

“How do you write a book? How in God’s name do you fill a book with thousands of words and simultaneously give meaning to it?” These were the words that struck me every time I read a great book when I was young. I used to throw a couple of pillows together in our small storage room at home and read my books. I don’t know why I did that; I just remember I used to like the smell. It’s a smell that still lingers in that very same room. Around the age of twelve or thirteen I promised myself something. I said: “I don’t know how, but I will write a book one day and I will publish it.” It’s something I spoke into the universe.

I guess this ambition coincided with the same thought I had at that age regarding any type of art. I never really pursued my artistic interests to their fullest potential. I never learned how to play an instrument, for example. I was in a play in high school, and despite the enthusiasm of the teacher who directed it, I never took it seriously. I tried to write sketches with my good friend Soufiane Moussouli, but we never really took off. I’m pretty sure it was because of me, because he is an actor now, who recently starred in a Netflix movie and does stand-up comedy as well. When I was 21 I also joined a theater group, and this time I tried to put my heart into it. As mentally troubled as I was at that time, devoid of purpose and fulfillment, I quit. Again. The director’s

disappointment was painful, especially because she considered me to be talented and urged me to join them many times after my small endeavor in theater. With no success however. I always managed to choose mind over heart, whether that be positive and smart or just plain boring. I was constantly calculating consequences at the wrong moments. I guess that got to me.

I started writing again. Very randomly, without reason, and very badly, if I say so myself. When I went through an even darker period in my mid twenties, I got the advice to write down what I went through as a way of healing from the problems I faced. This in turn made me read more again. Poetry, prose, and spoken word. Old and new. When I met my wife Martine I even started to write more. It is safe to say she is my muse. Before I knew it, I started to share my work online. Under a pseudonym of course. Too scared to share it as my own work. Perhaps that's the reason I never really pursued the arts in my life.

Art is something that we create internally. It's personal and woven into our confidence. When someone criticizes that, we can never detach ourselves fully from it, no matter how hard we try. However, the love I received for my work was overwhelming. Which gave confidence and the power to share more work. After some time I signed my poems with my real name, which turned out to get me more attention. The attention opened doors for me I never imagined to be doors. They felt like windows that I would look through and I could only say, "This looks nice." Eventually I realized there are no doors. Nor windows, peepholes, or anything like that. There is only

space, which dares you to take it. There was, however, a time where I thought it was not a space for people that looked like me. That is how society made me feel as I grew up.

Before long, though, I started to perform on stage. I started to get asked to perform at spoken word nights. I performed on the radio, online, and even on tv. “Who would’ve thought?”, that’s all I could say every time I think about it.

I never thought I would get around to have enough material to write a book, let alone be content with it. Over time I would read my old work and think how far I have come. I can thank Allah swt. for that, the source of my imagination and perspective on the world. It is part of my identity and one of the lenses through which I see the world. The 99 names of Allah swt. describe His attributes. A mosaic of unique qualities that all serve a purpose or understanding. The poems are my observations of the world, my view on matters that I have encountered through my life. The titles simply show that wherever I am, wherever I go or what I do, Allah swt. is with me. Therefore: ‘Na’im’, meaning ‘at peace’.