because it is the birthplace of her partner, Ariel Jordan, the man who "co-

conceived" "The Vagina Monologues" with her, as she says, and like her was the victim of incest in his childhood - a fact of life that has motivated Ensler all her life, in whatever she does.

Jordan, a handsome, gray-haired psychotherapist and filmmaker, was born in Kfar Blum and said he took advantage of this visit to renew his connection with this mother and his brothers. When he was an Israeli, his name was Ilan Tiano. In New York, as part of a process of mental recovery, he shook off his Israeli identity and changed his name to Ariel Jordan (after the River Jordan that flows through his kibbutz). "To carry the name of my father, who raped me from the age of three to the age of 14, was not something that I wanted or could do," he related on Thursday night, in the warmth of the bar at The American Colony Hotel in East Jerusalem, where the delegation lodged.

Last week Jordan met his mother after 15 years of complete alienation. "We met the day before yesterday, we hugged and we kissed," he said, "and she even phoned today to ask how I was doing. This is something that never happened in my life." Jordan said it was also he who encouraged Ensler to meet with her mother after she had not spoken to her for years.

Ten years ago, Ensler said, she forgave her mother, who had ignored the sexual, physical and mental abuse by her father. "I decided to stop being a victim," she said repeatedly.

Jordan and Ensler's frankness is their most influential political act. Jordan says that during the 1980s, there was not a single interview program on American television on which he did not appear. "But at some stage, I stopped giving interviews, because I did not want to be the Eli Wiesel of incest."

"The Vagina Monologues" is a series of skits that deal with female self-image, female weakness, women's disgust with their bodies and their sexuality and women's attitudes toward men and is the product of her life experience. Her next play, "The Good Body," will deal with plastic surgery, diets, piercing, "everything women do to fix their hated body," she says.

Her political activity, the organization she has founded, the interviews with victims of abuse, the play "Necessary Targets," which was produced last year and is about a woman psychiatrist who goes to "help" (Enslar gesticulates the quotation marks with her hands) rape victims in Bosnia – all of this motivated, she says, by her desire to stop being the poor little girl whose father hurt her, raped her and, she says, made her life a misery with his fist, sexual exploitation and emotional terror.

During a moment of rest in the midst of the visit, Jordan recalls how he met Enslar 13 years ago at his exhibition in New York. "She was standing in front of one of my works, which was called 'Beirut-Belfast,' and crying. She said she had never cried before from a work of art." They exchanged phone numbers, discovered that they lived across the street from each other in Chelsea, near Sixth Avenue, and discovered their mutual trauma.

Enslar, who was then already divorced from Richard McDermott and the stepmother of his son, Dylan McDermott, who eventually became an actor and the star of the television series "The Practice," went to Jordan's house to see more of his works and to interview him for a literary journal. They fell in love, "but for 10 months we didn't go to bed together, because we wanted to get to know each other first," he relates. Instead of sex, they wrote a book together called "Savage Love," which has not yet been published.

"It's about wild, intuitive love, like two birds who fly together and suddenly change direction together, in complete coordination, but also about destructive love, like that which we experienced from our parents."

In the minibus that took Ensler and Fonda around Jerusalem - to see the wall that has been erected in the heart of Abu Dis, to have their pictures taken with Women in Black at Paris Square, to learn about the politics of the city - Ensler took a moment to explain that the common experience of her and her partner connects them to refugees everywhere. "We are also refugees, from our families, from patriarchy. I've always felt like an outsider," she said, adding: "I love a lot about America but I feel like I don't belong. I experience a reality without borders."

At one of the high points of the visit, in an events tent at the Jewish-Arab community of Neveh Shalom on Friday evening, Ensler read portions of "The Vagina Monologues," among them the part in which she plays a lesbian, who discovers that her role in life is to pleasure women and reports on the orgasmic moans of the women she pleases - like the Jewish woman who cries "No!," the Catholic woman who cries "I'm sorry, I'm sorry" and the Muslim woman who cries "It's a sin, it's a sin!" Or the amusing story about a woman "who had a good experience with a man" - one called Bob, who liked to gaze at vaginas and admired the way they looked and also their smell. She told about American women who came to her performances with a lapel pin saying "I'm your Bob." She suggested that Israeli and Palestinian women do something similar.

The most impressive moment in the visit was provided by Souadi Omari, an architect from Ramallah, who stood up in front of the audience and announced: "I might look innocent, but I'm lethal." She warned that everyone should

beware of her; she had eluded the second roadblock on the way from her home to Neveh Shalom with the help of a friend who gave her a lift. "I'm a dangerous terrorist," she said, and the audience laughed. "Watch out for me now. You don't know what it is to be under curfew for more than a month straight. And even more, you don't know what it's like to spend the curfew with my mother-in-law. I am going to get back at you now. I'm going to bore you with the story of the day I broke the curfew to get my mother-in-law from her home. She's 92. Now get bored," she ordered with a serious laugh and recounted, moment by moment, the travails of that day with the confused and pesky old woman.

That evening, like the entire visit, included talk about the violence in the territories, violence against women around the world, rape, despair, oppression and depression but, in the best tradition of the '60s, there was also a moment when everyone sang, together with singer Amal Morcos, "We Shall Overcome." Fonda and Ensler joined in full-throatedly.