

Reading the future – overcoming the past

On a business flight to Paris one year, Yasmina Saleh was taken aside by Customs officers who had found an unusual item in her luggage.

"They were completely puzzled and said: what the hell is that?" she recalls, amused, sitting in her elegant Achrafieh apartment. Next to her, the controversial item: her crystal ball.

What she does for a living – fortune-telling, clairvoyance, occultism, or whatever name one chooses to give it – is, to say the least, quite an unusual business. Saleh deals with the mystical and the paranormal quite well according to her customers.

The 39-year-old blonde Lebanese, now a full-fledged psychic consultant based in Paris and London, first went into business 15 years ago while still in college.

She says her first visions came to her as a child. "I was about six. It must have been in 1968, well before the war had started in Lebanon. I started seeing images of tanks, destruction and suffering. In more simple terms, I saw the war, all of it," she recalls, grimacing at her traumatizing childhood experience.

It was only later that Saleh and her startled parents understood what was going on. "At the time it was horrible, I'd wake up at night terrified and screaming. I thought I was abnormal. But I learned to demystify all that and view it like any other part of my life."

Years later, Saleh earned a grant from the British Council to pursue her doctorate in Philosophy at the University College of London. Off she went to Europe with one thing in mind: to come back to Lebanon and become a philosophy professor.

"At the time, I rekindled my talent and started practicing fortune telling as a side job, to earn extra money." But her list of clients kept growing and by the time she graduated, the civil war in Lebanon was at its pinnacle and Saleh had become too involved in her new life to leave.

So she stayed and did what she does best. "My vocation gobbles up my life, it requires full devotion and barely leaves time for anything else."

She isn't exaggerating. Saleh has a waiting list of 5-6 months, with customers pouring in from



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all over the world. Today, those who know her call her "London's cherished child," but Saleh who has been described by The London Magazine as the capital's "new occult superstar," remains tight-lipped about her clients. "They're my patients and my friends. Their identities must remain strictly confidential."

Saleh did say, however, that she has clients who rank high in the British, French and Portuguese governments who visit her regularly. "I often leave everything behind to catch a plane for an urgent consultation. Some people consult me for matters of higher importance and often for state decisions – and believe me, they do what I tell them to."

Working mostly with her own tailor-made, hand-drawn tarot cards and her crystal ball, Saleh asserts that her visions are precise. "I give details, I describe accurate situations."

Many of her clients are senior executives working at the City, London's financial center. "The people who work there are the most stressed-out I have ever met, I help them out in that sense. But occasionally, I also tell them which stocks to buy."

Although following the stock market is not a hobby of hers, she claims being able to predict the course of the market. "I can say whether a transaction will be profitable to a person or not. But it's always relative to the person."

Working with the police is yet another peculiar aspect of her profession.

"I do that on a regular basis. I've helped find missing people and criminals, or at least give indications on their whereabouts. If I'm given a name and a picture, I can describe the setting or the place the person's at."

Clairvoyance and supernatural hearing are two of the methods she uses. "I see and hear messages which the universe transmits." She believes that anyone can come in contact with the forces of the universe by developing the subconscious part of the psyche.

"I don't pretend to be God. I do make mistakes, but it almost never happens." To prevent mistakes, Saleh never sees more than three customers daily. "I can't cope with more. My mind simply shuts down." Being a Christian believer does not interfere with her work. "Those are two different things," she said.

Saleh makes a truly colorful yet charming seer, living up to The London Magazine's description of her "unworldly aura and indefinable grandeur:" an aura that is compelling and strangely comforting.

Her consultations, she contends, are primarily of a psychotherapeutic nature. Accordingly, she has completed one year of training in psychoanalysis and counseling at London's Stavistock Institute.

"Many of my clients are extremely fragile. What they need, above all, is moral support and I provide them with it. If I judge that certain clients need to be followed up by a doctor, I refer them to one, or we help them jointly."

Amid all that unworldly business, Saleh still finds place for earthly activities. Now happily married, she has been through a previous marriage.

"When I met my first husband for the first time, it was in the 1980s and I was still a student. I had envisioned him on the same day. I had also envisioned the initials of his name and the exact location of our meeting place. I went to my room-mate that day and said to her I have to go to this bar, I'm going to meet my husband ... I guess clairvoyance doesn't stop a person from committing stupid acts."

Nayla Assaf