

GALLERY גלריה



All photographs by Daniel Tchetchik

Daniel Tchetchik and David Stavrou

Optimists say after every disaster, “The sun will still rise tomorrow.” Even if the skies fall, even if the world seems to be against us, people comforting us insist on telling us that the sun will always rise again, and with it bring new hope. The sun shining every day is a comfort wrapped up in the natural order of things and in the feeling of security granted us by the laws of nature. It allows us to keep believing. Whether faith or the laws of nature are of the highest order for us, the rising of the sun gives us the confidence to get up every morning anew and to do our part in the world.

But things aren’t so simple for the four million people living north of the Arctic Circle. In the frigid months of November and December, residents of the Arctic region lose several minutes of daylight with each passing day. Each day is shorter than the one before, and in most of the cities, towns and villages above 66.5 degrees north — the line of latitude that demarcates the Circle, residents begin preparing for the very long nights already in late October.

In addition to increasingly shorter periods of weakening light at dusk, nighttime will last in Bar-

# In extraordinary photos: The Swedes say a long goodbye to sunlight

The sun has set in northern Sweden, not to return until the new year. Haaretz captured the lives of four million people north of the Arctic Circle, in the last glimpses of light



row, Alaska, for example, a little more than two months. In the cities of Tromsø, Norway, and Norilsk, Russia, the darkness descended at the end of last month, and the sun will rise again only

in mid-January. The sun set this week in north Sweden, and the next sunrise will be visible only in the next calendar year. During that first day, in early January, the

sunlight will last less than 45 minutes, and about 10 precious minutes of light will be added each day. Until then, in the polar nights of December, the children will go to school and return from it in the dark, just as their parents will go to and from work. The playground games and sports competitions will take place under artificial light, and streetlights will be lit around the clock. Thousands of candles will light dinner tables.

“Av is dead/ So, too, Elul/ And their heat is gone,” wrote Shmuel Hanagid, the Spanish Hebrew poet, 1,000 years ago. Like Shmuel Hanagid, northern cultures, and perhaps with even greater vigor, dedicate mythological chapters, folktales and art works to the changing of the seasons and to nature’s great drama.

In Norse mythology, the Fimbulvetr, the long and difficult winter, constitutes the first stage of the twilight of the gods and destruction of the world. The northern winter also reverberates in the great 19th-century Russian novels, in 20th-century American literature, in the Swedish director Ingmar Bergman’s films and in the canvases of the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch.

The changing of the seasons is a catalyst for the evolution of tales and the shaping of the internal world of their characters. It makes the vegetation grow, animals wander and humans change the way they live. But life in the northern countries is different from that of the Middle East not only in movies and literature, but also in real life. Cars need special winter tires. Snow must be cleared daily from sidewalks, roofs and roads. Parents give babies vitamin D drops, which children in countries closer to the equator derive from exposure to sunlight. And, many youth suffer from seasonal affective disorder, aka SAD.

The Arctic winter perhaps sounds cruel and depressing, but from the point



of view of Inuits in Canada, Greenland and Alaska, the Sami people of the Nordic countries and residents of the cities of northern Russia, the shortening days and low temperatures are a natural part of the annual cycle.

The weather may influence the mood, but in contrast to what some may assume, suicide rates in northern countries are far from being the highest in the world. “Why do those

created by the white snow piled up on the ground, the peace and quiet that envelop the streets when the snow dulls the sounds of walking, and the anticipation of the winter holidays that clothe the natural darkness and cold in man-made light and heat.

A Swedish pop song from 1984 called “Vintersaga” describes the unique period when winter arrives, grabs a seat and settles in to stay. It’s a description in small pictures from all over this huge Nordic country, which is so sparsely populated (Sweden is the third largest country in the European Union, but only in 13th place in terms of population).

Following is a translation of the song, whose words and music are by Ted Strom, who also recorded it: A coastal tanker stomping through the pack ice in the Quark, a workout at Ullevi in haze.

Border station in Tornio an old woman on a kicksled, Landsort lighthouse where the snow storm sweeps in.

Dense snow and sleet in the hills of Mariaberget, hot and sweat at Statt in Härnösand. A truck in the swirling snow between Kiruna and the distant, flickering lights in Visby harbour. It is then that the great

melancholy rolls in and from the sea blows an icy bleak wind.

In Malmö the mist is scratched by the ferries’ sirens, and on the other side of the strait the world begins. A lonely Volvo rips in the headwind on the Tjörn Bridge, the cinema in Pajala gives “Deliverance.”

Laplandspilen [the Lapland train] bellows like a wild beast through the night, the farms turn off their lights.

A storm-beaten Marstrand says its Pater Noster, Stockholm City sways in drunkenness. Love that lives between the night shift and the dream Is fueled by cheap wine. It is then that the great melancholy rolls in and from the sea blows an icy bleak wind.

This is the profound and pensive melancholy, the sadness and gloom of the Swedish winter. It’s the longing for the sun, its light and its

heat, and the surrender to the enormous power of nature, which every year takes over the space without anyone being able to change it or influence it.

And that in effect is the real power of the Arctic winter. It reminds us that we are in no sense the creators of the world. It’s true that in the Arctic regions human beings are engaged in the same activities as people in every other place. Still, there are those huge spaces without a single living soul. The forests, the icebergs, the endless snow-covered areas and the great and steadily increasing darkness are such a powerful backdrop that they sometimes cause human beings to get lost in them.

Political discussions and newspaper headlines, petty gossip and social struggles, making a living and relationships, are all covered by a thick blanket of tremendous forces that are not dependent on our wishes and our capabilities – the northern winds and the currents, the ice and snow, the darkness and the light.

It’s not as though everything else is unimportant, it’s simply a reminder that we are born, live and die within something greater than ourselves. Outside the big cities of the temperate zones, it’s easier to remember that we are a part of the world, not its rulers.

In her poem “The Land that Is Not,” the modernist Finnish-Swedish poet Edith Södergran writes about the land of the dead for which she longs. The poem was written during the period of her illness, which caused her death from tuberculosis at the age of 31, in 1923, and the land that is not, the kingdom of the dead, is reminiscent of the lands of the northern nights – it is dark, with endless fogs, and illuminated by the light of the moon and the stars.

I long for the land that is not./ For all that is, I am weary of wanting./ The moon speaks to me in silvern runes/ About the land that is not./ The land where all our wishes become wondrously fulfilled./ The land where all our fetters fall.

The photographer’s trip was supported by the Swedish Embassy in Israel.

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### Weather

#### Slightly cooler, light rain possible

Partly cloudy to cloudy Monday, with a chance of light rain; slightly cooler but still warmer than average for the season. Tuesday will be partly cloudy with no marked change in temperatures. Warmer Wednesday and even hotter Thursday.

| Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday |
|---------|-----------|----------|
|         |           |          |
|         |           |          |
| 06:33   | 06:33     | 16:38    |

Air pollution index: 17, 12, 17  
low medium high very high  
Jerusalem Tel Aviv Haifa Krayot  
Be'er Sheva Karmiel Afula Mod'in  
pollution forecast for this morning: medium-high

