

Chapter Six: Dialogic Creation

A. Melting Pot

When Rachel and Jeremiah Shapirah were chosen to found and direct Hadassim by the heads of WIZO, their first step was to span the whole of the country for the teachers that would fit in with the spirit of Schwabe's Teacher-Scout group. More specifically, they were looking for young, inexperienced instructors free of influences that could compromise the educational fountainhead which Hadassim would become.

It was for the best that Rachel and Jeremiah weren't philosophers. There have been many new ideas in the realm of education, but philosophical originators have a bad track record when it comes to implementing such ideas. It was precisely the Shapirahs' accomplishment to synthesize and implement Schwabe's philosophy in the practical arena of educational design. Schwabe was there, in person, to consult them throughout the process (until his death in the fifties). The result of this division of labor was a wholly new creation: we, the students, were the end and purpose of it; we were there to "see the voices" – just as the Jewish people had once "seen the voice" of God at Mount Sinai.

Ultimately, life in the village rested on a triumvirate of sorts: Schwabe, Shapirah and Spira, with Buber and Margolin adding their own voices. These interwoven dimensions reached their climactic expression in Micha's dancing – in public, during the Shavuot holiday, and in private, in his Jerusalem apartment. The course followed by Rachel and Jeremiah during Hadassim's first decade, from the moment they were given direction over the village until the mid-fifties, was a model of optimal policy formulation and execution. The school's paradigm of weighted intuition was given form in Rachel and Jeremiah's conscience and discipline, qualities honed in the Teacher-Scout group during the twenties and thirties. The Shapirahs knew well that a creative-dialogic education required them to prepare, instruct and work hand in hand with a special team. One of their first selections was Drora Aharoni, the Beit Hakerem seminary graduate, who would subsequently go on to direct the agricultural school in Ein Kerem, in Jerusalem. As one of the original instructors in our village, Drora had the depth of knowledge to help us decipher the Hadassim miracle, and for that we are most thankful.

Drora:

"I spent the late forties at the Beit Hakerem seminary. We were given a career questionnaire during our final months of study; most wanted to work close to home, or in Gush Dan. Then one day the director, Ben-Tzion Dinnur peeked into our classroom and asked, 'Is anyone interested in working not in Tel Aviv or Haifa or Jerusalem, but in a rural boarding school with an enlightened educational system?' A few of us expressed some interest in the idea, and soon we were led into his office, where we met Rachel and Jeremiah. They informed us that preparations were underway for a youth village founded on a

model of education quite different from others' in the region. They'd insisted on preparing novice educators first-hand, the better to mold them to their unique pedagogy. Alisa Gutman and I immediately volunteered, along with three others: Tzvi Lehm, Reuben Cohen-Raz and Tuviah Cohen. The five of us went on to receive our training in Ben Shemen, where Rachel and Jeremiah were among the central pillars."

"Shortly after our initial meeting, Rachel invited me over to her aunts' house in Zuta on the corner of Beit Hakerem St. in Jerusalem. We had a long conversation about her concept of education, harvested through her own training at Ben Shemen, Summerhill and Schwabe's Teacher-Scout group. Soon enough I graduated from my seminary and presented myself at Hadassim, in the summer of 1947. There were only a few others there at the time, among them Abraham and Loniya Carmi, Yaakov and Yehudit Frey, Malka Shuneri, Avinoam and Miriam Kaplan, Abraham and Elsa Daus, Masha Zarivetch and Esther Kolodnitzki (the two counselors who arrived together with the children), the village counselor, Gustel Cohen, the head secretary, Melnik, the cook, Yoel Haas, Malka and Michael Kashtan, the English teacher Elishevah Weiss, and of course Rachel and Jeremiah. The buildings weren't even finished yet; we still had to use planks up on the high floors, while few of the units had all their stairs installed. All the workers were crowded with the children in unit B.

"We soon began to prepare to host the first of the new children. Jeremiah and Rachel were of the opinion that these children of the Holocaust deserved every compensation for their agony: we were expected to give them their due. Accordingly, for example, the dining hall was especially designed in the rural Swiss manner. Rachel and Jeremiah were provided with the financial means for such things by WIZO-Canada's generous contribution.

"The educational concept was driven partly by the vision of Israel as an integrated, Ben-Gurion style melting pot. Thus, there was some concern early on that if the Holocaust children comprised too great a portion of the student population, that the Israeli children – the Sabras – would eventually become the resident "nerds," developing arrogant and patronizing tendencies. In order to circumvent that problem, it was decided that the three groups of kids – holocaust survivors, children of wealth and children of distress – would be equal in number and evenly mixed in their units.

"The Holocaust children were all thrown into one prep course [Hebrew instruction] – Poles, Hungarians, Romanians, et al – where they had no recourse to their native tongues. I spoke in slow, even and emphatic tones, and the kids picked up the language in no time. I was still single back then. In addition to my teaching, Rachel had me work first as her assistant, then as her deputy. Village life was centered on labor, especially farm work. There were some children who spent the vast majority of their time in the sheep pen; they could hardly keep their hands off them, and they were always ready to drop

everything and run back to the pen when it was time to accept a new litter of their adopted creatures into the world.

“Some joined Hadassim after having failed academically at other places. For these children, intense agricultural work was a spiritual boon, conducive not only of academic success but also of greater social skills and self-esteem.

On one occasion, when an educational supervisor came for a visit, I showed him to the orange groves so he could watch the children at work for himself. He spent the day working among us, and was able to glean the nature of our educational experiment in the flesh, on the field.”

As I said before, Drora was the first person I ever saw in Hadassim, in 1952. The education of the first generation of state of Israel was her chosen front in the battle for a Jewish state, to which she would dedicate her whole life. It was in Hadassim that she chose to engage her life work, a campaign run under the command of Jeremiah and Rachel.

B. Dialogue with Nature

In 1958, Eli Shebo enlisted in the IDF. One of the standard questions on his routine aptitude test was, “What role model or figure has influenced you the most?” The answer Eli gave was “Avinoam Kaplan, my biology teacher at Hadassim.” When the psychologist interviewing him asked him why, he explained that Kaplan “wasn’t just a teacher – he’d been a guide and a mentor.”



Avinoam Kaplan

The education of Nature – the philosophy that held the experience and discourse of nature in the land of Israel as a fundamental good – was the lifework of the naturalist and teacher Yehoshua Margolin. Margolin never married; he was wedded to the earth and its riches and his relatives in Israel were none but the wilderness and vistas of the country itself. Another of Buber’s many followers, Margolin elaborated the concept of dialogue *with* Nature. It was Avinoam Kaplan’s luck to be taken under his wing, and it was Hadassim’s luck to

have Kaplan harvest that discipleship by spreading the culture of naturalist dialogue among us. He himself was no intellectual; indeed, he was often vulgar and many had their reservations about him. He was, nevertheless, the right man at the right time: his naturalism together with the dialogic spirit of Buber and Schwabe made the educational miracle of Hadassim.

Yehoshua Margolin was born in Russia in 1877. Though steeped in the Torah during his childhood, his education was sophisticated enough to encompass all of Russian and Modern Hebrew literature. He had the soul of a poet, and would delve just as easily into a vivid description of biblical flora and fauna as he would a bit of Talmudic exegesis or

an episode in the Haggadah¹. He delighted in the details of biblical landscapes, of plant and animal life in Judean Antiquity; that such details could come alive in biblical narrative was proof, for him, of the bond between Diaspora Jews and their lands and ancestors of yore. He would strive above all else for the revival of man's relationship with Nature, which he believed was created for the pleasure and edification of all mankind, including the Jews.

His career began in a Kiev gymnasium, where as an instructor of religion he taught the Hebrew Bible and cultivated Jewish nationalism among his student following. In 1909 he made his first move to Israel, where he indulged his passion for the theatre at the Hebrew Stage Lovers Association. But teaching remained his higher calling, and already he saw it as his mission to engage the children of Israel in active study and fellowship with Nature, subscribing firmly to the strand of thought that saw the vital need of strengthening Jewish roots in the homeland's physical soil.

Seeing that his science and pedagogical backgrounds were as yet inadequate for his ambitions, Margolin decided to return to Russia and enroll in Kiev University while joining the faculty of the Hebrew Lover's School, Tarbut², as a natural science instructor. There he continued to encourage nascent Zionist sentiments and met Rachel Cogan, who impressed him with her experiences in Schwabe and Dinur's educational project in Vetka.

At the end of 1923 he returned to Israel, where he'd been invited to teach at Mikve Israel, an agricultural school and youth village. Many pupils were immediately infected by his enthusiasm, including Avinoam Kaplan, and together with other faculty he eventually converted the school into the Center for Natural Science and Eretz Israel (homeland) Studies. Their extensive collections of geological, plant and animal life attracted great flocks of teachers and students from near and far, and Margolin's cultural activities – like organizing mass Oneg Shabat³ rituals and starting a kindergarten -- helped cement a closer-knit community. His new and radical approach - according to which a fully independent, observational and experimental method would be brought to bear on the study of Israel's natural life – led him to the conviction that botany and zoology should only be studied in the wilderness, in their own contexts. Though there were biological texts to master, sight and touch were superior to words.



Mikve Israel

Leaving his job in Mikve Israel, Margolin became a traveling natural science teacher for the main Israel Valley institutions: the Kibbutzim and Moshavim. He would arrive at each school carrying only his backpack, and it was in this period that he fully developed and first applied his doctrine. The earthly dome under heaven's gaze was his classroom;

¹ Rabbinical narratives

² "Culture"

³ Informal Friday evening gatherings, meant to express joy for the arrival of the Sabbath Holiday

the manifold birdsongs were his lesson plans. For the host pupils and teachers these lessons were holidays. Around the same time, he began planning the founding of the Pedagogical-Biological Institute in Tel Aviv, which would ground the nation's future science instructors in direct observation of Israel's natural life. In 1931, with the help of Shoshanna Persitch, head of the Tel Aviv Education Department, the Institute was established in the little space allocated for it on Yehuda Halevy St. in Tel Aviv, giving the country its first significant nature exhibit.

After our first introduction in June of 1944, Gideon would come visit me on our property in No. 36, 38 Lilienblum St. My great-aunt Shoshanna, the sister of the famous poet Rachel, also lived with us at the time, and she was a close friend of Margolin (as both had immigrated together in the same year). Shoshanna was a piano teacher, and every year her students would organize a concert in our courtyard under the all-embracing shadow of our ancient strawberry tree. Margolin was a regular guest at these concerts; I even remember sitting next to him and listening to him as he told me all about silkworms and how they ate strawberry leaves. His Institute was nearby, so aunt Shoshanna once took Gideon and me there. Margolin was a gracious host, and introduced us to his aide, Heinrich Mendelssohn, while some kids from Tel Aviv's Bialik elementary school were also touring there at the same time. Together we pet the animals and listened to Margolin's lecture, a memorable experience for Gideon and me both. At the time, Gideon went to Nordau Elementary school and I to the Ha'Chil⁴ Elementary school, and after Margolin passed away our classes would often visit the Institute; Heinrich Mendelssohn, remembering me from my first visit, would ask me to say some words about Yehoshua Margolin, and my teacher, Sarah Hashiloni would beam with pride.

Margolin wasn't satisfied merely with teaching, whether it was in the field or the laboratory, nor did he feel obliged to limit the scope of his influence to his immediate peers. He also wrote children's stories filled with natural history and beauty, published numerous essays in academic journals and anthologies, and prepared a detailed natural science curriculum that became a cornerstone of science education in our generation. We've already noted that conventional family life held no appeal for him, and indeed what stands out in this respect is his total, heartfelt nationalism: he seemed to have regarded every Israeli equally as a brother, and everyone he knew, in turn, loved him as an uncle, "uncle Yehosua." He died in September 1947, exactly the month Avinoam Kaplan started teaching in Hadassim, in line with his mentor's spirit⁵.

Margolin wrote the following, in his book, *Flora Life in Experiments*:

"Every fact [introduced in a lesson] should bear on a single theme or experiment, to illustrate for the student, according to a sequence of questions and directions, the proper methodology for understanding a plant's action and its biological

⁴ The School of the Jewish Brigade, founded in honor of the Jewish unit of the [British Army](#) during [World War II](#).

⁵ Rani Vaffle, "The Portrait of 'Uncle Yehosua'", the bulletin for biology teachers, 2nd edition, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, The Center for the Teachings of the Sciences, 1988

function. The student must find all the answers to the questions put before him, from his own examination of the material."

And he would write the following, soon before his death:

*"Naturalist Education means not only to live in nature but also to be involved with and experience it directly, to nurse from it consciously and subconsciously; and whoever reaches its splendor earlier, gains all the more."*⁶

Avinoam Kaplan was born in 1922 in Petach Tikva - a year after the end of the first round of war between Jews and Palestinians. The Hagana had already been established as an army of a nation underway, and Kaplan was raised in the kinetic atmosphere of this institution, the most important one in the entire history of the Zionist movement. Like many of his generation, the Hagana inspired unwavering loyalty, and he identifies with its leaders even today, at the age of eighty-four; he would never forgive me, for instance, for my published criticisms of Yitzhak Rabin (though he was willing to provide his testimony in them), a figure you remains sacrosanct for men of Kaplan's stripe. Whether my criticisms were sound mattered not: he ultimately withdrew at the last minute from a battle-reconstruction project I'd organized for my Hadassim cohorts (and tried to persuade others to do likewise).

"My father himself was an underground member of ETZEL [aka, The Irgun, a more radical insurgent group and bitter adversary of the Hagana] before the war," Gideon remembers. "I used to wear the ETZEL emblem on my collar. When I started taking classes with Kaplan, he would ask me to take it off -- he once even tore it off himself, taking my shirt along with it. I had photographs in my room of Zeev Zhabotinsky (head of BEITAR), of Menachem Begin, commander of ETZEL and later the head of HERUT, The Freedom Party, and of Abraham (Yair) Stern, who founded and commanded the LEHI underground and whose widow, Roni, taught music in Hadassim. Kaplan once hurled a bucket on Zhabotinsky's photograph and cracked the wall. My father, who appeared rarely in any case, he wanted absolutely nothing to do with."

Kaplan didn't fit well within Buber's dialogic paradigm, but this was somewhat of an advantage at Hadassim. He partook of a different kind of a dialogue – an earthy-archaic discourse that harked back to the days before the agricultural revolution, before the dawn of modern civilization and before man had succumbed to the fruit of knowledge and been expelled from the Garden of Eden.

In 1927 his father, Meir Kaplan, became a teacher and administrator of the citrus department of Mikve Israel, a career move that would prove lucky for his son Avinoam and, subsequently, for us. It was in Mikve Israel that Avinoam first came under the fold of the Hagana, and it was in his thirteen years there that he would form a deep bond with Margolin. His mentorship encompassed endless hours of observing animal life both in Mikve Israel and, later, under the auspices of the Institute. Margolin's character and

⁶ *In Nature's Way*, Hapoalim Publishing House, 1947

mentality as an educator passed seamlessly onto Kaplan in these early years, marking the future character of our naturalist education at Hadassim.

From Mikve Israel Kaplan moved on to Ben Shemen, in 1942. The Hagana company commander there was the author Yizhar Smilansky, and Kaplan was appointed his second in command, becoming commander himself two years later and finishing the platoon-commander course, then the highest course in the organization. Graduating from Ben Shemen, he befriended Jeremiah and Rachel and began to lead student expeditions all over the country. Rachel was immediately able to see past his apparent lack of education, recognizing in him the true product of Margolin's genius and giving him license to amplify the school's natural science curriculum. When it came time for Jeremiah and Rachel to deliberate on faculty for Hadassim, Avinoam Kaplan was their first choice.

In 1946 Jeremiah persuaded Kaplan to begin formal study of biology at the Hebrew University, to supplement his continued education with Margolin (at the Kibbutzim Seminary). The combination would fully prepare him to head natural science study at Hadassim, putting him in the optimal position to promote the atmosphere of naturalist reverence he grew up in. He was given the opportunity to build an animal corner that would soon evolve into a full bio-center, in addition to converting the western part of the village into a natural reservation. Within a year of his tenure at Hadassim he was married, to a secretary by the name of Mira. His relationship with Jeremiah and Rachel, as well, became quite close, even familial, to the point where he was trusted with their most sensitive and personal issues.

"Kaplan was an experience in his own right," Alisa Bar remembers. "In my very first encounter with him, he poked into his pockets and took out different animals, explaining what each was. He was the first instructor assigned to the eight Polish children who arrived in 1947. He would put them to sleep at night, sit on their beds and talk to them, then kiss them goodnight, one at a time."

Alex Orly remembers: "He'd take us on weekend field-trips, teaching us everything about the plants and animals we came across. At night, he would take us to hear sounds of nocturnal animal life."

Rachel and Jeremiah encouraged student initiatives in every realm, and Kaplan, in particular, had a free hand.

In 1951, Yeshayahu Giat wrote about the sixth-grade animal corner project: *

"The genesis of the animal corner started with a few crazy guys from unit C, in 1950⁷. In the same year, unit B prepared their own flower garden, west of the warehouse, and of

⁷ Yeshayahu Giat is mistaken on this count. Kaplan had already founded the first animal corner in 1947, but it fell into complete neglect during his army duties in The Independence War. He inspired enthusiasm for restarting the project when he came back for vacations, and resumed directing its activities upon his permanent return.

course unit C couldn't sit idly by and watch – so the animal corner was proposed. Excitement ran so high that we didn't stop to ask how, we just chose the fenced area near the pool, an attractive spot, and started working. It was a monumentally exhausting job, because there were tons of concrete leftovers from the old days, and the initial enthusiasm actually worked against us. As it turned out, a road was supposed to be built around that area, so we had to scrap the location. The place we chose instead remains to this day, but it was in such neglect at the time! A foothill steeped in tall grass.”

“But we didn't let that stop us, and by the end of the day we'd cleared the plot. The huge scope of the task could be summarized, without exaggeration, by the fact that almost nothing was left of the place by the time we were done - not even the soil. We dragged the soil off in wheelbarrows and used sledges to flatten out the foothill, leaving only the young oak tree in the corner. If by some miracle that tree opened its mouth today and began to talk, it would testify to how different the place was after we were through with it. We built two cages, put fences around them, grew castor-oil plants around the fence and prepared garden beds to grow food for the animals. We didn't even have a budget for all this, which is astonishing in retrospect. We had no outside material support for any of it, not even tools – we only had permission. We even got the animals ourselves: an owl from nearby wells, trapped mice, pigeons and rabbits bought and paid for by poaching toads for the Institute [Margolin's Pedagogical-Biological Institute], the fence from leftover wires lying around the Village. Just picture it: boys out at night carrying candles and buckets to catch toads, out in the rain checking traps for mice, wandering about with cages every Saturday looking for owls or coots.”

“But there were stumbling blocks. We had to fight for support with some of the teachers, and even then, with end of school year exams and transitions, commitment waned for some. So for a while the cages were deserted, the fence broken, and grass began to overrun the place.”

“But then, in 1951, the corner began to flourish again. Kaplan (now released from the army) took it upon himself to make it succeed. We were finally allowed a budget for tools; children were actually assigned work at the corner, and our project grew along with the natural science study and the plant hill. The grass was cleared off completely, the fence and cages repaired, and flower beds were sowed. But the cages were still empty.”

“The first animal to arrive was the guinea-pig, sent by the Institute. Then white mice, rabbits, and finally, a couple of pigeons. Now we needed larger cages. In the past year, the natural science study had mainly been used as a laboratory, for dissections and storage. Now it would also house animals that we couldn't tend to in the animal corner, like the white mice and certain larvae.”

“The plant hill, which later developed into a full nature reserve, was intended to preserve plant life threatened by the conquests of Israeli deserts. Certain areas were designated for this purpose, and the plant hill was one of them. We added our own wild plants from all over the neighborhood, like cyclamens, Irises, daffodils⁸.

⁸ Yeshayahu Giat's short article was originally published in our student newspaper. It was reprinted in the booklet, “Our Hadassim,” edited by Drora Aharoni and Shifra Kolat, in 1998.

Avi Meiri worked with Kaplan in the Bio-Center for three years. Avi recounts:

“We’d received a guinea pig as a present from the Pedagogical-Biological Institute, and one day it ran away. For two weeks I’d go wait behind the dining hall, ready to ambush and trap it. Finally we caught it, on the Sabbath, and we put it in a sack and went to catch a movie. But when we came back, we found it had choked to death. So I was chosen for the (very unfortunate) task of taking the corpse back to the Institute, hauling the heavy knapsack to the main road to catch the bus to Tel Aviv. Naturally, Professor Mendelssohn was very upset, but the hundreds of lizards that Gideon, Yakir Laufer and I had specifically fetched in order to dim that anger a bit had the desired effect.

As a commander in the IDF and Hagana, Kaplan was inclined to harsh discipline. Most of us admired him and lovingly accepted his demanding ways, but there were also clashes. In one case, at least, it transpired that Avinoam’s love for Nature could make him go overboard. Joseph Tanner remembers:

“One of our eleventh grade classmates, Immanuel Cahana, used to retire over to the orange groves and pour out his soul with his guitar. One day he saw a viper crawling towards him, and he quashed it with his guitar, killing it. Then he carried it with him to class, beaming and proud. But Kaplan was livid: ‘Are you crazy?!’ he said, ‘Do you know what you’ve done?! The snakes control the rodent population. The natural life cycle exists; you should respect it. How can you destroy part of nature’s cycle?!’ Immanuel apologized and tried to defend himself, saying the viper had endangered his life. ‘*You* will not study with me,’ Kaplan decreed. I was then a member of the student committee, and I immediately stood up for him, insisting that the snake should have nothing to do with school, and threatened to walk out on him and take the rest of the class with me. My friends all supported me.”

“When Kaplan arrived in class the next day, saw Immanuel and yelled, ‘Get out of my class!’ I quickly reminded him that Immanuel couldn’t be punished for having killed the snake. Kaplan insisted. All of us rose up, walked out and left him stunned. So he summoned Rachel from the office, and she ran back with him and yelled at me, ‘what is it now?! All you do is encourage dissent and wreak havoc instead of helping me calm everyone down!’ And I responded, as indignantly as I could, ‘I’m sorry, but Immanuel wasn’t treated justly. He killed a viper in natural self defense, so I don’t understand what Kaplan wants from him.’ There were several rounds of discussions, and in the end Kaplan yielded and Immanuel was allowed to stay with us.

Avigdor Shachan is a poet. The encounter between him and Kaplan, the poet of nature, gave rise to a complicated relationship.

“Wandering around in nature on those trips, Kaplan was an absolutely volcanic talker,” remembers Shachan. “His enthusiasm for every grass blade, flower and plant reached an ecstasy that infected everyone around him. I absolutely delighted in his lessons. For me, a child of the Diaspora, every lesson of his opened a new page in God’s book of nature...”

His conversations with us on those trips were a spiritual high for me. He knew that I wrote poetry; in fact, he'd refer to me as 'the poet' in an uncharitable sense, to mean someone who writes a lot of fluff about flowers without actually knowing the particulars about them, like how many leaves or petals they have or -- far worse! -- how they reproduced. Years later, I did some research to verify whether poets deserved that kind of scorn, and to my shame I had to admit (at least with respect to the Hebrew poetry I read) that he was right...

"I've carried one of those trips with me for more than fifty years. It was a radiant, summery day during the period of the Independence War. We were walking in a wide meadow not far from Hadassim, amidst God's handiwork; just us, Kaplan preaching to his pupils in high religious tones about the plant he was holding, the pupils encircling him as an elaborate crown circles a stalwart king's head. I raised my head to the sky. And in the sea of deep azure not far above, I saw an airplane coasting slowly our way. That hadn't been my first such experience with an instrument of flight, nor the most terrifying."

"It was exactly in that fashion that I once found myself on another open meadow, on a clear sunny day in my final days in Transdneistria, before the liberating Red Army arrived in Popovitch, our Ukrainian Ghetto. By that time Russian Partisans had already begun to arrive, and a glimmer of hope was lit within us. [The Germans had begun their retreat at this point.] The snow began to melt, and then one of our spies came running back with news of a big cache of potatoes that Ukrainians had hidden in the field, the kind normally used to conceal part of their summer crop. So everyone, even those who could barely stand on their own feet, rushed over to the giant pit in the faraway field. When we arrived at the cache several people went down and started digging frantically. Then the potatoes began to rain up at us; those who were quick snatched them up and devoured them raw, so furious was their hunger. It had been a blissful day, as innocent as an angel's face, so far a generous portion of sun, a field cleared of snow...

"Then I looked up and glimpsed, at some distance, a whole squadron of airplanes (later I learned that they were German Stuka dive-bombers). As they grew louder, everyone raised their heads and stopped cold. The planes moved in pair formation, little distance between them, and when they'd almost passed us completely one of them suddenly lurched toward us, and horrifyingly the others then spun around and formed a line behind it. They seemed to come slowly closer, and before we knew it they were heading right for us, their deep-sinking noise absolutely earthshaking. People tossed everything aside and ran in all directions, twenty four German fighter planes bearing down on them. Whoever hasn't heard that atrocious, numbing, death-cold roar doesn't know what the end of days is..."

"I saw a corn field nearby and ran for it. Throwing myself into the dry corn stalks, I felt another boy land by me who I didn't know. The terror was so immense that it felt like the airplanes weren't coming down at the earth, but like the earth, emitting sonic waves of doom, was launching up at them. And amid the shock and panic I heard the child crying out, 'Shma Israel...!' and I bellowed back at him, '...Our lord our god is one...!'

The pilot who'd initially noticed our group and turned towards us probably thought we were Russian partisan fighters.

After several low passes, probably intended to frighten, they disappeared..."

"So years later, in Hadassim, when that mysterious light aircraft turned towards us and Kaplan yelled "Down...!" as we spread in every direction, I heard *myself* instinctively yell 'Shma Israel...!' – and immediately prayed that no one would hear it. After all, I'd be the laughing stock of Hadassim for days if they'd heard it, since who would greet distress with *that* phrase if not a meek-hearted Diaspora Jew?! And I wanted so badly to be rid of that contemptible image...in the end, as it turned out, the plane was manned by a Jew who decided to play a bad joke on us by heading for us and momentarily releasing the throttle."

"I admired Kaplan, though his temperament was utterly unlike Kashtan's; two teachers, two educators, both of them high priests in their own fields, and so completely opposite. Kaplan brought me into the web of nature's serenity, of the conversations of grass and trees, of flowers' whispers. Every bud in Kaplan's world emits poetry, but also requires a name, even a nickname, for its survival. To my everlasting, I could never remember their names – even if we share the same environment..."

"And today, when my five and six year old grandchildren point to a flower, 'Grandpa, come and see...' and I see that they can name that which I know not --that they live within that world -- I just nod my head and mumble some words of recognition, so ashamed am I of my own ignorance. But then I swell with pride when I see the extent to which my people of Israel have redeemed their long, accursed exile! And all because of teachers and educators like Kaplan. Facing my little grandchildren, from deep fog of memory come Kaplan's old words, 'Oh poet...you poet, who so pines for the flower without so much as knowing its name or patterns..."

"Like the flight of an eagle, many days have passed since I stood at the entrance to the Valley of Kings in Luxor, at the heels of the ancient statues, lecturing on Ancient Egypt to an Israeli group. A bus had arrived and another group descended from it, coming near mine. I hadn't realized they were also Israeli, and hearing my lecture they immediately joined us. I could hardly contain my excitement about the king's crown, and pointing to it, I told them, 'You see? This is an eagle, the symbol of Egypt's kings.' And suddenly a voice boomed from the back of the group: 'Avigdor Shadchan⁹! You were a poet then, and you remain one now – what you think is an eagle is actually a hawk.' It was Kaplan, whom I hadn't seen for more than forty years since I left Hadassim. Then we embraced, and I told him, 'My teacher and Rabbi -- you were right! In Nature's generous fold I remained a poet.'"

Kaplan's eldest student was Micha Spira. During his senior year Micha prepared – in the face of tremendous hardship – a research project exempting him from matriculation exams in his bible course.

⁹ Shachan's earlier name

“I worked on the subject of the Tabor Oak, under Kaplan’s instruction,” Micha remembers. “I began the final paper with an historical-cultural observation: ‘The Oak is a power symbol. It embroiders the graves of Sheiks.’ Once covering the entire span of Sharon Valley, the Turks cut the Tabor down and used it as fuel for their trains, and now it is all but extinct. It is a fascinating tree: insects abound on its bark, laying their eggs on its leaves, and crabs, too, are nourished by it. I rode my bicycle to Mount Tabor with my friend, Amiram Saaroni, sleeping right in the fields at night. I mapped the trees, counted rings and analyzed their ages. I met some Arabs and chronicled their stories of the Tabor and their Sheik’s graves. The research process itself was edifying beyond anything I’d ever confronted – and the paper was excellent. I received a perfect score. I was especially happy to be freed of Dotan’s Bible course.”

I, on the other hand, never worshipped Kaplan, just as I’ve never worshipped anyone. I wanted not only to *know* nature but to *understand* its root foundations. Such an endeavor was beyond Kaplan. To teach him a lesson -- to show him that whatever he did, I could do one better -- I brought a bee hive with me to Hadassim, in concert with my chemistry teacher and against Kaplan’s policy. The conspiracy would never have taken place were it not for my father, who was an avid beekeeper who kept them around so they could sting him and allay the inflammation in his joints. I had the hive in my backpack the whole bus ride to Hadassim, without arousing the slightest suspicions from the other passengers that they were traveling in the company of thousands of bees. Luckily, there were no accidents. I placed the hive near the water tower, caring for it by reading from father’s beekeeper magazines.

My little pet project was successful beyond my wildest expectations: the hive reached to four floors by the summer, producing enough honey to sate all the honey lovers. Kaplan never graced the hive with a visit. But other nature lovers would secretly come with me (bringing spare masks to keep from getting stung) and observe the bees in their full glory.

In 2005, I spoke with Kaplan about that episode. He remembered it grudgingly: “You would always hurl questions and argue with me – ‘Untrue!’ you always interrupted – always offering your own, opposite opinion. You were still a good student, even if you were a troublemaker. You always had something to say.”

“You were never just another member of my club,” he added.

“Rachel and Jeremiah were against the bee hive idea from the start, fearing for the kids. To this day, I’ll never understand how you managed to do it.”

c. “Michael is all spirit”

On my very first Friday night in Hadassim, I accompanied Gideon, Chilli, Yoseph and Asher to the dining hall, wearing my Russian shirt. Gil Aldema sat at the center of the hall, his accordion leaning against his waist; Danni Dasa, Michael Kashtan and a *Kol Israel* broadcaster stood beside him, surrounded by a circle of students of all ages in white shirts, their hands interlocking. Gil played a few notes, and Michael began singing:

“Sharp, sharper than a sword
Sharp, sharper than a sword
My sickle will never stop.
Till, till evening
Till, till evening
Golden ears of grain we’ll reap, we’ll reap”.

Ears of grain, ears of grain, ears of grain
Sheaf’s we’ll bring to the barn,
Grain in the granary we will stock up,
Ears of grain, ears of grain, ears of grain.

Great, great is the surplus,
Great, great is the surplus
The blade will hit the hay
All this month, all this month
We will reap and celebrate, celebrate.

Ears of grain...”

The circles began dancing around them. As Michael continued to sing, the *Voice of Israel* broadcast his voice throughout the whole country.



Avigdor Shachan

Avigdor Shachan and I were Michael’s closest students. I kept in touch with him up until his death, in 1985. When the war in Lebanon erupted in 1982, Michael, then head of Haifa’s cultural division, convened a symposium at the *Rothschild House* on anti-terrorist war. Professor Yigal Eilam led the discussion, which also included Professor Martin van Creveld, Arie Itzhaki and me. I angered professor Creveld when I opined that the reason the essence of war often eludes people is that they’ve never assimilated the relevant cognitive tools. What normally passes for insights into warfare and the nature of war, I said, are akin to Plato’s science of shadows: they can be helpful for prizes and prestigious appointments, they can fill many pages and occupy one in diligent research, but they nevertheless describe a world of myth – not reality. Van Creveld positively boiled with rage at me for saying this, since he was obviously of the opinion that his work constituted something more than myth-telling or a “science of shadows.” (He would later claim in a public document that I was mentally ill, a diagnosis which Israeli military specialists were already inclined to agree with.)

After the lecture, Michael took me to a nearby café and thanked me for what I’d said. He told me that the most sublime courage is the intellectual kind, that he was proud to have been my teacher. Then he added, “Uri, do you remember Hadassim’s flowers?” His words conveyed sorrow.

“Of course I remember,” I told him. “I would always converse with them as I gazed at Metuka, every morning on my way to the dining hall; I used to ask them for help in winning her heart.”

“It was our dialogue with flowers that gave rise to Hadassim’s special spirit,” he said. “We have to thank Jeremiah for that, for transforming the dunes near Even Yehuda into the most splendid garden in Israel, like the *Tuileries Gardens* or the hanging gardens of Ancient Babylon. There was a time when students of horticulture from all over the country used to visit and study our gardens. Now the dunes are reclaiming that pristine territory, once the site of our common dreams.”

He glanced reflectively at the flower vase on our table, and continued: “Today you can find all sorts of wonderful flowers at nurseries and city gates. You can find them at the florist, where flower arrangement has become a specialized profession. They accompanied the very rhythm of our lives in Hadassim; there was no corner or trail that wasn’t ensconced in them.”

“Flowers were Jeremiah’s obsession, indeed.”

“That they now disappear from those gardens, day by day, is the writing on the wall for Israel. You are the son of the first – perhaps the last – generation of the state. I escaped here from occupied Poland in 1940, and I won’t survive to see the last great test...”

“Michael, don’t be so pessimistic! We will bring about a renaissance of the state together, just like the Phoenix we heard in that Beethoven sonata on Tikkun Leil Shvuout all those years ago. The spirit of Hadassim will end this decline! Do you remember my three research papers in the seventh and eighth grades -- on the Hagana’s failures in the Mamila market during the initial phase of the War of Independence, on the Lamed Hei affair in ’48, on the doctors’ massacre in the Hadassah convoy during the same year?”

“My dear Uri, I have to admit that you were right on that score! You were only a child then, but your insight into the essence of military and war was already beyond my grasp. Our decline as a state and society came from a mythologizing tendency which tended to undermine the strict adherence to analyzing our failures. I regret my own role as a pawn of this kind of academic culture.

“Michael, it’s never too late. You can’t stop one person from dying, but you can certainly halt the decline of a system, and reverse its course...”

“It’s late,” he sighed. “It’s too late.”

It was not clear to me then, nor is clear to me now after twenty years, for whom it was “too late” – for Michael, who by then had already lost his two daughters, or for the Israeli state itself. As I reflected on this last, Michael got out a piece of paper from his shirt pocket, and intoned softly:

“The Millennium’s End

*“There is no neck in the collar,
The investigators failed to find anything,
The judges remained speechless,
It was a natural disaster.*

*“All the antennae collapsed
All the nexuses froze
The central fuse expired
Not from voltage over-load
The lonely died of cold and hunger.*

*“The wheel froze
Only a tune’s rhythm still burns
Not a woman’s heart
Only her body still burns
Not her soul.*

*“Not an eternal fire
A lonely generator
His last hopes.”*

“It’s a powerful metaphysical poem. It echoes our conversations in Hadassim.”

He looked at me lovingly and then rose from the table, holding his pocketbook to his chest. “Remember, Uri, the first stage in the reversal of our national fortune: the thawing of the wheel. It is a thankless endeavor that you’ve chosen, to put yourself on the line only to be mocked and excommunicated. As Heine wrote in his German translation of *Don Quixote*: ‘If you take the task upon yourself, you will suffer for it all your life. You will be lonely. Loneliness is Man’s greatest fear, it is death.’”

On that note, he took his leave of me. I had nothing more to say; the whole way home I thought to myself: “How will I do it – how do I achieve this ‘thaw’?” The only solution I could come up with was the policy of bringing the nation’s failures to light. I still hadn’t realized, thirty years ago, just how right Michael was about the extent to which ‘thawing the wheels’ would be a thankless course – and the extent to which it would be disastrous not to do so.



Michael Kashtan

Michael Kashtan was born in Poland in the town of Stoklyn, in 1922. His father, Yehuda, was the director of the Tarbut School. He had an elder brother, Aaron, subsequently an architecture professor at the Technion, and a younger sister, Tzeira, who would eventually become a high school principal in Israel. Yehuda had planned on immigrating to Eretz Israel with his family in the early thirties, but the Jewish Agency pressed him to delay the move so that he could work for their

immigration office in Warsaw. Thus, when the war erupted there in 1939, the Kashtans were trapped -- and their chances for survival were slim.

Tzeira: “We only learned Polish in the third grade; Hebrew was the spoken tongue at home. I absorbed Yiddish from my parents’ friends and from a housemaid. Our house was a nexus for Israeli Zionist emissaries and pioneers. Father’s main focus was immigration. He didn’t belong to any particular party, but he was a socialist Zionist with ties to Mapai.

“Michael joined the Hashomer Hatzair movement as a boy. He loved soccer, and I remember how often we sang together. We knew all the ‘Eretz Israel’ songs. Father took part in two Zionist congresses and made two trips to Israel. The house was brimming with Israeli culture: we spoke Hebrew with Sephardic accents just like in Israel, we subscribed to the Israeli children’s magazine “Davar Leyeladm” to stay connected with the land and the people. We took in a guest from Eretz Israel every Friday night.

“Everything was structured around Eretz Israel and the Hasidic tradition. Father wasn’t religious, but he kept to the traditions, especially the Talmudic tradition and Hebrew literature. So what we received in that house was the whole heritage of Zionism, Hassidism and Socialism.

“Warsaw had a wonderful Jewish educational system in those days. Aaron and Michael attended the Tarbut [“culture”] Elementary school and later the Chinuch [“education”] Hebrew Gymnasium, where there was a “Yehudi” [Jewish] wing for boys and a “Yehudiya” [Jewess] wing for girls. There were matriculation exams in Polish, classical studies and languages. While Aaron was more inclined toward the secular, general culture – he was an avid butterfly collector, he was interested in science and order – Michael was always more attuned to the Zionist values we were exposed to at home. He was drawn to Hebrew literature, delving into poetry from the age of seventeen. Michael was all spirit -- he had a bohemian sort of temperament. Their personalities were so obviously different: Aaron’s room was prim and proper; Michael’s study, on the other hand, was a total mess, full of ink stains.

“WWII broke out in September of 1939, just as our family was finally preparing to immigrate to Eretz Israel. Our parents spoke Russian, though they’d both studied some Polish after settling in Warsaw. Aaron had just finished one year at the Technion, in Haifa, so he had already been able to immigrate, while the rest of us were trapped. But he came back to us that August, right before the war; we were incensed with him when it became clear that he had joined us knowing full well what he was risking. He had decided to ‘be with the family, come what may.’ I remember well my parents’ agony at seeing him in the midst of all the turbulence, when they knew he could just as easily be safe in Haifa.

“I don’t believe in miracles as such, but something rather miraculous happened when our house was leveled to the ground during the Rosh Hashana bombardments in 1939. Our apartment was in the Jewish district, which the Germans targeted intentionally on the eve of the Jewish New Year. They destroyed it all. At our place, the bomb came horizontally and descended down to the living room, floor by floor, until it hit the cellar – right next to our shelter. The bomb split the apartment building in two, and it was brute luck that kept it from where we were sitting. Almost everyone else was dead.

“Everything went dark. The men had to dig a way out for us, and there were moments of blind terror. We thought we were going to suffocate. Michael wasn’t with us when the bomb hit; he had helped others into the shelter and remained at the entrance. When we finally escaped, we had no idea what had happened to him. Then we finally saw him hatch out, covered in soot and ash, blood running down his cheeks. We hardly recognized him. This picture of him, his face bloodied and ashen gray, will never escape my memory.

“So it was thus that we managed to escape, by the very skin of our teeth, to the Polish quarter. Father had an unparalleled resourcefulness. He had always been very charismatic and popular, and it wasn’t long before we arrived at the address of one of his Polish friends who worked for an Italian shipping firm called ‘Adriatica’. There were really no other alternatives: the streets were filled with Jews running frantically every which way, barefoot and wounded, their arms scrambling to hold onto their last possessions. The bombardment had begun just as we were about to sit at the dinner table, so here we were in our holiday clothes, searching through the streets for this man’s house.

“How had father remembered the address? It just goes to show that resourcefulness is everything in life. We rang the bell and knocked at the gate. The people in the house let us in and served us food and drinks. There were now six of us in that house, including the housemaid. We were received with open arms, given beddings and allowed to sleep in the rooms and the corridor.

“Father didn’t want to stay there for long, so he was already looking for another place the following day. Initially we moved in with two distant relatives, a widow and her daughter, until we found a vacant apartment. The owners had escaped eastward to Russia, so we rented the place for the interim. Father, Aaron and Michael went back to our old place for whatever possessions were worth salvaging. They were able to get in and grab our coats from the entrance hall, along with some other things. Eventually we settled into our new apartment. I was almost nine then, so Michael and Aaron had to help me piece all of this together later on. Some of it remains obscure for me, but I remember that father was planning an escape; he kept saying we needed to find a safer place, and he and mother quarreled over whether we should leave Poland entirely. Mother wanted us to move in with her sister’s family in Stolyn, but father was adamant that we should leave the country.”

“We saw first-hand the soldiers’ entry into Warsaw, with their famous duck march. We heard on the loudspeakers that ‘Hitler had penetrated Warsaw’. We hid in the house, hungry and under siege, with only a little bit of sugar and rice to keep us going. The young men in the neighborhood were abducted and forced to rebuild the city, so the rest of us had to fill in with other duties. My role was gathering supplies.

“Father planned the escape. It’s hard to say how he made it all work: a little bit of bribery and a lot of help from Polish friends; and it certainly helped that he had a connection with Chaim Barlas, the head representative of the Jewish Agency in Constantinople, whose son-in-law also escaped with us.

“One evening during Chanuka, in December ’39, we hosted a huge meeting at our place. Drapes were hung over the windows to keep it secret. Father told everyone that we were planning to go through Italy – it wasn’t allied with Germany yet – to find our freedom in Israel. He revealed information about the contacts he’d put together along his escape route.

“We got on the train disguised as regular folks on a routine vacation. It was late when we arrived in occupied Vienna, where there was a strict nighttime curfew. Father had arranged for documents that allowed us to take a cab to a good hotel after hours, and by morning we were already on a train heading across the Italian border. Michael could pass for an Aryan, but Aaron’s darker skin made for something of a problem. He was dragged away by an officer, and we were already sure he wasn’t coming back, but luckily Aaron managed to ingratiate himself with the soldier by telling him about his architecture studies at the Technion – the officer was an architect himself, you see. The man actually smiled and waved to him as he crossed the border. There were people already waiting for us on the other side. That was how we reached Trieste.

“Father opened an immigration office in the north Italian border city. Chaim Barlas had asked him to stay and help other Jews escape. I don’t know how successful he was, but there were definitely a few who were able to escape via this route.

“We stayed in a modest Trieste hotel. It was forbidden to eat on the premises, but we almost never ate out, either. We’d go out to buy milk while the boys wandered around the city; I still remember feeding the pigeons on the town square. Father insisted that Aaron return to Haifa once the school year started in October. As for us, we didn’t know how long it would be before we could join him. But with the first signs of Italy’s entry into the war, we immediately sailed on the ship ‘Marco Polo,’ disembarking in Haifa in March of 1940.

“The Jewish Agency had anticipated our arrival, and they debriefed my father before assigning him work in the immigration department, which he went on to

head until his untimely death in 1956, at the age of sixty-one. Life was tough financially – we ended up borrowing some money from friends and relatives. So we were in debt, but mother kept a happy and dynamic household nonetheless, always filled with guests and song.

“In October 1940, Michael began his literature studies at the Hebrew university. He’d been accepted on a conditional basis, as the war had prevented him from finishing high school. He was utterly absorbed in poetry in those days, both his own and others’; he adored S. Shalom, whose lines he often recited by heart¹⁰. He enlisted in the settlements’ police forces and worked as a security guard in Neve Yaakov, and he found other jobs now and then alongside his studies. He spent his summers as a camp instructor.

“Michael married Malka in 1947. Her father was an executive for Egged, the bus company. She was born in Poland and was only a baby when her family immigrated. I first met her when I was fifteen. Michael had had several girlfriends before her. She was in his class at the Hebrew University, a very pretty literature student, quite thin and feminine – even a little coquettish, to my eyes. Her Hebrew was flowing and refined; she wrote the most wonderful letters to Michael.”



Malka Kashtan

Michael Kashtan was a poet, a mystic, an educator, a Zionist, and a socialist. Rachel and Jeremiah had handpicked him for training at the Ben Shemen school, before setting him to the task of assimilating literature and the humanities to the spirit of creative dialogue in Hadassim. It was fitting, then, that just as Micha Spira would be closer to Avinoam, Avigdor Shachan and I would be closer to Michael.

In parallel with the philosophical-poetic dialogue between Michael and me, Michael and Shachan had their own, magical-lyrical dialogue. Shachan confided the spirit of that relationship, a golden web of word and dream, in our recent interview. Michael had met Shachan, the Holocaust survivor, the fourteen year old poet, in March of 1948, and the two of them took to one another instinctively:

Shachan: “I remember learning the Hebrew Aleph-Bet in the *Cheder*. I loved the script and the characters from the moment I saw them; I likened them to birds that had nestled and been liberated from within me. Even to this day, the Hebrew letters have an uncanny effect on me: I can’t walk next to a Hebrew book without feeling the urge to peek inside it.”

¹⁰ S. Shalom Yoseph (1904-1990). A Hebrew poet, influenced esthetically by Symbolism and ideologically by Zionism and Hasidism. He translated Shakespeare’s sonnets into Hebrew

The student's poetic soul found its poetic counterpoint in his teacher:

“He had a deeply beautiful and resonant voice. Everyone who remembers him from Hadassim won't forget the Friday evenings we spent out on the grass, singing songs of Eretz Israel, lying together on the warm bed of Israel's earth with our eyes fixed on the starry sky. Michael's singing echoed with pristine clarity, though I can remember only one sad and gentle line -- even now it brings me to tears: 'In the cellars there is no window light...' It's the kind of romantic moment that exalts the human spirit to the highest peaks. This was the man that led our unit and presided over our literary upbringing in class.”

Michael's kindness, like Virgil's to Dante, emerged for Avigdor as an indelible essence guiding the boy who had survived the hell of Transnistria through the heavenly gates of Eretz Israel, embodied in the gold of Hadassim's dunes.

“Upon our arrival from Cyprus, armed vehicles took us to the tents of the immigrants' camps in Raanana. Two or three weeks went by before three instructors came to examine us, but I don't remember if Michael was among them. It was in March 1948, before the founding of the state. Our general and Hebrew knowledge was tested in a personal interview, to see if we were fit to study at Hadassim. My sister and I, both members of the Lapid group, were thirteen and fourteen years old at the time. Our group had arrived from a Transylvanian agricultural Hachshara [a vocational training camp] via Cyprus.

“We were told to file into a tent, one at a time, where the interview took place. The excitement was huge. The very next day, a van came by and took ten of us to Hadassim. Michael was sitting next to the driver: he was wearing short pants, and he had a scar on the side of his knee. I remember his blue eyes and warm, charming smile. At last somebody was smiling at us! He patted each of our shoulders as we struggled to climb onto the van, one by one.

“The front side of Hadassim was still a rough, sandy road, so we had to go around through Even Yehuda and then through the fields by another dirt road. Our van still got stuck in the sand, so we left our stuff and walked through the sea of dunes through the far slope ahead. Ahead of us we could see four buildings, with one at the very peak -- the dining hall. Once we reached the top of the hill, we handed over our personal possessions for safe keeping in the warehouse, and we were told to join unit C, in the third house.”

“I stood on the summit looking all around in every direction. Downward toward the right side I could see a plantation, with huge leaves stretching up. These turned out to be of bananas the likes of which I'd never seen. A house stood in the garden, looking slightly hunched over, with a balcony on the second floor. It was called Beit Hanun. As for the rest -- everything was gold, azure sky, and pure dunes. I let my heels sink through the caressing sand -- a sensation so pleasant in itself that I'll never forget it in a thousand lifetimes -- and then I whispered to

myself, 'I will never leave this place...never...only for a [Zionist] cause...' (this notion of 'Zionist missions' had only recently entered my head, when Israeli emissaries – who were more like gods to us – came to visit our Cyprus camp). It was in such moments that the Hadassim landscape was the purest in the whole world. I swore then and there that I would grow up and make my home in this place. And, indeed, I kept my word.

“When my feet finally lifted from the sand’s caress, I hurried to follow my friends into unit C, where I was given a room on the second floor. When I came into my room for the first time, I stood there completely transfixed: it was so clean and so simply attractive, with flowing colors on the bed covers, with blankets and sheets and everything. I stood gazing at it all for long minutes until I finally lay down and felt what it was like to rest.

“I’d spent the previous days sleeping without the comfort of sheets underneath me. The ship that took us from the Bulgarian port of Burbas was dreadfully crowded, with something like 9500 illegal immigrants. It was like a whole city trapped in Noah’s ark, flailing over slashing waves. We, the Lapid group, were the last ones to arrive at the boat, so there was no more room in the belly of the ship to accommodate us; we were left on the deck, underneath a stretched tarpaulin. The ship had three floors, with five rows of beds in each and a mere sixty centimeters of living space allotted for each illegal refugee.

“It was cold on the deck, with a constant, death-chilling wind. We’d sailed in December, so the rain storms were a given. Once we passed the Dardanelles, we began to be accompanied by British destroyers. They moved around us without attempting any real contact, while their numbers grew each day until, by the third day, they numbered eleven ships. We were the two illegal immigrants’ ships *Atzmaut* [Independence] and *Kibbutz Galuyot* [Diaspora Gathering], which between them held 15,500 illegal immigrants. As we entered Israeli waters, several of the destroyers blocked our way. Our commanders, Hagana people, cried defiantly that we were to fight with every means if the British decided to board us. The chief of our boat informed the British that our goal was Israel -- that we would risk drowning but would never be deterred from our course. Our ship, the *Atzmaut*, was first in line, so I could see the British destroyer up ahead moving toward us. Then, all of a sudden, it blazed ahead in a sudden foray right against the middle of our ship; it drew up only a few meters before impact, only to line up and repeat the same maneuver again and again. It was a not-so-subtle hint of their resolve, and our commanders soon gave in to the ‘improved’ British offer to board and escort us to Cyprus, where we discovered ready camps with big tents, each with six iron beds and mattresses and two blankets a piece. The cold Cyprus winter bit into us in its unclenching fury.”

“That recent memory was still on my mind as I sat listening to Michael, along with the rest of my unit, in our clubhouse. He was our new counselor. We were fourteen years old, and our introductory meeting was more of an informal

conversation. It was all in Hebrew, which most of us didn't really know yet. He talked pleasantly, in clear and simple words, never veering into any other language."

As the years went by, the dialogue between Michael and Avigdor Shachan transformed their teacher-student relationship into one of friendship between equals. At its peak, the master invited his student into his most private inner chamber – his own poetry.

"Can you tell me about the most dramatic thing that happened with you and Michael?" I asked Avigdor.

"When we were in Cyprus, every *Lapid* gathering started with a Hebrew anthem that I'd composed myself. One of the rhymes in the refrain contained an error which neither I nor my friends were aware of. When one of the Israeli emissaries discovered it he excused it as poetic license, an argument I was well disposed to accept. So when we were sitting in our clubhouse and Michael asked who had written the same anthem, my friends proudly pointed at me. He smiled a little coy smile, and then, just as we rose at the end of the meeting he added, by way of an afterthought, that our anthem was in need of minor readjustment. I quickly explained that a poet is allowed some measure of license, for rhyme's sake...at this, he just smiled again, and said no more.

"That was the first time I faced him as a poet."

"That's your idea of the most dramatic event?!" I interrupted him.

"No! It was the beginning, because he kept encouraging me once he knew I could write. And with each new poem, I'd run to him all excited to show my new creation. And he never said, 'Oh, I'm too busy now,' or, 'Come some other time...' It was from him that I learned the meaning of poetic license, and the discipline of writing. He trained me to restrain my delivery and express everything through the words themselves, since each word is a world in itself. I always wanted to recite my new poems to him, but he refused; he would grab the written page from my hands and tell me: 'You're fairly good at vocally disguising weakness in the text with all your pathos or stumbling rhyme. But whatever you meant to say was here already, it's written right here on the page, so you ought to think ten times before you let the page slip out of your hands: the reader has no mercy, you see...'

"And this was the most dramatic event with Michael?!"

"No! The most exciting encounter, one which turned everything upside down, was one or two years later – when he finally revealed his own poetry to me. 'Come, I'll show you some of mine...' he told me. It was the one and only time I came to visit him at home. He reached for a brown notebook from the drawer in his study. The paper inside was smooth, thick, with velvet black lines filling the

page with his flowing script. Even now, sixty years after I first saw them, those pages still leap out at me. There were thirty or forty poems he read to me from that notebook, each with a powerful rhythm. I just sat there with my mouth wide open and listened to him read aloud; I don't know whether I was more impressed by the poetry or by the fact that he found me worthy enough to share it. I was absolutely hovering in the clouds. I was still dazed by it many days later, in disbelief that this man, who I admired so much, had seen fit to read his poems to me.

“His poetry was influenced by Alterman and Shlonsky, both of whom had admired his talent and encouraged him to continue writing. And that was before he'd written his really popular songs, with his distinctive rhythm. Those he only began to write when Gil Aldema arrived at Hadassim.

“What impression did these poems have on me? An unmatched impression. I'm much attuned to rhythm, and his poems draw much from that aspect. And their national themes: Vigil nights, defense of the land, and romantic love. His only volume was published posthumously. When it came out, and I finally held a copy in my hands, I was so excited that I only let my eyes range over a few pages before shutting the book closed again. And to this very day I can't open it: my hands tremble when I merely touch it, and I let go immediately.

“Michael was my spiritual father. My entire methodology in education, literature and research was given form by his spirit, guidance and education. I used to inform him, in person or by letter, of every new position or appointment I undertook. On the occasion of my first leave from the *Golani Barak* battalion, I appeared at his front door with my chest held out proudly in full IDF uniform. And when I received the instructor badge for the *Golani* squad leadership training program, Michael was the first to know. He was the first person with whom I shared my happiness upon my acceptance for university study. This pattern continued well into my public career.

“Before my wedding, I declared to my parents and future in-laws that I intended to include a note on the outgoing invitation cards requesting that guests not bring any presents, that ‘Only those who hate presents shall live...’ Their reaction wasn't exactly positive, and when I pressed the point my father suggested that I ask Michael for his opinion. His advice promptly arrived: ‘Again, you are ahead of your time. You have my sympathies on the matter, but your guests might easily misunderstand your intentions and be insulted...Behave as the world behaves...There is no escape from prejudice...’ And so I did.

“He gave me an electric water heater as a wedding gift. When he arrived at the ceremony, he took me aside and whispered: ‘you always study and write through the nights: a cup of tea will help you shake off the urge to sleep.’ The very same gift is still one of my favorite possessions: it is a monument, an amulet, an echo of his indelible halo and imprint on my psyche.

“When I received the Jabotinsky prize in 1966 for my first book, *The Wings of Victory*, Michael was present at the ceremony. He was every bit as excited as I was, and as I stepped forward to the speakers’ platform, he whispered to me, ‘Don’t force pathos on your words, Avigdor.’ I was too excited to hold back my emotion, and yet with every word I could see that Michael hovered in the sky.

“When I sent him a copy of my doctoral thesis, which I had dedicated to him, he wrote back that it constituted the greatest moment of his whole life. Such was the nature of our relationship.

“When Michael passed away, the Educational Television Network decided to produce a program on his life and legacy. His wife, Malka, made the whole project contingent on my participation. Unfortunately the producers sought me out under my old name, Shadchan, which they couldn’t locate in the phonebook. Shevach Weiss alerted them to the name change: the Hebrew name ‘Shachan,’ like so much else, was given to me by Michael himself -- after one of my professors took to bullying me about my old name.

I’ve written nine books, spanning military history, the Holocaust, even fiction – but I never missed Michael nearly as much as I did when I worked on *Towards the Sambatyon: An Odyssey on the Ten Tribes*. It took me thirteen years to complete the necessary research of that book, including four years of travel in rain forests and other strange lands. It was above all during those years that I longed to share my insights, dilemmas and discoveries with my old mentor. I wondered what he would think of my claim that the Japanese language is a distorted version of Hebrew, that our holidays and theirs are so alike, that their Shinto temples are descendants of our *O’hel Moed* [‘Convocation Tent’ – part of a system of worship dating back to Moses] of yore, that the Shinto practice of transferring temples to nearby sites, at fixed fifty-year intervals, is but an echo of how our Mishkan was continually dissolved and reconstituted during our ancient wonderings toward the promised land. I wish he could look at the glossary I provide in my book, of Hebrew words embedded in the Japanese language. Oh, if he could only have known that!

I wish he could read the book, if only to glimpse the road to which his instruction had ultimately led. The glow of his intellect, the loving imprint of the teacher, resides in every line. Some of my short stories are scattered across different publications, in seven different languages. My ambition is to have them all published under one volume and dedicated to the ‘teacher, educator and poet Michael Kashtan, my mentor and friend, the man who lead me to the hallowed chambers of Hebrew literature.’”

Professor Shevach Weiss:

“After losing my sense of Polish identity in the Holocaust, life in Israel, so rife with the one-dimensionality of Sabra culture, made me Polish again. [Michael] Kashtan tried just as hard to be Israeli, but he couldn’t help being Polish either. So naturally it was easy for us to understand each other. Michael was a wonderful conversationalist – he never lectured. He only conversed. He was a true poet: his language was rich in metaphor. He was handsome, too, but he was rugged, with quintessentially Polish features.

“His main teaching field was the bible, and it was an incomparable pleasure to study with him. He was a socialist, a loyal Mapai member, so his biblical exegesis was socialistic: Jeremiah and Amos, for example, were seen as prophets of social justice, heroes resisting the current. That was how he became the role model for my own intellectual-political advocacy.

“He used to devote Friday nights to teaching songs. He would often sing solo, and his soulful voice still echoes in my ears and inspires me to this day.”

Amir Shapirah: “He was a *Mentch* in every way. You could knock on his door any time of day, and be treated as an adult -- with respect. He was willing to dedicate all his time for you; he was built in the image of the noble educator, par excellence. My parents loved him.”

Michael Kashtan’s dialogic gifts had critical impact on Avigdor Shachan’s educational approach. The mentor’s openness and communicative ease gave hope to the young holocaust survivor’s broken heart, that there was something to live for in this world. Michael was therefore able to do the impossible, overcoming his student’s trammled faith.

Shachan: “Michael had the virtue of honesty. As children of the Diaspora, suspicion of others flowed easily in our veins. We were both very old on the inside. What could Michael possibly teach me, after what I’d seen in Transnistria? What he taught us was to express everything that came to our minds, not to be ashamed. To be clear and forthright. He knew how to get us to talk.

“The purity of heart, the ethical communication – these were virtues he embodied even in his latent behavior, and it pervaded his educational approach. In that respect he was quite unlike Shalom Dotan. He [Michael] educated for innocence, for honesty, which forged a deep trust in his students, neutralizing the artificial dichotomy between the public and private domain which still permeates our school system. He trained his students in a way you cannot get at any such school: the capacity for true intimacy.

“Michael was the antithesis of Kaplan, and the two were certainly not friends. Kaplan’s manners and mores were aristocratic, while Michael’s approach with the students was direct. That manner helped me a great deal and later became a

cornerstone of my own educational credo as an instructor and supervisor of the community college system in Israel. He taught me that you never reveal the secrets people confide in you.

“As adolescents, as we were just beginning to develop crushes, one of my friends from Poland taught me the secret to courtship. His name was Emanuel Zinger, and he was slightly older than me. And this was the essence of his doctrine: If you love Shoshanna, you have to court Sara...this will make Shoshanna jealous, which will increase her estimation of you. I had my doubts about this line of thinking, so I came to Michael and said: ‘Listen, Emanuel told me so and so...’ Michael’s response still resonates with me today: ‘Avigdor, when you love a girl, just tell her so in your own way; I think you’ll know what that means, but just say it clearly: I love you. Don’t play games. Because they can read it in your face anyway.’ And that became my own motto in matters of love: when I loved a girl, I always told her, in a tasteful way.”

Michael had a role in my intellectual development in two primary ways, both aspects of his dialogic virtue: first, his ability to listen activated my feedback mechanism, the same mechanism that the dialogic methods of the Yeshiva – harking back to Abraham’s dialogue with God -- aim to direct. Current research has reaffirmed the importance of this mechanism for the evolution of the brain, in reinforcing the symbolic function of language and the power of abstraction. Second, he had a direct influence on my methods of research, which led to my study of the fundamentals of human behavior, according to military models.

Michael had a formative influence on each of us. Rachel and Jeremiah had enough foresight to realize that Michael was an artist of the verbal meta-dialogue, without which other kinds of dialogue are impossible. This meta-dialogue constitutes the human pre-eminence, which Michael cultivated in each of his students.

When Michael passed away, the poet S. Shalom, who Michael admired so much, eulogized him:

“He lived and died in silence, but I know that a (small) voice still mourns for him bitterly. I don’t know how many lines of poetry he wrote in his lifetime, but his whole essence was of a poet, attentive to the pulse of the world’s heart. I first met him twenty-five years ago in Jerusalem, when he invited me to attend the reading of his Doctoral thesis on my works, presided by his teacher, Professor Yoseph Klausner of the Hebrew university. On that occasion, professor Klausner said: ‘I owe many thanks to Mr. Michael Kashtan for showing me how to understand a book of poetry, which until now I admit I didn’t understand.’ I don’t know whether he was being superbly honest or ironical, but his words hit their target nonetheless. Michael had understood what the others did not, and his knowledge inspired those around him for the duration of his cultural life. He certainly understood what others were incapable of understanding: why fate had one day chosen him – the good, honest and noble – to

destroy, along with his family. He walks away from us now just as he once walked among us, wondering and knowing, in silence.”

D. “A Boy Takes A Girl” [A popular Israeli folk dance]

Students at Hadassim were always engaged in sports, exposed to classical music, to plays and painting and dance – both folk dancing and the more generic variety. On his very first encounter with the teacher team, in September 1947, Moshe Schwabe had this to say:

“The Greek philosopher Pythagoras, who lived in the sixth and fifth centuries BC, took part in boxing matches in the Olympic Games. Plato, the greatest philosopher of all time, competed in the Olympics as well. The Greeks believed that educating children in beauty and art would shape ideal citizens for an ideal state. Their conception was Pantheistic, according to which the divine is both mind and body and reflected in Man; that beauty and physical strength were both expressions of the harmony of the cosmos. Thus mind-body integrity was regarded as a high virtue. One should keep in mind that the Greeks regarded as a supreme value what they called *Agon* – competition -- which meant the agony of the struggle for the divine in the human, a tragic struggle between Man and his Destiny, allowing no separation between the spiritual and physical aspects of sport and art, whether in the writing of tragedies or in the discus. They saw it as a dynamic struggle, since divine perfection was only held to be possible temporarily. It was thus no accident that winners were decorated only with wreaths made from natural plants. Just as the victory was temporary, so the winner could not rest on artificial laurels: he would have to practice and prepare for the next competition, never allowed to stagnate at home with his medals. Lucian had the following to say about this issue, in his ‘Dialogue on Gymnastics’: ‘It is not the prizes’ external value which is important for us, for we see in them only a symbol of victory, a mark of the fact that one overcame the other...Those who do not regret the effort, the work they invested, [for such men] victory purifies even the scars they’ve endured.’ He also said this: ‘And hear what honors they give to the athletes, and how the victor is equal in their eyes to the gods themselves’

“Lucian, in his lectures in 160 BC, traced the survival of the Greek Polis (through conditions of both war and peace) to the mind-body harmony of its citizens, a harmony achieved by the Greek educational system which honed the child’s body in wrestling and honed his mind through music, literature, poetry and mathematics. Between the ages of 16-18, Greek youths studied in Gymnasiums that reflected the pantheistic mindset, and were therefore founded on optimal integration -- with nature at the center of things, so that physical education was held as a mirror to the soul. “Gymnasium” comes from “Gymnos,” meaning “nude”. Competition was therefore held in the nude, and the philosophy underlying it was this: that whoever had enough ambition to win would need to be proud to show his full body. To reach that level of perfection would require a great effort indeed!

“In 42 AD, the philosopher, statesman and playwright Lucius Ennaeus Seneca said that peace would reign on earth if we would but educate our children to see the whole world as our homeland, and that this could be achieved through sports and the arts.

“The modern reviver of the Olympics, the French Baron Pierre De Coubertin, intended them to be a spiritual celebration.

“The conclusion: Hadassim must have a focus on sports and arts education.

Many years later, Nelson Mandela, the first black president of South Africa and a Noble Peace Prize winner, had this to say: “Sports and the Arts have the power to transform the world by uniting human beings in common ideals. Sports and the Arts speak to all people in the language they understand. They inspire hope, and are more powerful instruments than governments in bringing peace to the world.”

Rachel and Jeremiah adopted this same concept for Hadassim. Artistic and athletic activity helped purify us of our psychological toxins, they transformed us into a natural, integrated community, elevating us to a state of “Savage Thinking” (*Sauvage Pensée*), as the Jewish anthropologist-structuralist Claude Levi-Strauss explained. What the Greeks grasped intuitively in their metamorphosis from Paganism to Mythos, and thence to their philosophical-scientific Logos, and what Micha grasped in his dancing, was that the brain resides and communicates everywhere in the body: it is savage thinking – a sophisticated and weighted communication of the body with the mind (hence the way Jews sway when they pray and study) – which accelerates and perfects our neural communication, enhancing the reciprocal access of our cognitive-conceptual apparatus to the sum of our sensory information. It was on this foundation, of the concept of dialogic creativity, that Gideon Ariel developed the bio-mechanical discipline which has so thoroughly changed the sports world. It is on the same foundation that we, together, have developed an educational paradigm which can vastly improve our world.

The man who helped stir the combination of sports, dance, and studies in Hadassim, was Danni Dasa -- the greatest folk dance teacher of the twentieth century. The sixty dances he



Danni Dasa

originated are still danced today, the world over.

“To really dance means: ‘My bones, all of them, are talking.’ When a person reaches this stage, that’s when he really gets it,” he explained to us, at the age of 77, at the folk dance center he founded in California.

“I believe in the existence of a divine space whence creation is revealed to man. Creation was revealed to me, and I developed Jewish education through dance. Around here they call me ‘Judaism through the feet.’ My dancing expresses the values of friendship and togetherness, the necessary dialogue of the ‘tribal bonfire,’ so that we can continue our national existence.

It was our great fortune to be Dasa's early lab rats at the start of our educational journey. By the time he left us and moved to the U.S., it was no longer possible to arrest the momentum.

Danni Dasa was born in the old city of Jerusalem in 1929, an eighth generation Israeli on his mother's side, a grandchild of Salonika immigrants on his father's side. That very same year saw Arab pogroms all over the country, including the massacre of the Jews of Hebron. At that point it became clear that the Arabs intended to expel the Jews en masse from Eretz Israel, that the war between Arab and Jew could very well last for years to come. The Dasa family relocated from ancient Jerusalem to a safer residence in the new city. Dasa soon began to enroll in religious schools, but both he and his family eventually distanced themselves from religion. He still carries a vestige of that phase, in his belief in brotherhood – that all Jews are brothers. It was a key turning point in his life when he joined the leftist youth movement *Hashomer Hatzair*. It was there that he became attached to the custom of folk dancing on Saturday nights. The first dances he learned were *Cherkesia* and *A Boy Takes a Girl*.

“Our instructor's name was Uri, from the Kibbutz Mizra. He taught me how to dance, he influenced my whole life. I regard him as a god. We still keep in touch, seventy years later.”

At the age of seventeen, he joined Kibbutz Beit Haarava, on the shores of the Dead Sea. And when the War of Independence erupted soon after, on November 30, 1947, he was right there at the first battle -- the battle of Mamila Market, where the Arabs gained their first victory on the third day of war.

Dasa was our social instructor during my first year at Hadassim, in unit C. In one of our first encounters, he told us all about his role in the failed defense of the Mamila market, at the very onset of the war.

“A day after the first joy of November 29, we were still dancing in the streets, we went crazy with *Hora*. Dancing was the instinctual expression of joy, and this was really, on the whole, the greatest evening of my life. The next day, Arabs came out from the mosque through Jaffa St. and headed to the city center. They lit fire to the whole long street where my uncle owned a sweets' factory. I headed straight to the Jewish Agency buildings, and from there eight of us raced to the Generali Building wielding our clubs, geared for battle. We fought hand to hand on the streets before going back to the Jewish Agency building, where we upgraded to hand-revolvers. We broke through and seized the main building in the market, closed the iron shutters and stocked up on vegetable cans and other goods. We stayed the night there, but by morning we were under siege, without a phone connection or any other communications lines. That situation persisted for two days; we really didn't know what to do. On the third day we realized we couldn't stay there; looking through the window, we could see an Arab mob – even some British soldiers and police – breaking windows, taking whatever they could get their hands on, the ugliest show of naked violence. It was a very harsh

experience. The thought occurred to me then: if even now, after November 29th, we weren't capable of defending the Mamila market, just how were we going to consolidate and protect a whole state? We decided that each of us, that night, would sneak out on his own to try and reach safety in the city. Luckily, though, a British armed escort arrived that evening. Soldiers came up and searched the building, and soon we were heading back in their vehicle to the post office on Princess Mary St., and from there we walked back to the Jewish Agency building on King George St. There were Hagana people there, but the commanders knew nothing of the situation in Mamila Market.

After that I went to Tnuva, the dairy center near Geula St. There were a few commanders there, too, but this was no army. They didn't know about Mamila, either. I was beginning to feel desperate!"

Dasa's story interested me a great deal, but none of it was terribly astonishing for me. During WWII, when I was four years old, I spent time talking with my grandfather about the ongoing battles; I learned a great deal from my father while he was on leave from the British army. Both my father and brother were later recruited again during the War of Independence: at the age of 17, Ram was in the first Palmach Battalion, while my father served in the Kiryati brigade. They fought together in Operation Danny in Lydda, and after the "Ten Day Battles," both father and I went to visit my brother in the Arab village of Barfilia. So I got to hear all about the chaos in the battle at Mishmar Ha'emek, about our defeat in the first Malkiah battle in the Galilee, about the Lydda massacre and expulsion of Arabs at the hands of third battalion Palmach soldiers. My brother believed that Yigal Alon, the commander of that operation – along with his operation officer Yitzhak Rabin – gave the order for the expulsion. The issue of cover-ups, of strategic non-disclosure, was something that was raised in these discussions. I'd already known, therefore, that our heritage of war stories, particularly those surrounding the Palmach, contained elements of political myth that shrouded truth and presented difficulties for an objective assessment and diagnosis. When I went to visit the Malkiah battle site with my brother, in the fourth grade, he told me: "If we won't confront reality, admit our failures and dysfunctions, the Arabs will be able to seize the advantage, perhaps to the point of endangering the Israeli state." His words left a deep impression on me indeed.

When I heard Dasa's story about Mamila Market in the seventh grade, I wanted to talk about it with Michael Kashtan. I had this to say: "The Arab victory in Mamila helped elevate Arab morale in the city, at the expense of Jewish morale, not only in Jerusalem but all over the country. Wouldn't the whole war have gone differently – wouldn't the events of November and December of 1947 have resulted in something other than war – if we hadn't suffered that first defeat in Mamila?"

"Uri, don't be so quick to jump to such far reaching conclusions," he answered. "The whole thing needs to be studied before you can give your verdict."

It was a challenge, and I responded with vigor. I spent the rest of seventh grade, then my summer vacation and first trimester of eighth grade doing almost nothing but studying

that battle, turning it into my final paper for the year. Michael Kashtan oversaw my work up to the end of the school year, and my uncle, Moshe Shiponi – a wounded veteran of the war in his own right -- became my research partner during the summer. I was very close to him in those days – this was the same man who had originally introduced us to Rachel and Jeremiah – and he was happy to study the affair with me. Daphna Urdang also helped, and we became very close as a result.

B. A Fifth Grader’s Research Project: The affair of the Mercantile Center in Jerusalem at the advent of the War of Independence¹¹

Introduction

A few days prior to November 29, 1947, the four hundred members of HIM (Heil Mishmar, or “guard force”) garrison were put on general alert, of the sort that usually warned about potential Arab riots, by Commander Israel Amir¹². Some members failed to show up for duty. The commander’s order had read thus: “We don’t have intelligence of any ongoing preparations for terror...but nevertheless defense services these days should not be left idle, and we must be confident that we can respond immediately to any spontaneous riots.” The soldiers were short on munitions, and no firm communications means had been ensured between units. A new



Israel Amir command issued on November 30, but the number of men didn’t change and the armament situation remained dismal. One reason for this was the difficulty of locating Hagana members, some of whom were still engaged in street celebrations.

The Husseini family, representing the Arab population of Eretz Israel, declared a three-day general strike beginning December 2nd. The report sent to Ben Gurion on this latest development, authored by Golda Meir, Reuven Shiloah and Eliyahu Sasson, included a memo suggesting that the Arabs would only demonstrate on the last day of the strike -- a notion which turned out to be completely false. Arab students began their protest demonstrations that very day, December 1st, immediately following the declaration of Jewish statehood. They marched from the Al Aqsa mosque to the Sheik Jarrah neighborhood. There were shootings of Jewish workers at the Zobah quarry near the Castel. The chief of SHAI [“Sherut Yediot” or Information Service – the military intelligence arm of the Hagana], Yitzhak Levi got wind of Arab attack plans on a particular Jewish neighborhood, but none of that was enough for regional commanders to call up more Hagana units or change their overall security stance.

¹¹ The research paper is presented here in its original form, i.e., essentially unedited. Explanatory notes are added in square brackets.

¹² Amir Zablodowsky was a senior commander with the Hagana and Shin Bet, as well as a director in the military industry. He was subsequently one of the IAF’s principal commanders during the War of Independence.

The Jaffa newspaper *A'Riffa* wrote in its front-page article: “Shartok was given everything he asked for. He was given 95% of the country’s fertile land, 75% of its total space and 60% of its population; he took all the airports, railways, paved roads and all the regions belonging to the Arabs; he received Jaffa, which is surrounded by a wall of Jewish lands and flooded with a wave of Jewish hostility. Shartok took everything he demanded. He demanded more than Weitzman, and the world knows well what Weitzman’s dreams are. Oh you sons of this kind nation, wake up!”

The last spout of riots, in 1936-1939, had also begun with a general strike and incitement in newspapers, and it was obvious to everyone then that the Arabs would never settle merely for withholding their produce and labor from the country. Riots raged spontaneously all over the country, but the real confrontations – though not yet military – happened in Jerusalem. The Jews had lost that round.

The “new mercantile center” spreading from behind the King George Hotel, along the city walls all the way to the Jaffa gate, was surrounded by Arab quarters¹³. It was a calamity waiting to happen. The lot was owned by the Land Development Company¹⁴ (which originally bought it from the Orthodox Church in 1922); it comprised a whole long line of big wholesalers owned by Jewish families (the Calderons owned, the Vakovers, the Sitons, the Israelshvilis and the Yushas) as well as dozens of smaller Arab and Jewish stores and mechanic shops. Most of that business was shut down in the early days of the strike, and the tension was more than enough to drive Jewish business owners out entirely, to the safety beyond the now ominous Jaffa gate.

Rumors had spread that the Arabs had all along intended to use the occasion for mass looting. That Monday, December 1st, there were already sundry Arab merchants evicting the premises and restocking their merchandise elsewhere. The Sephardi merchant and activist Eliyahu Elisar¹⁵ came to the community board with this information only to be met with reassurance that “the Hagana will protect the Jews” and that business owners mustn’t evacuate their stores. Three Hagana guards were then posted at the main center, and the merchants were duly warned that “should you transfer even one shoe from here, you will be summarily shot. Everything here is in order!”

A Violent Demonstration

Early in the morning on Tuesday, December 2nd, the chief of the Jerusalem SHAI [intelligence service] asked his assistant, Yitzhak Navon¹⁶, to fetch him a newspaper and

¹³ My uncle Moshe, Daphna and I were able to observe Mamila Market from the King David Hotel. The market itself is now an isolated military area. Traces of the original fire were still quite visible.

¹⁴ A Zionist financial body founded by Dr. Arthur Rupin and Professor Auto Warburg in 1909, in order to buy lands in Eretz Israel and prepare them for settlement by Jews. After WWI the firm also started to engage non-agricultural properties. By the time the state was established, the firm had already acquired about half of Israel’s lands. The firm was privatized in the nineties.

¹⁵ Subsequently a member of the first and the second Knessets.

¹⁶ Subsequently a secretary to the Prime Minister, an MK and then President of the State



Yitzhak Navon

briefly survey the old city. Navon's report read thus: "The situation was calm in the morning, with Arab grocers stocking their vegetables as usual." Navon ordered his subordinates to report to him at his office in Zion Square, in detail, on every incident. The information soon began pouring in: merchants in the eastern city had bolted their shop entrances with iron shutters, which they marked with crescents and crosses to distinguish their properties from the Jews'. Arabs had gathered in large crowds to hear fiery speeches; they were waiting for directions by phone from the Mufti in Cairo, and those that lived near Jewish neighborhoods, like Nachalat Shiva, were quickly evacuating. At 8:30 in the morning, students at the Abrahamia and Rashidia schools prepared for demonstrations at the Shchem Gate. But in spite of all these signs, reinforcements were conspicuously absent from the mercantile center. Eliyahu Elisar was asked to assuage the panicked Jewish store-owners,

which he bravely attempted at nine o'clock in the morning.

Navon had duly reported on all these matters to regional commander Israel Amir, who then ordered company officers Tzi Sinai and Israel Font to send five mixed teams (each composed of two soldiers and one female aide) to stock the length of Princess Mary St. with hidden munitions, including revolvers. Driving through that street at ten in the morning, Asher Iazar and Moshe Shamir of *Ha'aretz* were attacked, just around the corner from the secret police offices near the Mamila mercantile center.

Moshe Shamir wrote the next day, "A mob of screaming Arabs appeared suddenly from around the corner, waving their fists, knives and clubs. Asher held onto the wheel with both hands and tried with all his might to turn us around, but, as the saying goes today, he 'didn't pass the test'. The car was stuck, the motor had breathed its last. Soon we were completely surrounded. 'Run away, Asher!' I yelled as I kicked the door open. My kick helped bring one of the Arabs down along with the knife in his hand, and for the moment the road beyond him was open. I fled the scene as quickly as I could."

Iazar was badly stabbed in the stomach and back, and they'd almost torn him to pieces before Amir's teams arrived to help. Three commanders fired straight at the mob: Captain Tzvi Sinai¹⁷, platoon Commander Moshe Salomon and squad leader Moshe Yarkoni. Sinai recounted the scene: "We saw some British officers attempting to block the street, and it looked like they were trying to intercept the mob...but the Arabs, armed with clubs and knives, pushed right past them. As they approached us, we drew our revolvers and shot several rounds in the air. The mob turned and ran back toward the mercantile center." Two of the British officers ran up to Sinai, one of them shouting at the other: "shoot the legs – we'll get him alive." Sinai managed to break into one of the shops and escape through the back, mixing in with the crowd on the other side and sneaking into the Public Health Services building, where the regional staff held their offices. He told Amir about the smoke rising from the mercantile center; he told him that

¹⁷ Daphna and I interviewed Zvi Sinai and received documents pertaining to this project.

British armed vehicles were busy evacuating the wounded, that he and Salomon and Yarkoni had fired at the Arab mob. Their shots had deterred the Arabs, leaving Asher Lazar wounded on the ground. "He was in terrible shape," Moshe Shamir concluded his story. "I have no idea where they came from, but a few Hagana people arrived just in time and forced an Arab vehicle to take us to an emergency medical station, where he [Lazar] was taken by ambulance straight to a surgery table in Hadassah Hospital. His life was saved."

After Sinai had left for the Health Services building, Moshe Salomon regrouped his team to defend the city center. His journal contains the following entry: "We've seized a building near the Rex cinema. The weapons we have here are useless. I heard about the Jews living in the building on the corner of Princess Mary and St. Julian streets. They've been gathering one by one. I have twelve people in my platoon. We've organized all the Hagana people in the area; two of them went down to control the traffic and sweep out the Arabs and other aliens without mercy. We could see smoke rising from the mercantile center. There were crowds stirring up; Jews were trying to break through to the bottom of the street, but they were blocked by police. Now they've crowded up next to the Rex theatre. Another Arab mob was evidently gathering up ahead and coming down from the top of the street, but soldiers have lined up right next to our building and are holding them back. I [could] point to an imaginary line and decide to unleash our grenades if the Arabs try and pass it. No – the Arabs are too few, and the soldiers won't let them pass, so it would be a pity to waste our ammunition. There's isn't any fear of being searched or imprisoned, as the state is ours! Suddenly I can see a huge fire up ahead, from the north...from around the post office. I gave a shout out to the guys on the roof to see if they can track the source, only then I heard steps: A British sergeant coming in for a search. I leaped up and left the revolver behind the water boiler on the roof. Just then I remembered my reserve cartridge and tossed it over the side. I climbed down the ladder to get my coat. More British arrive...No, they aren't coming up from the stairs but from the apartment next door. They've broken through a door on the shared wall. Now I understand why we weren't warned earlier. A secret police agent arrests us on the stairs, and another officer comes down from the roof holding a grenade, which he says he found on Joseph.

"They moved us downstairs, four to a room. Some of our friends were able to stay hidden upstairs. Half an hour goes by, and I see Joseph taken away with an armed escort. Another four hours go by. What happened to the guns? Another two hours. A young neighbor comes in and hands over three of the revolvers we kept on the roof...we're still surrounded by police. They hand over the phone and let us call some acquaintances. Then I hear a car downstairs announcing a curfew. Now I hesitate: should I take the risk and make my run for it? I see a man and woman sneak by, and they manage to escape. Eventually we got away, too, and made for the base undetected. Everybody still thinks we're under arrest. We hid in the gymnasium and stayed up till the late hours recounting the day's events."

The Destruction of the Mercantile Center



the Arab mob

Some of the Arab mob, encouraged by British police, set their sights on various undefended shops in the mercantile center. They stormed the whole block, raising their iron poles, clubs and axes at the shop owners -- raiding, looting, leaving only fire in their wake. All the while British officers looked on amusedly, even lending aid by aiming their sub-machine guns at some of the more stubborn locks. One policeman stopped to take photos as a police armed

vehicle broke through one of the iron shutters; spotting a Jewish man who was clearly noting down his uniform number, the officer struck the man's cheek and tore his note to shreds. The scene was secretly photographed by another Jew.

A.S. Poly, the chief police officer for the mercantile center – and a notorious Jew-hater – helped set an example for the Arabs, ordering his subordinates to burn some of the stores themselves. Yaakov Cohen had joined the hordes in order to gather information, disguising himself as an Arab. “The Jews tried to save whatever they could,” he remembers. “They stored some of their goods, closed their shutters and transferred their other merchandise to the Jewish neighborhoods. I remember seeing one of them struggling to pull away with his heavy bag as Arabs chased him down with their knives. Alas, I couldn't help him and risk exposing the operation. But my heart wouldn't let me stand there and watch a fellow Jew get massacred, so I screamed ‘Bolis! Bolis!’ and the Arabs scrambled away from the scene. I had to leave the area, and it was left for others to save this man.”

The Hagana's Mal-function

Throughout the whole day, representatives of the Jewish Agency tried in vain to contact Sir Henry Gurney, Chief Secretary for the Palestine government. Yechezkiel Sahar, defense minister for the Jewish Agency, along with Reuven Shiloah (a member of the political department), maintained contact with the chief of police for Eretz Israel.

Mishka Rabinovitch (Michael Rotem)¹⁸ was a paramilitary instructor for the Hebrew Gymnasium of the Rehavia neighborhood. At ten o'clock in the morning, his headmaster asked him to verify whether the rumors of riots in the city were true, in which case students would need to be sent home.

¹⁸ Daphna and I interviewed Yaakoba Cohen and received documents pertinent to this project.

“I went to the Histadrut Building,” recounted Rotem. “Students formed a line at the front, and Israel Font and Kritzimer the gunsmith were giving commands. Font ordered me to join them. ‘We’re going on an emergency operation,’ he told me. They brought a bag full of hand to hand fighting gear and distributed it among us. Kritzimer brought his own leather bag containing a Sten submachine gun. They asked if anyone knew how to use it, and I volunteered. ‘I’m familiar with that instrument,’ I said. ‘It’s true, he’s in the brigade,’ Kritzimer added. I started putting the Sten together, latching the cartridge in, but they advice me to keep gun and cartridge separate in order to avert British suspicion. I hid the gun under my sweater, and soon we were heading towards Mamila. I was second in line at first, but Font objected: ‘pull the guy from the brigade further back in line.’ The bunch of us got on a truck that was waiting to take us further up the road. We stacked it with as many stones as we could fit. I was the only one with a gun.

“We arrived at the Generali Building. There was a roadblock at the far end, packed with British armed vehicles. We got off the truck. Font started negotiating with a Jewish police officer named Sofer, as well as a British officer, Tiger. Font was full of grit and chutzpa when he dealt with Tiger, and the Brit finally agreed to let small groups of us sneak into the market. I crossed one block before a British officer noticed my Sten, but Tiger just nodded at the guy and he let me pass. It basically felt like we were acting with British permission at that point. Fire was already raging and spreading from shop to shop, and we received a command to rescue whoever was left in whatever stores were still untouched by the flames. Then we gathered survivors near the ‘triangular house’ and accompanied them to the Russian Compound.”

One Hagana staff member took it upon himself to climb up Mt Scopus, in order to recruit volunteers among the students at the lecture halls and libraries to help with the Mercantile Center. One of them, attending to his book in the library, was Boaz Schechvitz; another was Yehuda Fargo (Arbel)¹⁹, who was on his way to his sociology class, and yet another was Arie Uri, who had just arrived on campus via his morning bus. All three had served in the British army during WWII; Schechvitz had been a lieutenant, while Uri and Arbel were sergeants. Together they took a taxi down to the Histadrut building, passing lines of rock-throwing Arab children on the way. The students asked the driver to stop so they could ‘break some bones,’ but the Hagana man ordered him to drive on. As they had military experience, the three of them were taken aside and interviewed once they arrived at the Histadrut office.

“Which of you has the highest rank?” Nobody answered.

“Is there a Colonel?” Again, no answer. “Is there a Major? A captain??”

Schechvitz outranked the other two, so he was given command and arms: A Sten sub-machine gun, two revolvers, three grenades and three hoe handles. They were introduced to the man responsible for the whole operation – a rather squat, fifty year old man.

¹⁹ Daphna and I interviewed Arbel, (subsequently one of the heads of the Shin Bet) and received documents pertinent to this project.

Pointing toward the King David Hotel, he said: “The enemy is there, up ahead, in large numbers. We can’t do a thing. There’s a barbed-wire fence behind us, and there’s no escaping that, either. We have to stay here until four o’clock, and then we’ll be able to disperse individually and meet in the Rehavia Gymnasium courtyard.” There were no questions asked. Then he left Schechevitz in charge and duly disappeared; the students weren’t sure whether they were supposed to laugh or cry. A British soldier was guarding his post about twenty meters away, his gun pointing at them. Arie Uri called over to him in English: “Three degree elevation!” The soldier understood the joke and pointed the gun back toward the old city walls. Schechevitz recounts the scene: “We sat there on the rocks, British guns behind us, Arabs rioting up ahead of us. We were basically powerless. We fell short of doing what little we could do. We sat there and waited, without firing a shot.

Israel Amir, the regional commander, explained the Hagana’s failure that day:

“The Jewish quarter was surrounded by security zones, which were impossible to traverse without attacking British soldiers outright. That was our main difficulty. Only a day after the UN vote [to endorse the state of Israel], loudspeakers circling Jerusalem’s streets called for the Jews not to be swept up in their celebrations, but to be prepared for what was coming. Our units were stationed in the most sensitive spots of the city, and when the riots broke out we immediately bolstered those positions with a special defense unit. That unit fired two shots at the mob, causing it to flee, and two patrol guards urgently ran to my headquarters at the health service clinic with the news that ‘The Jewish Quarter is being stormed by Arab gangs.’ I ordered the unit positioned there to open fire, but their commander hesitated to obey – it seemed obvious to him that anyone who followed the order would be surrounded and arrested by the British, surrendering valuable ammunition in the process. So I ordered another unit, this one located at the electricity company building at the mercantile center, and this time they obeyed and began targeting the Arabs. Predictably enough, the British surrounded the building and arrested the whole unit. I tried sending additional units to handle the rioting; one of them was stopped at a British roadblock, and another was caught trying to sneak through the checkpoint disguised as fire fighters. Then I called for aid from some Hagana men in Yemin Moshe; four times, they tried and failed to get by the police. The only remaining option was to break through by force, but that decision had to be made at the political level. It took a few hectic meetings at the Jewish Agency to decide not to attack the British directly, since the Arabs had thus far only damaged properties – there weren’t any dead, yet. We were concerned that trying to breakthrough by force would mean imminent, full-scale war. It was the right decision, in my opinion. It left the British in a position of passive, albeit hostile neutrality, enabling us to act with a greater degree of freedom at least for the next few months. Our situation would have been a great deal harsher, otherwise, as we were in no position to subdue the British.

“In conclusion, that day’s riots were not allowed to spread to other areas. At dusk, the British finally allowed a small Hagana contingent through their roadblocks and into the mercantile center, but the fire had already died out at that point.”

Outcomes

One can glean much about the Hagana's crisis in Jerusalem from Menachem Ritschman's [Richi] letters to his family in Tel Aviv. Ritschman was the student company's second in command.

On December the 23rd he wrote: " I am not satisfied. It seems like we are made to fight over every trifle as if we were struggling against the occupation of the Temple Mount. I'm fed up with all of this. People are beginning to think that the Zionists are covering up their failures, neglects, disorder and contempt for human life. I quarrel over every paltry non-issue, on every demand of mine pertaining to order, organization, responsibility, not to mention that I can't seem to control my language, so I inevitably end up offending someone. They probably think me a pest, while I consider them lazy and heartless – pompous nobodies who have no business being here.

...Why are we holding back? What of all the big promises that we would hit them with all our might, not for tactical reasons but because we don't have what it takes to endure a lengthy campaign? Or perhaps they've managed to unearth some new rationalizations? Perhaps it's true what they say, that we are ruled by old men with less than a full understanding of the situation? It was bizarre to have to wait to see one of our men brought down, to see the blood flow from his forehead, until we were allowed to fire back. Will the other side always have this kind of control over events? Why can't we dispense with Yazur, Bab El Wad and the *National Arab Company for Traffic* by massacre and explosions, which will put an end to these riots, even if it will mean a great deal of bloodshed (theirs, not ours)? How did it come about that our brave leaders can play around with our boys' lives with impunity? They offer such fine eulogies, don't they...No -- If I must die, I don't want it to be as a mouse in a little hole, swiped down by any stray cat as soon as I peep out of my hiding place. No explanations have been forthcoming here, and sympathy for ETZEL grows day by day, understand? The masses don't go for sophistication. ETZEL kills, massacres (even if just a little bit, the principle is the important thing) and terrorizes, and this satisfies the people. The party line doesn't make sense to anyone. The Arabs clearly aren't aiming for peace, and nothing will be gained a treaty between Holon and Tel Arish.

The Mercantile center affair was a big warning flag, and it went unheeded by the leaders of the Jerusalem community and the Hagana at the time, just as it failed to penetrate through the skulls of the IDF and the new state after the war. The affair proved that the Jews had arrived unprepared for battle, and that the Hagana organization was unfit for the historic mission to which it was appointed: securing the establishment of a new state, while overcoming the Arab threat to its very existence. Though the Jews finally won that war, the cost in lives was high in the extreme: six thousand Jews – a full one percent of the total population. Had the Jews been better prepared for war, the cost could have been much less – a factor that not only clouds the outcome of the war, but casts a shadow over the victory itself, inasmuch as *cost* is one of the main evaluation parameters of every alternative. In retrospect, such a cost can only have had a far reaching and irreversible

effect on the Israeli state; should we persist in ignoring reality, preferring fairy tails and legends instead, it will put into question our very existence as a people.²⁰

C. The Hadassa Convoy

Uncle Moshe was very satisfied with the research. He advised me to further cultivate my research skills, but warned that Israeli culture, still at mid-century, lacked the maturity for such work – that I should not expect to garner support from the academy or the media, or even from the defense establishment, to say nothing of gaining prestige. I shared our findings with Danny Dasa, and he rationalized the Hagana's malfunction in Jerusalem as a symptom of our inability to establish a true military while we were still occupied. He still believed that the Jewish response in 1948 was unimpeachable. In contrast, Michael Kashtan, praised my work. Nevertheless, even he explained the failure in Jerusalem as a by-product of bad leadership on the part of Ben-Gurion's cronies, who overruled and kicked out the Palmach leadership. Michael had known Moshe from his Ben Shemen days, and he now suggested that my uncle had influenced me to take an overly critical approach, adding that the research looked more like my uncle's work than my own. Indeed, my uncle was indispensable to my research process, and my draft would never have taken the shape it did without him, but Michael's claim was a *de facto ad hominem*, an attack on the person rather than the argument itself.

In my opinion, the primary issue, both then and fifty years later is this: Why did the Hagana arrive so unprepared for the War of Independence – and why was that plain fact concealed not only from the public eye, but from our political and military leaders as well? To lie to the public is a sin against Democracy. Beyond that, leaders and commanders who engage in self-deception constitute a fundamental risk to our survival. Danny and Michael's meek rationalizations seemed to me an evasion of the crux of our existential problem: structural flaws in the Jewish settlement and defense system generally, on the one hand, and the ignorance on the part of Ben-Gurion and his followers of the real essence of war and military science, on the other.

I understood, through my own contribution, what the value of our research had been, hence I viewed Michael Kashtan's evasive response in light of my uncle's warning: namely, that the generation was not yet ready, and that Michael was part of that generation. And indeed, my opinion was considered heretical in those days, at the turn of the fifties. Only Daphna was interested in my research and discussed it with me at length. She wanted to contribute herself to my next projects. The objections against and reservations for my work, meanwhile, only strengthened my focus. As for my uncle, his encouragement was undeterred.

On Independence Day of 1954, Danny recounted his involvement in the Hadassa Convoy affair: "I was sent to the Mount Scopus enclave, which was surrounded by Arabs, to guard the Hebrew University and Hadassa hospital. In April of 1948, an armed convoy

²⁰ As previously noted, my interpretations have developed through dialogue with my uncle, Moshe Shiponi, and many insights herein are originally his.

began heading toward us from New Jerusalem, comprised mostly of doctors and nurses. Most of them were massacred. It was a nightmare. We were asked to identify the bodies; they'd been slaughtered like animals, one and all. I took my sub-machine gun and descended downhill, firing all the shells I had. Only a tiny portion of that convoy managed to survive and reach the top of the mountain. We'd done what we could to help them; the British made it impossible to help the rest. They blocked the way.

I discussed this episode with Danny Dasa and Michael Kashtan, and again I heard the same excuses: the limitations imposed by the British, and the Ben-Gurion contingents' dysfunction. This time their explanations rang hollow, they simply made no sense. I began to think that a certain cultural characteristic was involved here: evasion of responsibility. In earnest, I pursued further research on the massacre with uncle Moshe and Daphna Urdang, now without the help of my teachers in Hadassim. I knew, then as today, that though they were wonderful pedagogues, they were not strong enough to transcend the mythological paradigm of Israel's wars. I spent the whole of my summer vacation between eighth and ninth grade on the project. Again, Daphna would visit me in Tel Aviv and I would visit her in Jerusalem; together, we sought out and interviewed various witnesses to the massacre at Mount Scopus. The following comprise our findings, drafted with my Uncle's help.

Mount Scopus

At the peak of Mt Scopus, at the end of the 20th century, stood the summer estate of Sir John Gray-Hill: a British lawyer, and Zionist sympathizer. He'd frequently spent his Easter holidays there; in 1914, he began negotiating its sale to the Israeli office of the Zionist Organization, which finally came to possess it after his death. In 1919, the first stone of the Hebrew University was laid on the estate. The university itself was inaugurated in 1925.²¹ In 1921, Chaim Weitzman and Albert Einstein together established an organization to recruit money for the founding of a medical-scientific center in Eretz Israel, and the resulting monies went to pay for land on Mt Scopus, not far from the university proper.

The Jewish American Women Organization *Hadassa* was committed to establishing this center. General opinion was split. Yehuda Magnes, one of the university representatives, demanded that the medical center be located near the university; Dr. Ephraim Bloston, the Hadassa man, wanted to put it closer to the rest of the population, and he reasoned thus: "For the patient, it is more important to see a doctor -- not the view. No barrier should be forced between the patient and doctor, and a geographical barrier would be especially unbearable." Dr. Yehuda Magnes was a pacifist who believed in international brotherhood, and it was he who ultimately won the argument. The medical center was inlaid on Mt Scopus, among the Arab populace, in October of 1934. The hospital itself opened in May of 1939, in time to deliver two new babies to the world.²²

²¹ This chapter is also being reproduced without further edits. Additions are indicated with square brackets

²² Shifrah, my wife, was the third baby born there.

Mount Scopus was the academic-medical center of Eretz Israel during the forties.²³ There were many Hagana members among both teachers and Hadassa Hospital doctors – and even more so among the students -- but it wasn't they who comprised the general mindset of the university, which was defined by Brit Shalom, the union led by Dr. Magnes, Professors Moshe Schwabe and Martin Buber, who could never believe that the Arabs would harm this citadel of moderate Zionism along with its medical center. Meanwhile, the Hagana base was also located on Mt Scopus; the British were completely uninterested in the mountain, since it was far from the city, so it was logical for the Hagana to settle there. Hence, Mt Scopus would form a Jewish enclave in the midst of a hostile Arab population during the war. Anyone who wanted in or out of this enclave had to pass through the Arab neighborhood of Sheik Jarah. Mt Scopus was therefore considered an independent region (number 11) by the Hagana, while its commander, Yehoshua Ben Yeshayah, answered directly to the district commander.

Much was done to fortify this location during war preparations, but it remained isolated from the other Jewish neighborhoods that led toward Jewish Jerusalem. Likewise, no connecting road was ever paved around Sheik Jarah. District command intended to use the area as a launching pad for attacks on Arab neighborhoods and Arab traffic to north Jerusalem. Leaders of the Jewish settlement were more concerned that things proceed normally with university and medical center activity.

Meanwhile, an ambulance had already been ambushed on its way to Hadassa hospital on November 30th 1947. Snipers from Sheik Jarah had shot at a Jewish bus heading toward Mt Scopus on January 2nd, killing Hanna Gardi, a nursing student. On January 20th, regional commander Israel Amir reported to Ben Gurion: “The city of Sheik Jarah, the Nashashibi neighborhood, the mufti’s house and Antonius all border the road to the university. Arab bullets reach all the way into Shmuel Hanavi St. as well as Beit-Israel. Arab residents have long since abandoned Sheik Jarah, their empty houses left to the gangs. We’ve had severe difficulties with traffic into the city; the situation is easier now after we’ve emptied out the Arab Rommema neighborhood, but two roads remain vulnerable: the road to the university and into Hadassa, and the one leading to Talpiot, Ramat-Rachel and Mekor Chaim.”



Sheik Jarah

Another bus bound for Hadassa was attacked in February, with nine passengers wounded. The driver continued to drive the bus to Mount Scopus despite enduring severe stomach wounds. Arie Hirsh, a member of the Hadassah technical department, reported four more incidents: “On March 2nd, two buses bound for Mt Scopus were stopped in front of the Antonius House, the front bus blasted by a mine. Arabs quickly ambushed both of

²³ Of course, the Technion preceded it as an academic institution. IT was founded in Haifa at the turn of the last century, before WWI, but it didn't have a medical school until the fifties.

them, killing Ephraim Ben Yoseph, a construction and fortifications man... Both buses eventually reached Mt Scopus without any further casualties. There were more shootings that very same afternoon in Sheik Jarah, on a truck bearing construction supplies. The truck was stopped and the driver managed to escape, though two *Solel Bone* [an Israeli construction company] trucks that came to the rescue were themselves fired upon, resulting in the death of Elimelech Schulman. On March 11th, a whole convoy was fired upon from Sheik Jarah, this one carrying doctors, nurses and students. No one was hurt. On March 17th, another convoy was targeted at the same location. Two Hagana people were hurt, Yoseph Pinto and Moshe Giat. British troops present at the scene chose not to interfere.”

During the Wadi Jose battle (part of the Carmel operation), on February 26th, Hagana units arrived at the scene from their base on Mt. Scopus. The same day saw more sniper fire coming from Sheik Jarah, on an arms convoy headed uphill: one vehicle was disabled and torched after two of the passengers were killed and their bodies mutilated.

In each of these incidents, one striking pattern emerged: the Arabs would assault and attempt to disable the vehicles, the Hagana would refrain from attacking in kind, while the British would stand by and do nothing. That was the status quo even as late as April 13th.

The British Government and military leaders, generally friendly with the university and the Hadassa medical establishment, did demonstrate special treatment of Jewish traffic to Mt Scopus. Until March of '48, they provided security for the uphill convoys. One report, written by the Hadassa hospital director Dr. Chaim Yaski, testifies that Mt Scopus saw an average of five convoys per day; the same report indicates that responsibility for that traffic was transferred to the Hagana beginning in March, and that “disorder [had] prevailed” from then on.

On the afternoon of March 2nd, the medical center’s switchboard operator received a message in Arabic: the hospital will be bombarded within an hour. It turned out to be a false warning. In the middle of March, Abdul Kader Al Hussein made the following comment during an interview: “The Jews are destroying our houses and killing our women and children from their bases in Hadassa hospital and the university, and therefore I commanded they be occupied and even destroyed.” He showed journalists a cannon positioned on the roof of Rockefeller Museum, pointed at Mt Scopus; he declared his intention to strike at the traffic ascending the same mountain. When he died in Operation Nachshon (the objective of which was to open up the Jerusalem road), sketches of his plan to ambush and hold Mt Scopus were found in his pockets. The Arabs never hid their intentions. It was the Jews, apparently, who didn’t take them seriously.

The surgeon Edwards Joseph wrote to Hadassa director Dr. Yaski that he was no longer taking responsibility for the transfer of patients to Mt Scopus, and Dr. Yaski answered: “The time isn’t right to evacuate the hospital, and we don’t have security anywhere else.” But he was equally concerned about his patients’ fate; written in his report to director Elierzer Kaplan of the Jewish Agency of March 19th is the following: “There are

currently over 250 [in the Hospital]. Over eighty of them are suffering badly from various diseases. These patients require a much greater number of staff and supplies, which would be available given functioning transportation to the city.” He worried that without continuous traffic to and from the hospital, his own functioning would deteriorate: “...it would badly hurt hospital activity in Jerusalem, weakening our position on Mt Scopus, and it would be spiritually corrosive to the Jewish-American community in general and the Hadassa circles in particular. They’ll begin to feel that liquidation is at hand...we have only a few days until May, and we must prepare for every contingency. I would prefer to avoid doing anything that might psychologically depress our patients and workers, which could only help the enemy.”

Yaski sent copies of this letter to Ben Gurion, Dr. Magnes and six more addressees. On March 22nd, the directors of Hadassa Hospital discussed evacuating from Mt Scopus, but decided to continue the status quo for the time being. They agreed to continue reminding Jewish authorities that relocation was inevitable, should the traffic problems continue unabated. Dr. Yaski paid for postponing the move with his life: the really critical moment was not the middle of May, but the middle of April.

Zadik’s Warnings

On March 26th Yoseph Shani²⁴, the Hagana signal officer, met with Brigadier Johns, the regional British commander, at the British headquarters then located in the German colony. “The Arabs are attacking your convoys because they’re convinced the Hagana uses them to transfer ammunition and equipment up Mt. Scopus,” Commander Johns told Shani. The Englishman promised him that British forces would target future violence emanating from Sheik Jarah.

Johns said the orders for such retaliatory operations would relay to lieutenant-Colonel MacLeod, commander of the Northern Jerusalem battalion. On March 2nd, Johns again promised Shani that the British would help restore order on the Mt Scopus road, this time asking that the Hagana refrain from causing incidents in the northern city or anywhere near Atarot and Neve Yaakov, and that they also refrain from shooting mortars down on Wadi Jose from Mt. Scopus. The Arabs, Johns said, would agree to this arrangement.

For his part, Shani was happy to commit to such conditions: “The Hagana will hold their fire if the Arabs agree to do the same.”

But the Hagana only kept to this commitment for two days. By March 4th, Noam Grossman and his subordinates had begun shelling Arab vehicles at the Al-Gibb junction near Ramalla. This was Operation Shemuel, destined to be the Hagana’s manner of reprisal for the manifold Arab attacks on Jewish traffic accumulating all over the country, especially on the Tel-Aviv-Jerusalem road. Grossman and his fifteen subordinates were killed before they could do any damage, but the sector certainly began to heat up after Operation Shemuel.

²⁴ Daphna and I saw Shani and received documents pertinent to this project

By late March, it was already clear that leading convoys through an Arab region was a difficult feat – and rescuing them from attack in such areas even more so. The Atarot convoy, for example, got bogged down in Shoafat, not far from the road to Mt. Scopus. David Shaltiel²⁵, along with regional headquarters, hadn't learned his lessons. The intelligence officer of northern Jerusalem, codenamed "Zadick," had issued a report in early April to the effect that convoys to Mt Scopus were headed for danger, that "Military and police units of our own should be organized for rescue operations." His warning went unheeded.

Dr. Yaski and Dr. Magnes continued pressing Ben Gurion for action, and David Shaltiel was eventually ordered by telegram, on March 31st, to "make all efforts to protect convoys to Hadassa Hospital three or four times daily, from 7:00 am to 4:00 pm."

In reality, nothing like this ever happened. By January of 1948, the university had almost shut down completely; most of the students had been recruited by the Hagana, while the laboratories were turned over to the Jerusalem science corps headed by Dr. Aaron Katchalsky [Katzir], who were promptly released from guard duty.

Yehoshua Ben Isaiah, commander of Mt. Scopus, fixed the standard of 80 men posted at various intervals along the mountaintop. Hagana headquarters in Jerusalem (along with university authorities) helped staff three more positions with teachers and other workers, those under fifty who weren't yet recruited for other defense purposes. A few teachers older than fifty also volunteered. One of them was Professor Buenaventura, who was killed in the line of duty on April 13th. There were also those younger men, on the other hand, who defaulted on their duty. The university founded a select committee to ensure that intellectuals would indeed fulfill their minimal security duties.

With the full knowledge of the Hagana, the university and the Hadassa Hospital negotiated with the British on the paving of a secure road – north of Sheik Jarah -- between Mt Scopus and Jewish Jerusalem. On March 12th, the British assented to a final arrangement, with three provisos: the Jews would finance, direct, and provide the requisite labor for the project. These conditions, however, struck the Jewish authorities as overly harsh, and the road wasn't built.

By April, Hadassa Hospital was already beginning to operate on the level of day to day improvisation. Chaim Renan, head of the reception office, took charge of the hospital on the Hagana's behalf. He sought out winter coats, new motors for the generators, fuel and other equipment from the British facility next door, the Augusta Victoria Hospital. Power shortages were the norm at this point, and the phone lines were often disabled as well.

²⁵ . A senior commander with the Hagana and one of the heads of Shin Bet. Shaltiel replaced Amir as Hagana's regional commander for Jerusalem, viz., the 9th "Etzioni" Brigade. He served in this capacity until August, when he was replaced by Moshe Dayan. He was subsequently an IDF Major General.

Several hospital departments were transferred to the Jewish quarter. Dr. Yaski purchased what had previously been a Scottish Hospital and mission on Haneviim St., and the Hadassa people began remaking it as a full-fledged medical center. The move was mostly complete by the first week of April, with Dr. Yaski himself taking residence in the old city. He and his wife went back to Mt Scopus on April 13th, in order to finish moving some remaining equipment and personal possessions.

Though the British weren't yet supplying ready security for every convoy to Mt Scopus, by April their armed vehicles were already patrolling the main road up the hill on a daily basis. On March 9th, a special British unit was posted in the deserted Antonius house in Sheik Jarah, in order to secure one of the riskier segments of the road.

“The Arabs have dissidents”

Following the capture of the Castel, the Nachshon operation, the attacks on Dir Yassin and Colonia, and the death of Abd Al- Qadir Al Husayni on April 1st -- and after ten days of Jewish resurgence in Jerusalem -- it was predictable that the Arabs would try to exact maximal vengeance. It wasn't hard to know in advance that they would make another attempt on a Jewish convoy: the first four months of experience already showed that the roads were still the weakest link in the Jewish formation.

From about the middle of March, Asher (Zizi) Rahav headed the main convoys up to Mt Scopus. After April 9th his subordinates began observing signs of unrest on the main road to the mountain. Rahav reported to Shimshon Bar-Noi, his company commander²⁶, regarding the suspicious trail of Arab vehicles in the section between the Jewish neighborhoods and Mt Scopus.

Captain “G.S.,” the officer in British Military headquarters responsible for intelligence gathering in Jerusalem, would claim after the war that anyone with a dose of common sense should have guessed that the Arabs would revenge themselves on the Jews for Dir Yassin -- and that they would concentrate on their weak spots. G.S. had coordinated with Sherut Yediot [Hagana's Information Service] and the Jewish Agency's political department, and according to him British intelligence had warned headquarters of Arab reprisals on a Jewish convoy in Sheik Jarah. On April 10th, in due course, the Arabs exploded a water pipeline connecting the French Hill to Mt Scopus. British soldiers sent word to Hadassa's technical staff, and a team was sent to repair the damages. Major Jake Churchill, a Scot, was the officer in charge of security for Jewish and Arab convoys in Jerusalem, and he was present during these repairs. Yoseph Shani reports that Churchill was “a very pleasant man, who always had medical supplies with him on his way from the city.”

On April 11th, Rahav outmaneuvered the Arabs by leaving with his convoy at 11:00 am, rather than the usual time of 9:00 am. While they didn't encounter any resistance on the

way, both he and his subordinates thought that “something didn’t smell right.” They could point to nothing specific, but they clearly felt that something new was afoot.

After the convoy arrived at Mt Scopus, Jewish and British representatives met at Hadassa Hospital: Brigadier Johns, Major Churchill, the commander of the British Jerusalem brigade, university president Dr. Magnes, Hadassa’s medical director Dr Eli Davis, and university and Shai [Hagana’s information service] representative Professor Abraham Reifenberg. Dr. Magnes asked whether the Red Cross would extend its protection to the medical center, and Brigadier Johns answered: “The Arabs are not to be trusted, as they have their own dissidents who aren’t bound to the ceasefire agreements. Fortunately, the road to Mount Scopus is calm at the present time.” Major Churchill warned the Jews: “Your snipers from the Beit Israel neighborhood could easily stir up retaliation.” It was decided that the next convoy would climb up Mt Scopus two days hence, on April 13th.

Yoseph Shani reported back to his commanders on this meeting the very same day.

“Don’t send the fur coat”

The Hadassah convoy left Mt Scopus from the clinic on Hasolel St at 9:00 am, on April 13th. The only people allowed aboard were those engaged in the mission, but there were nonetheless some who joined the convoy for their own personal reasons. There were people trying to storm into the two armed buses on Hasolel St., but seats were strictly reserved for Hadassah and university staff. The buses were crowded with around forty people each. The whole convoy came together on the way to Beit Israel, with the addition of two ambulances, three load-bearing trucks and two armed vehicles – all told, about 100 people in nine vehicles. Their last stop in the Jewish area was near *Tipat Halav* [the Family Health Clinic], on Shmuel Hanavi St. in Beit Israel.

Asher Rahav led the armed vehicle at the head of the convoy, carrying five soldiers and two women hitchhikers. They were followed by a small ambulance carrying twelve passengers, including Dr. Yaski, his wife, a few other doctors and nurses, and a wounded man on a stretcher along with two hospital patients; behind them were the two buses, then the three trucks, then a rear-party armed vehicle carrying six soldiers. The convoy had no internal communications system to speak of, though that was already a common feature in convoys traveling outside the city. Zion Eldad, the Etzyoni Brigade officer²⁷, sent the convoy on its way feeling so certain of its safety that he even allowed his sister Chava (who served for the Hagana on Mt Scopus) to travel in it. Nothing had reached the Etzyoni Brigade regarding possible Arab revenge attacks, and there was no rescue plan in place for such a contingency.

Two of Abd Al Qadir Al Husseini’s subordinates – Muhammad Abd Al Sager and Abdul Abd Latuf – had set a mine on the road in Sheik Jarah and planned the ambush.

²⁷ Daphna and I met Zion Eldad and received documents pertinent to this project.

Hagana men, posted at their observation platforms, had indeed spotted something strange on the road in Sheik Jarah that morning, at 9:15 am. The convoy had by then already arrived at the station near Tipat Halav. A report from one of the observation decks was sent to the regional commander: “A group of Arabs have occupied a house between Nashashibi house and the unfinished house on the left side of the road, and they have some kind of gun set up on one of the windows.” The report suggested that the commander use long-range binoculars to verify whether it was a machine or a sub-machine gun at the window. The regional intelligence officer then offered Rahav to have the house searched. The same officer, following the catastrophe, would later testify that he’d lacked the authority to halt the convoy: “given the arrangement with the military and police, all convoys in the preceding days had skipped their normal stop at Tipat Halav, where final security reports were generally issued.”

A man stood at the road block near Tipat Halav: Moshe Hilman²⁸, the point man for the British in Northern Jerusalem, and a good friend of Robert Web, the chief of police for Mea Shearim. Hilman had set Web up with his Jewish mistress, and had even bought her a fur coat once – in exchange for Web’s services on behalf of the Hagana. Web, along with his subordinates, used to patrol the roads and report back to Hilman before any convoy mission. On April 13th, a British police sergeant informed Hilman that the road was in order. Not satisfied with this report, Hilman called Web for confirmation. According to the report submitted by “Zadick,” Web eventually told Hilman that the road was “okay” (though the same report indicates that Hilman had received word of suspicious goings-on in Sheik Jarah). To us, however, Hilman recounted that Web had given him a cryptic warning over the phone: “Today, don’t sent the fur coat.” Hilman thought his friend was talking about an additional coat for his mistress, so he was understandably bewildered – after all, she’d already received one – but he didn’t stop to think that the police chief might be hinting at something else entirely. So he gave the final “go” signal to the convoy. By the time he understood, it was already too late.

Many years later, Rahav remembers how bad their situation really was. A deathly still silence reigned in Sheik Jarah: “I had the feeling that we are stepping right into a horrible trap. The road was empty and deserted. I thought it might be better to turn back, but I chose to do nothing, and there didn’t seem to be enough room for all the cars to turn around. So I told myself, ‘It’ll only be a moment, and then we’ll be through with this nightmare.’ And then it started.”

A 1948 inquiry commission report documents what happened next: “as the convoy entered Sheik Jarah, one of the doctors in the big ambulance (the third in the convoy) noticed something out of place...a low sand bag on the left side of the road, on the corner of Shimon Hatzadik St., and a low post just before it that both he and the driver hadn’t seen before. The passengers on the trucks sensed a movement behind them. It was 9:40 when Rahav’s lead vehicle arrived at the location of the perilous assault.

“Dirt heaps were piled up in front of the half-skeletal, half-constructed house on the side

²⁸ Daphna and I met Hillman and received documents pertinent to this project.

of the road. Rahav ordered the driver to go around them, but the man was lax in fulfilling that order, and as he turned only slightly to the left he ran over a mine, and the vehicle was thrown over the side of the road. Just then, intense machine gun fire hit the rest of the convoy; the driver of the small ambulance (the second car in line in the convoy) was startled and disoriented long enough to lose control and veer into a canal on the left side of the road. The big ambulance, the three trucks and rearguard vehicle were caught in the middle of the ambush, while the cars behind them quickly reversed and managed to escape back safely to the Jewish city. Some were badly wounded, but their lives were saved in the end. But where the guns had found their mark, in the middle of the firetrap, there were eight people left in the lead armed vehicle, twelve more in the small ambulance about five meters away, and eighty more in the two buses stranded further back. The armed vehicle had one machine gun, one submachine gun and several Czechoslovakian guns and grenades, while there was only one revolver in the ambulance, Dr. Yaski's. There wasn't one soldier among the bus passengers farther back, but evidently they also had two or three handguns among them. When he was interviewed later, Rahav agreed that the four civilian vehicles were justified in leaving the convoy: 'It was a pity the others didn't,' is how he put it. On the other hand, he was appalled that the rearguard armed vehicle escaped with them: 'In my opinion, he should have moved forward and helped us.'"

The Jerusalem regional headquarters received the first report of the attack at 9:50 am, from Yitzhak Navon (the Arab SHAI chief). The second report came ten minutes later: "Two buses and one ambulance are stuck just before the Nashashibi neighborhood, under intense fire." Yet another came fifteen minutes later: "Both buses and the ambulance are stuck in the middle of Sheik Jarah, with some fire exchanged on both sides."

Eliyahu Arbel was the officer on overnight duty at the Jerusalem headquarters in the early hours of April 13th. His replacement that morning, Zion Eldad, reported on the incident in Sheik Jarah, and Arbel passed the information on to Yitzhak Navon's headquarters and then to Shlatiel, who at the time was waiting for a big supply convoy near Shneler base on the coastal plain. Both Shlatiel and Arbel agreed that this sounded like a "normal incident," but as additional reports streamed in Shlatiel ordered Arbel to go to Beit Israel and verify first-hand "what could be done."

Yitzhak Levi²⁹, chief of SHAI in Jerusalem, recalls the following about the incident:

"The explosive assault on the convoy in Sheik Jarah was like a volcanic eruption. I knew that something terrible had happened. I leapt into my car and headed for Shemuel Hanavi St, where I ran found the cars that had managed to escape from the ambush. I pressed some of them for information before climbing onto one of the roofs and seeing for myself what was happening. When I realized the convoy was completely bogged down, I ordered the regional officer to bring up a submachine gun and fire at both sides of the street, to provide cover. I wanted to prevent the Arabs from approaching the buses. Then

²⁹ Daphna and I met Levi and received documents pertinent to this project.

I took another machine gun with me and reported back to Shaltiel that the waylaid convoy had to be rescued immediately, or else there wouldn't be any survivors. He said we were negotiating with the British for a rescue attempt, but I made clear that we couldn't afford to wait any longer. I offered to send a company to break through into Sheik Jarah, and he responded that what I was suggesting was tantamount to suicide, that the British would manage it themselves. I walked away, angry and completely mystified, and then I strode back to him and yelled that we had to act immediately. At that point he answered that 'this is Eliyahu Arbel's problem, so go find him.'"

At 10:30 am, Hillman called Zion Eldad from Tipat Halav: "It's been five minutes since we called for help for the convoy, and nothing's been done. The situation is awful." Yitzhak Navon called headquarters a few minutes later: "They're asking for heavy arms for Sheik Jarah – they can't get out of there with anything else!"

Arabs had run into Sheik Jarah from all directions, and the convoy passengers soon heard shouts: "Remember Dir Yassin!" Most of the fire was directed at Rahav's armed vehicle, which was made of soft aluminum and covered with a long net to keep grenades out. But the bullets found their mark anyway; people were badly hurt, and the guns were damaged and paralyzed. The ambulance and the other armored vehicles suffered much less. Everyone kept waiting for the Hagana to arrive and push back their attackers, while about 100 meters away, Rahav could see British assault vehicles securing a path for General Macmillan's convoy, which was passing through Sheik Jarah on its way to the airport near Atarot [Kalandia]. Amazingly, it looked to Rahav that the British were helping out the attackers, adding their own fire to the ambush. So he ordered Baruch Nussbaum to target them as well, and they of course shot back.

Macmillan would later write about this to Dr. Magnes: "I was targeted by a Jewish armored vehicle; from my vantage point, it seemed like the [Jewish] convoy were holding their own and could be helped -- if they would only refrain from firing at us..." But Macmillan, along with his entourage and the remaining British vehicles, eventually left the scene.

The Irish officer, Captain Falkner, headed the British platoon stationed in the Antonius House. The inquiry commission report notes that "[This platoon] tried to stop the attack, but was unable to affect the outcome because they lacked heavy equipment." The British intelligence officer "G.S." was stationed with another unit at the Notre Dame convent when he learned of the attack, and he quickly sent for his driver and assistant and headed for Sheik Jarah. They passed the convoy, went around the small ditch in the road and passed Rahav's vehicle, and entered the Antonius House. G.S. later recounted that at one point a white flag was visible from the armored vehicle, but the Arabs only intensified their fire. Captain Falkner became furious at this and ordered his men to fire with everything they had. G.S. sent a radio message to British army headquarters at the King David Hotel, reporting on the situation. According to him, soldiers in Mea Shearim were ordered by British Command to shoot three-inch mortar shells at the Arab crowds streaming into Sheik Jarah. The attack was successful, forcing back many Arabs and wounding others. Jews from all over Mt. Scopus and the outlying neighborhoods aimed

their haphazard machine gun and mortar fire so as to distract the Arab gunners and help deflect from fire aimed at the trapped convoy, but none of this was too effective. It's reasonable to assume that more of it hit the Jews and even the British³⁰. And there's not any doubt that it provided British soldiers with a pretext, an excuse, not to get further involved. The British demanded that the Jews halt their fire as a condition for a rescue attempt.

The "Moriya" Battalion was responsible for Northern Jerusalem. Moshe Salomon, who at this stage was already company commander, wrote in his journal that he'd heard the explosions that morning and realized the convoy was being attacked. "I immediately put my men under alert, even before I received any orders, so we were fully prepared, with two armored vehicles." Dov Doron from "Moriyah" battalion reported that he and his friends had received orders to prepare for an assault on Sheik Jarah -- but the final go-ahead never came. When they asked about the delay, company commander Joseph Nevo³¹ answered that the British had threatened to fire their cannons at any Jewish rescue force. According to Yitzhak Levi, Nevo reported that regional headquarters had forbid him from ordering the assault.

The Moriya Battalion's second in command, Tzvi Sinai, recounted that Nadav Weisman, (the Battalion's intelligence officer) had come running to headquarters with news of the attack. Sinai got in his car and headed for the neighborhood close to Sheik Jarah; he climbed onto one of the roofs and saw for himself what was going on, then returned to headquarters. Realizing that two armored vehicles would do nothing for the convoy, he asked Moshe Salomon to wait for him while he paid a visit to Shneler base to ask Shaltiel for reinforcements. There the head of SHAI, Yitzhak Levi, persuaded him to approach Michael Shacham³² for help from the supply convoy (then heading back from Chulda) for a rescue attempt in Sheik Jarah. Shaltiel wanted to offer direct help from his armored vehicles, but Shacham refused, claiming that those vehicles and trucks were immediately needed on the coastal plain: those were the orders he'd received, and they were unequivocal. They continued to plead with him until he gave in, allowing for one armored vehicle to be sent to Sheik Jarah. Both he and Shlatiel relayed the same request to Baruch Gilboa, the lead platoon leader of the "Nachshon" convoy.

Most of the auxiliaries with the Nachshon convoy had already left for their lunch break, and only fifteen had remained with Gilboa to guard their vehicles. Some of these men didn't even know each other.

Gilboa: "Several of the 'generation's greatest' – Shaltiel, Shacham and the men they'd brought with them – approached and asked who the commander of our armored vehicle unit was. My group pointed at me. Shlatiel looked at me and told me about a 'disaster, a

³⁰ This insight is explicitly Shiponi's.

³¹ Subsequently an IDF Colonel and mayor of Hertzliah

³² Subsequently an IDF Colonel. Founded unit 101 as commander of the Jerusalem Brigade, at the age of sixteen.

massacre on the road to Mt Scopus, where Arabs are murdering doctors, professors and nurses.’ He said that we needed a concentrated force for a rescue attempt immediately. I told him two things: one, I needed to have an authorized command from one of my superiors; two, I wasn’t familiar with the road to Mt Scopus. Then he answered: ‘I’ll contact the supreme command in Tel Aviv, and you’ll get your orders.’ Then he disappeared while I stood waiting with our fighting units. When he returned he said: ‘We have your orders: now go and gather your men in one armed vehicle and get out of here.’”

Shaltiel wanted to send three armored vehicles to Sheik Jarah, with Tzvi Sinai in command. But Moshe Salomon had already arrived there with two Moriya Battalion units by the time Shaltiel and Shacham were finished negotiating with Gilboa. So Shaltiel ordered Sinai join and guide Gilboa’s group instead. Twelve people, Palmach and field units, sat in Gilboa’s armed vehicle, but only Tzvi Sinai knew the precise location of the trapped convoy.

Salomon’s group entered Sheik Jarah at 10:45 am under heavy fire. They could see hope stirring in the passengers’ eyes as they passed the buses and reached Rahav’s armored vehicle. “For a moment I thought it was a trap,” Salomon wrote in his journal. “But I ordered the driver to go ahead, turning to the right over the side of the road. I had two wounded men with me, so I took them to Mt Scopus. By the time we got there, three of our tires were flat and the breaks were finished.

At 11:15, Yoel Melkov (commander of Mt Scopus) reported to headquarters: “Salomon’s has reached the university and is asking for police reinforcements.” Salomon’s armored vehicle was badly shot and some of its passengers wounded. The driver turned around and returned to the city just as Gilboa’s unit arrived with Tzvi Sinai. Their car swerved over a mine, however, and soon they were stuck between Rahav’s vehicle and Yaski’s ambulance.

Sinai was shot in the forehead. Though still conscious, he was unable to move. Gilboa’s men started shooting back at the houses, while others concentrated their fire along the road to prevent the Arabs from moving in on the ambulance and the buses.

Baruch Ben-Anat, deputy commander of his Palmach company, was still relegated to the Shneler Base with the rest of his unit at this point. His friend Nadav Weisman, an intelligence officer for Moriya Battalion, had taken him to an observation platform and showed him the convoy in the distance. Later, when he was interviewed and asked why he hadn’t tried to assist the men in Sheik Jarah, Ben-Anat answered: “I’m not the one who can make that decision. I did what I was told. I remember Nadav saying that it was a pity for the men who were already sent there: ‘they don’t have a chance...’” While the convoy in Sheik Jarah was under heavy fire, Ben-Anat and his men were given food vouchers and allowed to sleep.

“Everything is Fine”

Two weeks after the convoy disaster, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, the national council representative, posed three questions to Ben-Gurion in a letter: “Is it true that, throughout the whole attack, no one from the Agency or any other public institution approached the [British] chief secretary or the high commissioner with a demand to intervene in the massacre?...The chief rabbi tells me that he would have been willing to approach the high commissioner, if he’d only known about the situation before it was too late.

“The question is further asked: did the Jewish Agency’s political department also know nothing, during those seven hours, of the happenings in Sheik Jarah? Somehow the Hagana knew about it, since they were acting on some sort of intelligence. And how was it possible for the Agency’s political department to be aware of what was happening and not alert the national council or the rabbinate?”

According to Yitzhak Levi, the Agency’s political department indeed had full knowledge of the affair, and even negotiated with the British.

Years later, Shaltiel would write: “The Jewish community’s institutions – the Agency’s political department, the University institutions, Hadassah and Hagana’s liaison officer – were unable to persuade Brigadier Johns, commander of British Forces in Jerusalem, to stop the Arabs.” When he testified before the IDF’s history department, Shaltiel explained: “There was a rescue plan centered on a ground force in Shneler. The force was not activated, however, because the operation was deemed hopeless. The convoy buses and armed vehicles were totally paralyzed; the only way to reach them was with an armored division, which we didn’t have. A ground force would not only have been ineffective, but downright suicidal. It has to be added that British forces aggravated things by defending the Arabs, preventing us from offering assistance.”

The latter testimony fails the test of criticism. At least 90 minutes before Rahav’s driver stumbled over a mine, the British had not refused permission for three armored vehicles to enter Sheik Jarah. British soldiers in the Antonius House assisted the ambushed convoy, and may very well have saved some lives in the process. At the very least, thirty-six armored vehicles with the Nachshon convoy were available in Jerusalem. Only one of those was sent out to help.

Shaltiel could have done more to influence Tel Aviv headquarters and Nachshon to have Shacham use the armored vehicles at his disposal to rescue the Hadassa convoy. The Palmach fourth battalion stood at the ready in Kiriath Anavim and Maale Hachamisha; the “Foremen” auxiliary units which had assisted ETZEL in Dir Yassin stood waiting in Shneler Base. One of these “foremen,” Gideon Sarig, testified that he had been able to observe the Arab assault in Sheik Jarah from the roof of his base: “There was a heated argument about whether we were going to help the convoy; Shaltiel was certainly yelling a great deal, though I don’t remember who was for and who was against [the operation]. In the end we weren’t activated. It was surreal to witness them massacred like that, like they were right there on the palm of my hand...”

It is hard to understand how Shaltiel could claim that sending ground forces into Sheik Jarah was “suicidal.” When it comes to urban warfare, ground forces are superior to armored forces – which in close quarters can easily become death traps under heavy fire. It’s reasonable to assume that the attack on the Hadassa convoy would not have withstood a whole ground force battalion advancing from one house to the next. And if Shaltiel refused to order an operation and prevent the massacre for some reason other than “suicide,” then he acted against the Hagana’s principles: to always aid their fellow citizens when their lives are on the line.

In the final analysis, the man who offered assistance to the besieged convoy was a British officer. The honorable Scotsman, Major Jake Churchill, had just received his morning parade at the court of the German “Hospis” Saint Paulus, one kilometer away from the place where he first heard of goings-on at Sheik Jarah. Churchill took an armored vehicle to the city before returning to headquarters and requesting a full armored unit (equipped with three inch mortar shells). He got his unit, but his superiors refused him permission to use the mortars. It was already 10:30 am and the vehicles were taking too long, so Churchill decided not to wait. He organized a private rescue operation: it was *he* who led his soldiers to Sheik Jarah.

Once in the city, under intense fire, he came up to the bus and immediately began helping passengers onto his truck. Moving from the bus to the truck was extremely dangerous under those conditions. “Can you ensure our safety?” some passengers asked him. According to the inquiry commission report, Churchill’s answer was: “There’s a fifty-percent risk involved.” The author of the report, a lawyer by the name of Shalom Horowitz, includes the following note: “At this stage, it seems the passengers expected more help to arrive, so they decided against the risk of transferring into the Major’s vehicle, which apparently was only partially armed.”

The stunned Major shouted back at them: “If you stay here, you’ll all die!”

“But we’re alright for now!” one of the nurses answered.

“You won’t be alright for long!” Churchill, now under fire, yelled at her.

“Why don’t your soldiers deal with the Arabs?” another man asked defiantly.

“We’ll wait here for the Hagana,” said another.

The Major made the same offer of help to the passengers on the other bus, and they likewise declined. Meanwhile, one of his soldiers had been wounded by a stray bullet to the neck. Churchill, utterly bewildered, left the convoy to accompany his man to the hospital. As he later put it to the journalist-playwright Michael Almaz, “As late as April 13th, my Hagana contacts had reported to me on every convoy to Mt Scopus, so I could maintain security in Sheik Jarah. On April 13th, however, I received no information. The disaster happened precisely for that reason.”

Hillman's report to Shaltiel was simple: "The situation in Sheik Jarah is critical: a force must be sent there immediately."

Only two minutes later, Shaltiel received a call from one of his officers in the neighborhood of Beit Israel: "The convoy is under intense pressure; the Arabs are getting closer and are attacking with hand grenades. I suggest we activate the [Palmach] brigade which just arrived with the Chulda convoy."

Professor Abraham Reifenberg, the contact man for the British, had already called him from Mount Scopus: "The army has promised to move into the area with heavy equipment. They've asked that we not intervene at this time. We agreed that the situation was harsh and that some kind of intervention was necessary."

At one in the afternoon, the attackers finally stormed the two buses and began killing passengers. A few had already escaped into one of the other vehicles. Only two others remained alive: Shlomo Nisim, in the Hadassa bus, and Nathan Sandrowsky, in the university bus. Sandrowsky later said that there was a single revolver in his bus, along with eight bullets – some of them sterile.

"Remember Dir Yassin! Remember Dir Yassin!" The Arabs droned.

Sandrowsky used a surgeon's scalpel to defend himself. A bullet had pierced the fuel tank, and as the gas leaked the Arabs started throwing molotov cocktails. "I'm burning!" he heard from the side. His immediate impulse was to jump out the window; he ran and zig-zagged up the road, past the ambulance, until he found Gilboa's armored vehicle, throwing his fists on the door and screaming "Let me in! I'm a Jew!"

When the door opened, he saw that the vehicle was already filled with wounded and dead men. One of them, David Bar-ner, held a grenade in his hands – its safety hatch drawn. Sandrowsky stole the grenade from his hands and threw it outside, right before it exploded. He then took hold of one of the machine gun turrets and aimed bursts of fire on the Arabs.

By 2:20 pm, the commander of Beit Israel was calling Shaltiel to inform him that "one of the buses is on fire." Five minutes later, one of the men at the observation posts reported that "both buses are in flames and people are frantically jumping out, some of them clearly wounded." At 2:40, a bullet pierced through the driver's side of the ambulance, hitting Dr Yaski. He diagnosed himself: the bullet had pierced his liver, which meant the end for him. "Goodbye, my love" he whispered to his wife, and died in her arms. The ambulance driver had leapt from his seat and run toward the Antonius House, but he was brought down by hail of bullets. Dr. Yehuda Matot, the pediatricist, crawled to the Antonius House despite a severe back wound; once inside, a medic was able to attend to him as the British commander explained that he lacked the manpower to attempt a serious rescue of convoy passengers. Nine people were left in the ambulance, utterly defenseless, awaiting what seemed like certain death. An armored vehicle struggled past the buses, now blazing in an inferno, commanded by Chaim Camerun of the "Noam" brigade. It had finally arrived under heavy fire only to get burry itself in one of the ditches on the side of the road. Two men were killed immediately and another three

wounded. The driver managed to get out of the ditch and drive off toward Mt Scopus. It had been the last hope for the remaining convoy passengers.

Cameron later said that he had climbed, in full rage, onto one of the roofs at the university, and let loose his machine-gun on a neighboring Arab village.

Meanwhile, Moshe Salomon's armored vehicle was busy descending down the mountain toward Sheik Jarah. By then, all he could do was gather together and help the few remaining survivors who had managed to escape the fire.

“The army is shooting the Arabs”

Around 2:40 pm, the “Arnevet” [“Rabbit”] unit charged with monitoring British communications reported the following: “The British have sent forces to Sheik Jarah with heavy arms and negotiated with the commander of Arab Jerusalem, the Iraqi officer Fadel Abdalla Rashid – now the senior officer in Jerusalem following the death of Abdel Qadir Al Husayni.” This was the very same officer who now led the attack on the convoy. It seems that the Arabs had toned down the attack for a while, which explains why they held off on approaching the vehicles directly. But apparently they also prolonged their negotiations with British command in order to buy time, hoping to kill the remaining passengers in the dark of night. After gathering enough forces together, the British began concentrating fire on the Arab fighters. It was 4:45 pm when Navon reported to Shaltiel that “the [British] army is firing on the Arabs and calling for a ceasefire...the Arabs have many dead and wounded at this point, most of them Iraqi, and there aren't any ambulances to save them.” Navon reported again about an hour later: “The battle was already supposed to be over at 4:45, according to the terms of the British agreement.”

At 5:00 pm, British armored vehicles drove into the city and took the remaining survivors into the Antonius House. Dr. Zinger had arrived there from Hadassa Hospital under British protection, and he now offered what aid he could. The officer G.S. handed Rahav the sketches for the Nachshon Operation he found in Gilboa's vehicle. The British now offered to escort the survivors of the Hadassa convoy to the hospital of their choice. Sixteen of them chose to go back to Mt Scopus and Hadassa, and nine chose the improvised new hospital at the Scottish mission on Haneviim St. All would receive the medical treatment they needed and live to tell the tale.

That included Tzvi Sinai, whom everyone had already written off as dead.³³ Among the ruins, three casualties were immediately identified. Forty-seven of the original passengers were missing, and some of their relatives continued to hope that they were alive, perhaps taken prisoner by the Arabs. But most of their corpses were later found – some of them were unidentifiable, either burned or otherwise disfigured. Doubts have persisted to this day regarding a few of those: the number of those found, both identified and not, is smaller than the original passenger list.

³³ One of the Hashomer and Mapai movements' leaders. Subsequently Israel's second president.

Altogether, seventy-eight people were killed in the Mount Scopus convoy, twenty of them women. Batya Bass was on her way to Hadassa Hospital in order to give birth; Shoshana Ben Ari was going to visit injured friends from the Palmach; Yehudit Roso was going to see her husband; Meir Mizrachi wanted to visit some of his relatives; Beruriah Haber, Fritz Mozeg and Rebeka Aharonov were both going to the Hospital for medical treatment. These people would be alive today if they'd been barred from joining that convoy.

“Every time one of our convoys is attacked, somehow the people in charge are taken by surprise, even when the odds for an attack are fairly good,” wrote the intelligence officer of Northern Jerusalem shortly after the disaster of the Hadassa convoy. “Precious time is being lost now, when what should be done is what should have been done at the start: getting to the attacked cars with an overwhelming force, towing the cars, rescuing the passengers...there’s no doubt that responsibility in such cases rests with the man assigned to oversee the operation...”

Who Pays the Bill?

When all the dust was cleared, Yitzhak Levi (Levitze)³⁴ wrote the following: “I sent a telegram to headquarters demanding a full inquiry. Nothing happened. There was a palpable feeling of helplessness at the district headquarters. Shaltiel was simply bankrupt as a commander.”

Two weeks after the massacre, Yitzhak Ben-Tzvi wrote Ben-Gurion that “although Shaltiel has appointed a ‘small committee for inquiry,’ sixteen days have gone by and no report has been forthcoming. I’m simply bewildered by how slowly things are going when it comes to this most important issue. Previous committees have acted vigorously and expeditiously. The last one was chaired by Dr. Yoseph, who took all of two days. I have no doubt that this kind of delay is undermining our recruitment efforts and morale.

It took only two days for the respected lawyer, Shalom Horovitz, to be appointed, by the university and hospital chairs, to investigate the causes of the disaster at Sheik Jarah. Horovitz’ able assistant was the lawyer Yitzhak Tunic³⁵. Two university representatives were present for each phase of the inquiry, Dr. Olitzki and Dr. Ashner, along with two Hadassa representatives, Yehudit Gintzburg and Dr. Ulman. Horovitz indicates, in his final report, that he “wasn’t able to get direct testimonies from Magen’s people despite the appeals I made to headquarters,” and that Asher Rahav “would not agree to testify.” Horovitz submitted his final report on May 6th, 1948. Yitzhak Levi recounted that

³⁴ Subsequently an IDF Lieutenant-Colonel, and a member of Maarachot, the editors of the IDF professional journal.

³⁵ Subsequently the president of the Israeli chamber of advocates.

Shaltiel had forbidden Jerusalem Hagana members from testifying before Horovitz' full committee.

The Hagana appointed a committee of its own, headed by the lawyer Moshe Gorali. The three commanders who took part in the battle – Ashr Rahav, Tzvi Sinai and Baruch Gilboa – have said that no one asked to submit their testimony to this committee.³⁶ No one ever approached or questioned them. Rahav expressed astonishment on this score even while he was still in the hospital, and after his recovery he went on to give his testimony to Chaim Hertzog of the Jewish Agency.

The Jews took no time to blame the British for the convoy disaster – this despite their official policy of neutrality, despite their earlier warnings and despite the fact that twenty-seven Jews were saved on their account. The Jewish Agency's political division sent formal protests to the Red Cross in Jerusalem as well as the British Military Commander General Mackmilan. The chief of the political division singled out the British – “based on a detailed report solicited by the Agency” – for failing to activate the Antonius House unit, noting especially that British military and police vehicles close to the scene refused to assist in the rescue of passengers. Cohen demanded that the authorities investigate the matter and supply their findings to the Jewish community.

The British were also blamed in Jewish internal reports. On April 16th, Ben-Gurion wrote to Moshe Sharet (then in New York) that “all the signs point to British involvement in the massacre, though of course not an active one. But (a) by preventing the Hagana from moving in, (b) by not stopping the Arab mob for the length of hours...” It should be borne in mind that Sharet needed precise information in order to operate in New York and Washington, so Ben-Gurion's letter didn't describe everything as it really was.

During a council session of the Jewish Agency, on April 21st, Eliyahu Dobkin said: “Nobody can really grasp what happened. Seventy-four Jews were murdered only 600 meters away from the next Jewish neighborhood, and there was no real effort to save them.”

It's clear from Ben-Gurion's statements during that session that he didn't change his mind: “Had the British not identified themselves with the Arabs – and it is beyond doubt that they do identify with them, the Sheik Jarah massacre will prove it – the situation in Jerusalem would have been much better. We can rename the Sheik Jarah massacre the ‘English Massacre’. They were there, they didn't so much as lift a finger, they didn't even let others help.” Moshe Kolodni (Kol) asked for a full report on the massacre and added: “It seems to me that we deserve it.” Ben-Gurion hadn't responded to Dobkin's question, and he never responded to Kol's request.



Daphna and I shared our discoveries with Michael. He expressed great admiration for our efforts, and he also had this to say: “When you grow up, you'll be able to grasp the concept of ‘friction’ as it applies to war, that war depends for its existence on men's vices

and failures. But you should remember always that he who doesn't act, doesn't fail." After fifty years, most of them dedicated wholly to the research of wars, it's clear to me that Israeli historical accounts of the Hadassa convoy generally put the blame squarely on the British. The IDF historians who produced *The history of the War of Independence* had this to say: "The British army, only a few steps away, kept aloof, and all of our pleas were in vain. The British officer in charge claimed that this was retaliation for the Dir Yassin affair, which had happened only two days earlier."

The Mt Scopus convoy affair exposed not only the schism in our national political conception, or the lack of an integrated security posture for the settlement (which accounts for the Hagana's failure in Jerusalem), but above all it exposed the unwillingness of our leaders to learn the lessons of their failures. Instead, our military and political systems, both before and after the declaration of statehood, have insisted on concealing those failures. The price for such a policy was already felt during the War of Independence and the guerilla war in the aftermath. One sign of the corruption of our defense leadership, following the birth of the state, was their failure to do what even seventh graders can do – research. It is a further sign of the intellectuals' corruption that they become fluent in language and myth, providing our leaders with ready fantasies, rather than exposing our faults and faultlines. It was within the intellectuals' power in the fifties to shed light rather than darkness, to expose the truth in a more effective way. Instead, they adopted a norm of devotion to elites, and their students have followed dutifully.

E. "For me, Haddasim was the scent of citrus groves"

After the convoy massacre, Danny Dasa came home from Mt. Scopus. "I had many guns in my possession, and kept asking where I should return them. My father was with the signal corps at the time, so he said 'Go to the base in Shneler.' So I did. When I arrived there, they told me to leave the weapons in the warehouse.

"I entered the big hall and immediately saw all the commanders. I ended up falling asleep on the floor. There was a failed attack on the city the very same day, and I got to see the trucks roll back into the base, carrying corpses. At that point, my father pulled me aside and took me in to register with the signal corps. They gave me a room above a whole stockroom of shells. From there, I transferred to Katamon and thence to the headquarters of Moshe Dayan, chief of the Jerusalem Brigade.

"I was sent to an athletics education course during one of the truces. They didn't really have much for us to do. When the lull ended, I was part of the operation in Beit Jala. Father was the signals officer for the same operation. At one point he ordered me to facilitate a phone communication between Moshe Dayan and the Jordanian commander Abdalla Thal, so I got to listen to their conversations.

"My active sports life began with the athletics education course. While I was in the reserves in Netanya, I did basic fitness coaching. I trained people. There were artillery corps officers there, too. I was transferred to the general staff base in the

Kiria, a little while before the end of my military service. They gave me a job: cleaning bathrooms. I refused. So they moved me to the Chatzor air force base, where I was told to guard the gates. So I stood at the gates. The next day, one of the officers walked by and asked, ‘Danny, what are you doing here?’

“He knew me from the Hapoel [a sports club]. I told him that they’d staffed me as a guard. He took me with him, made coffee for us and told me, ‘Tomorrow we’re getting another thousand officers for training. *You* will train them.’ Indeed, a thousand men registered for the fitness course the following day. There I was, standing in front of a group of them. And there, right in front of me, his face beet-red – the man who threw me out of the Kiria base to begin with. I made them run like hell, and I had a ball doing it.

It wasn’t long after that that I was a free man. I came to Tel Aviv, with nine liras in my pocket as compensation. I took advantage of an offer for a Gymnastics teaching course in Mahane Yona. The course ran for a year. Like I said, I’ve been dancing ever since I was a child. Dancing is my life. I took dancing courses with Nurit Kadman during the Independence War, and afterwards I organized my own performance group. This was a hobby that I happily resumed after the army. The first folk dancing course I did was in Hadassim, during the summer. That’s when I met Ofra Shapirah for the first time, when she was only ten. She was already so gifted. It was so easy to love her.

“In 1952, Jeremiah Shapirah approached me about a job in Hadassim, as an athletics teacher and youth counselor. He appointed me to instruct unit C, which included your class. I was studying modern dance with Gertrud Craus in Tel Aviv at the time. So when I arrived in Hadassim I decided to establish a folk dancing troupe, which was launched quickly when we performed on Independence Day in Netanya. We performed in Even Yehuda and Hertzeliyah. Greta was starting her own troupe in parallel with ours.

“It was easy for me, as an athletics teacher, to look upon Gideon Ariel as a son. I felt a kinship between us; he wasn’t just ‘one of the gang.’ He was an outsider. When I met him he seemed more interested in motorcycling than anything else. We became very close. I remember telling him, ‘Gideon, do you really want to be strong? Then build the track. Take plow, break the field...’”

“I cultivated the athletics program in Hadassim. I made the students race each other on the limestone path in front of the dining hall. That’s where Miriam Sidranski was discovered. We didn’t have a gymnastics hall at first. A carpenter from Even Yehuda built a trampoline for me. I wanted to build a race rack, but there just wasn’t a budget for it, for any equipment. So I invented my own tricks: ‘free’ gymnastics, ‘Swedish’ gymnastics. The students all loved soccer and dodgeball. We organized our own little basketball court and gathered up a team. We even played the team at Tel Mond Prison! The warden used to live in Even Yehuda, and I met him over a glass of Cognac. He told me to put a group together and have them play the

prisoners. ‘They’ll kill your prisoners!’ I told him. ‘Well, that’s my problem’ he responded.

‘For me, Hadassim was the scent of citrus groves. To wake up in the morning, to take the gang for a race around the village...night trips to Michmoret, running gracefully on the dunes...’

F. Dialogue with the discus

Hadassim’s grass was the fount of life for two super-athletes: Gideon Ariel and Miriam Sidransky. Danny Dasa discovered both of them, via his ability to frame a dialogue through motion and the human body. Gideon was driven by the idea of becoming strong well before he set foot in Hadassim. He’d begun weight-training at the Halprin Institute in Tel Aviv, while still in the fourth grade. The person he admired above all when arrived in Hadassim was Shlomo Fogel, and they quickly became workout partners. Fogel would regularly lift 50 kilos, but Gideon – to the manifold surprise of every teacher and students – succeeded to lift the same weight at the age of twelve.

Gideon: “While I trained with Fogel, I began to observe the phenomenon that the first phase of a lift is always harder than the second. Since I wanted to make it even harder on myself, I developed my own method: I tied chains to the weights, and cans to the chains. That meant more weight to carry on the second phase of pressure, enabling the muscles to work that much harder.

“I eventually took this insight, which I’d grasped intuitively at Hadassim, and named it ‘A changing force,’ which I developed further while at my laboratory in the U.S., into a central concept of the computerized biomechanic discipline: *Dynamic Variable Resistance*. Every discovery of mine in adulthood was a derivative of this early concept.

The most senior athlete in Hadassim at the time was Shevach Weiss, who looked at sports as a way of being more Israeli. Danny trained Shevach at the discus and shot put.

Gideon: “I saw Danny and Shevach throwing this rubber disc, and I wanted to try it. Chilli and I were shown how to hold and throw it – it wasn’t easy. The thing flew a distance of only ten meters or so. Shevach turned and twisted like some kind of Greek god, and his throw was colossal. It made a huge impression on me. I really wanted to throw like him, but I just couldn’t do it. So Shevach arranged the disc in my hand the right way, and suddenly it was like a spirit had infused itself in me. I became attached to the disc. It was also the first time someone had tried to help me, and I didn’t want to disappoint him. I wanted to be much better next time. But I didn’t have a disc to train with – I practiced with stones. I found one that was shaped like a disc; I threw it like a disc, like Shevach and Danny showed me. The stone was surprisingly sharp, so I ended up cutting my hand. Two days later, during a sports session, Danny let me throw the real disc. He saw the cut on my hand and asked me what happened. ‘I was practicing with a stone,’ I told him.

“Danny let me have the rubber disc, which weighed 1.5 kg (the regular disc weighs 2 kg). It made my life crazy like a rock concert. I couldn’t stop throwing it; I slept with it at night. A kind of dialogue developed between me and that disc. It was true love.

“At first, Chilli threw farther than me, just as Asher Barnea threw the shot-put farther than me. So I was obsessed with beating them. I found some instruction books. They were certainly more interesting for me than the bible. Tomi Shwartz-Shacham, the GADNA instructor who eventually replaced Danny as our athletics teacher, found books on disc throwing in English for me. The author was Kan Doretti, who was a world-renowned trainer at the time. I asked Yosheph Tanner to translate every word for me: the description of the proper throwing angle, of the right chest and leg movements and coordination, etc. The world champion at the discus at the time was Al Orter³⁷, who won the Olympic gold medal with a fifty-two meter throw. I told myself that whatever was good enough for Orter was definitely good enough for me, and quickly focused in on his style. Having to study the discus throw from a book, with scant familiarity with the language, cultivated my endurance and patience as lifetime traits. I started throwing the way I saw it demonstrated in the book. Both Shevach and Danny wondered about my style, saying my way was wrong. But I persisted. And sure enough, I was soon outmatching both Chilli and Asher. I didn’t have enough time to surpass Shevach before he left Hadassim: his throw was forty-two meters, one of the best in the country. Danny got surprisingly angry after Shevach surpassed his throws, and he stopped throwing altogether. I knew that I might not be as gifted as Shevach, but I kept telling myself that I could outmatch him too if I could dig deep and fulfill my full potential. I was so absorbed with both sports, and my will to improve, that I even analyzed different styles and techniques in the middle of class. While they spoke of the biblical King David, what I imagined was a scene of triumph, with me as an athletic King David in my own right.

“My father didn’t take me home on vacations, so at first I used to cry when I was alone in the village at night. I only had older students to spend time with on those occasions. I used to go to the bathroom and cry.

“In the ninth grade, Tomi Shacham, who’d replaced Dani Dasa as athletics director, was much impressed with my dedication. He suggested that Rachel send me to a summer prep course for sports instructors in Holon. Not only did Rachel agree with the idea, she financed it with 20 liras. The course was led by Yariv Oren³⁸, and included Anatomy and physiology. Not surprisingly, I was the youngest student there.

“One evening, the students all held an arm-wrestling tournament. One of them came out far ahead of the rest: Zeituni, a recent immigrant from Iraq. He was big and strong, while I was just an outside observer that night. After he soundly defeated everyone, Yariv

³⁷ Orter attained a personal unprecedented achievement when he won the discus event at four different Olympic Games – in Melbourne (1956), Rome (1960), Tokyo (1964) and Mexico City (1968). Only Carl Lewis parallels him. Due to the American boycott of the Olympic Games in Moscow in 1980, Orter did not participate in them.

³⁸ Subsequently the Sports authorities manager.

asked if I'd like to give it a try. So we got into position, and Yariv counted 'one, two, three, Go!' But Zeituni couldn't move my arm. Suddenly I grew confident and brought his arm down. It happened so fast that it almost seemed like a sleight-of-hand. Everyone just stood there in silence. Zeituni blushed and suggested, a little sheepishly, that we change places. But I took him down again, like some miracle from above – a little boy with thin arms. He was fifteen and I only thirteen.

'What kind of exercises do you do?' Yariv asked.

I told him I didn't really exercise much, that I only worked with the discus.

'Who teaches you?'

I spoke with Tomi and asked him to let me visit Yariv's school every Tuesday and Thursday so I could train. 'Bring Iris along,' he said. Iris' event was the 400 meters. I brought Miriam Sidransky along, too, and she destroyed all the other students. Soon, training became a religion for me. While Iris and the others didn't travel to Kfar Saba regularly, I hitch-hiked to the Stadium there every Tuesday and Thursday. I trained myself that way for a year, until I became the top discus thrower and shot-putter in the country.

'In 1956, there was a terror attack near Hadassim. Terrorists had infiltrated Kfar Saba from Kalkilia and murdered several people, cutting off their ears for good measure. Fear descended upon everyone in the area. Even still, I continued to train in Kfar Saba per my normal routine. Yariv was generally present with me at the stadium.

'I practice so hard, yet nothing changes,' I complained. 'Do you think I can make the Olympics?' I could almost see myself competing on the world stage, at that moment, and my eyes filled with tears.

'Believe me: if you get that far, it won't be a fairytale. And if you practice hard enough, you'll get there. If you could make it here more often I'd be able to train you better. Nothing can beat willpower, Gideon.'

'I practiced even harder from that moment on. One weekend, during tenth grade, Iris, Chilli and I went to see the Israeli athletic championships. The national champion, Baruch Habas, was there, as well as Uri Glin, who was related to Iris. Glin managed a 48.03 meter discus throw, breaking the Israeli record. I turned to Iris and said, 'Tell Uri that *this* man here will break his record soon enough.' Everybody laughed at me at the time.

'So I worked even harder. No other athlete in the country, it seemed to me, was willing to dedicate as many hours for training as I did. The dual goal I set for myself was fifty meters at the discus, and sixteen meters at the shot put. Accordingly, I changed my name to 50-16. Happily, most everyone at Hadassim complied with this change.

“By my senior year I was already the national youth champion, but I failed the graduation exams in bible and Hebrew literature on account of my long training hours. On the other hand, I got high grades in Mathematics, Chemistry and zoology, partially because my study partner was Micha Spira. So the two failures didn’t get me down too much. Much more relevant to my life was the one goal I had then: to represent Israel in the Olympics.

Gideon Ariel set the Israeli and Asian records at the discus – 58.03 meters – which held for ten years. The record was a notable achievement by international standards, as well.

Danny Dasa recognized Miriam Sidransky’s talent during the morning races he organized on the limestone path by the dining hall.

Miriam: “I always won those races. It drove Iris absolutely crazy. I also won the weekend races, the 100 and 200 meter runs. I came out on top in the Aliyat Hanoar championships. No one knew about professional training in those days. Danny Dasa himself wasn’t a trainer so much as a dancer and a dance teacher. When he left, Tomi Shachan filled in for him, and he truly helped cultivate me. He sent both me and Gideon to compete outside Hadassim. I had a very natural style of my own, and I achieved much with it. In the 11th grade, I was part of the Israeli youth team selected for the Maccabiah games. By the age of seventeen I was already competing in the adult bracket, even representing Israel in Greece and placing third in my event. I came in ahead of my fellow Israelis. At that point, Tomi really felt that he’d done all he could for me as a coach; he handed me over to Mordechai Mageli of Petach Tikvah. After him I moved on to train with Amitzur Shapirah³⁹ at the Hapoel Tel Aviv.

“I had a very pure, uncomplicated talent. It’s hard to say that I got my style from my trainers, but their encouragement was essential. Asa Eliav Mizrachi joined our class during junior year, and Tomi Shacham identified his ability and trained him into one of the finest Israeli runners of our generation. He was a member of the national team in the 100 and 200 meter events, and a partner in his team’s record-setting 100 meter relay.

“Hadassim also had superb basketball and soccer teams, both winning numerous metals in regional and national competitions. That was proof that Rachel and Jeremiah, along with Tomi and Dani Dasa, had accomplished Professor Moshe Schwabe’s vision of athletics as a symbiotic educational vehicle, helping to shape the first generation of Israel.

G. To educate through experience

Art in all its facets, together and separately, surrounded life in Hadassim in tandem with nature. The visual arts were manifest in Hadassim’s Babylon-inspired hanging gardens; their breathtaking flower structures were an architectonic work of art. Art breathed in and out of the residential units; it was part of a deliberate vision of restoring their lost childhoods to the children of the Holocaust. The art of painting was part and parcel of

³⁹ He was killed in the massacre of Israeli athletes during Munich’s Olympic Games, September 1972.

the rooms, bound to the children in intimate friendship. Hadassim brought the finest painting teachers into its community. Philly's art classes produced superior works that were actually sold in Tel Aviv's elite stores. Folk music and dance were combined as one by Gil Aldema and Danni Dasa. Gary Bertini brought classical music with him to the school; the modern dance art spoke to us through Greta Salus; Tzvi Rafael elevated the theatre arts to new heights.

Art in Hadassim was like nature itself. It reflected human nature. Jeremiah knew that the human being, unlike the animal, is rational; that the use of reason is not automatic, like instinct, but conditioned by the individual's choice to focus, to activate his consciousness. Jeremiah therefore viewed art consumption as necessary: he understood that Man's profound need for art lies in the fact that his cognitive faculty is conceptual, i.e., that he acquires knowledge by means of abstractions, and needs the ability to bring tie his widest metaphysical abstractions into his immediate, perceptual awareness. Art fulfills this need because it is a concretization of metaphysics, allowing him to bring his highest ideals down to the perceptual level and grasp them directly⁴⁰.

Shevach Weiss: "On the day of the founding of the state, May 14th 1948, I was a fourth grade instructor for unit A. I was still a thirteen year old boy. We sat together on the grass and listened to David Ben-Gurion giving birth to the state. Afterwards we performed a ceremony of our own: Rachel selected me to climb up to the middle floor of the water tower and recite the Declaration of Independence. Climbing up and down was actually very frightening. Israel Malchi, one of the teachers, trained me at it. It was an astonishing experience of integration. Avigdor Shachan and I would later write an article for the Zionist Youth Journal dedicated to the founding of Israel, 'The Sun is Rising in the Sky'."

"Jeremiah came up to me," recounts Shlomo Achituv, the history teacher. "'Shlomo,' he said, 'Yidishkeit and Judaism are both missing from the children's education. How about this: we can have traditional Friday night meals with flowers and challas, and you can give a traditional religious prayer, so that these kids can feel what every Jew feels in his home on a Friday night.' I hesitated about praying in a secular context, but Jeremiah persuaded me. From then on I was nicknamed 'Vaichulu' [from the Kiddush prayer, of the genesis of the sixth day]."

Rachel and Jeremiah wanted to cultivate high culture in Hadassim, and they searched for the right man to coordinate this activity. They chose Moshe Zeiri.

For three years – from the end of 1945 until the end of 1948 – a home for children of the Holocaust was kept in Selvino, a small village in the Alps, northeast of Milan. It was directed and instructed by soldiers of the British Jewish Brigade. Moshe Zeiri was the central figure in the community, having instructed the children ever since the Allies invaded Southern Italy in 1943, at which point he dedicated most of his time to gathering

⁴⁰ Based on Ayn Rand's Objectivist esthetics, The Ayn Rand Library, Vol. IV, *The Ayn Rand Lexicon, Objectivism from A to Z*, edited by Harry Binswanger, with an introduction by Leonard Peikoff, Meridian publishing house, see the definition of Art, pg 37.

Holocaust children. About 800 children passed through his home and stayed there for different lengths of time on their way to Israel. Children aged 5-17 gathered there in Selvino from all over the ruins of Europe – from the extermination camps, forests, and sundry hiding places in villages, convents, and Siberian prairies.⁴¹

In 1948, Moshe Zeiri returned to Israel with his wife, Yehudit, and his children. By 1949, Jeremiah had already invited him to work as an instructor and cultural coordinator in the village. Yehudit joined the Hadassim staff as a kindergarten teacher for the workers' children.



Moshe Zeiri

Moshe Zeiri was born in 1914, in the little Polish town of Caputchinsa near Lvov, only a month after the eruption of WWI. He joined the Zionist Gordonia movement at an early age, and graduated from a teacher seminary in Lvov and was heavily engaged in theatre. Yehudit, his wife, talked about his career in theatre: “He was inclined in that direction ever since his childhood. And in a small town in Galicia, ‘theatre’ amounts to a wandering troupe which mostly performs in Yiddish”. His sister recounted that he had something of a sixth sense: he always was the first to know when one of these groups was in town, and was quick to assist in carrying their poor stage designs in exchange for free tickets. After a short time, he founded his own troupe along with his friends, performing in town as well as the surrounding villages. Meir Margalit was in attendance at one of these shows, during one of his trips to Poland. He suggested that Moshe immigrate to Israel and join the Ohel Theatre. But as a Gordonia member, my brother was more inclined to immigrate as a pioneer and join Kibbutz Shiller.

“There he continued his pursuit of theatre, performing plays with the Kibbutz children and the Aliyat Hanoar. In parallel, he appeared as a popular narrator in the neighboring Kibbutzim. After a while he joined the *Habima* studio under Tzvi Friedlander’s instruction, where he didn’t have it as easy as he did in a Kibbutz. He would wake up early, bringing agricultural products to the city, so he couldn’t participate in the course. He was so happy when studio members were invited to appear as extras in several Habima plays. He subsequently took a directors’ course, working at the port of Tel Aviv in order to finance his studies.

“In WWII he enlisted in the British Army, and together with the actors Hanna Maron and Yossi Yadin (then her husband) he founded a military troupe, performing for Jewish soldiers. The Troupe’s famous song was ‘All roads lead to Rome’”.

In Hadassim, Moshe educated through the theatre – he believed, like Jeremiah, that education works via experience. There was never a holiday without a play or a ritual of some kind. The young children would perform once a year, and once a year the whole village would perform in the ritual.

⁴¹ Aaron Meged wrote a book about the Selvino children affair, “The Children’s Odyssey in to the Promised Land” AM Oved Publishing House, 1985.

During the days of Chanuka, splendid rituals were held, with torch parades and choirs singing parts of Handel's Oratorio and Judas Maccabaeus. And who could fail to be excited by a play like "The Rebellion's Echo" or "A Porcupine in the Woods" on Tu Bi'Shevat [a minor Jewish holiday -- "The new year for the trees"]?

Sometimes outside directors were invited: Shmuel Bunim, who also worked on stage design, or Tzvi Rafael and his wife Haya.

There were also more modest events. Friday night celebrations and the Saturday third meals at the end of Shabbat. At dusk, the village would gather for the soft sounds of Gil Aldema's playing, while Moshe would read a Hassidic tale and everyone sang along softly.

The crowning achievement was the holiday of the first fruit's ritual, which became in the course of the years the village's primary event. The amphitheatre was built in its honor. There was nary a person in the village that wasn't involved in its preparations. First among them was Greta Salus, of course, who prepared wonderful dances to go along with Gil Aldema's music and Michael Kashtan's lyrics.

The first music teacher to settle in the village was Abraham Daus. His wife Elsa taught painting. He taught the Holocaust children their first Israeli songs. Roni, the wife of Abraham [Yair] Stern, LECHI's founder, taught piano. When Daus and Elsa left, the painter Yaakov Pintz began arriving once a week from Jerusalem to fill in.

Moshe Zeiri brought his friend, the conductor Gary Bertini, whom he first met in Selvino. Bertini founded the village orchestra in 1950, and everyone was allowed to join, the talented along with the less talented. He also founded a choir, which won an honorable mention in the Netanya choir competition. He brought classical music to the children. He used to hold regular Saturday morning music programs, providing lessons to go with the records he played for us, bringing his friends from the Philharmonic to give concerts and recitals. With Jeremiah's encouragement, Gary Bertini and Moshe Zeiri turned Hadassim into a musical youth village unlike anything else in the whole country.

Alex Orly: "Gary Bertini survived the Holocaust. He was a musician of international caliber, but he was a devoted teacher to us until he finally adjusted to Israel and embarked on an international career. His wife was thin and pale from tuberculosis. He was basically a fanatic as a teacher, he knew exactly how to harness the unique power of music to penetrate into a man's feelings directly, through sound, without external objects or pictures or even stories. He knew how to concretize the listener's most abstract consciousness⁴².

"We weren't exactly little angels. He decided that I would play the cello in the orchestra, and set about to teach me the instrument. He would simply go nuts if somebody played a wrong note, so we started doing that on purpose. The man worked day and night, without care for consequences – he even used to faint during rehearsals. Our teaching team in

⁴² Based on Ayn Rand's esthetics.

Hadassim was highly energetic, in every field. There's never been a parallel in any other institution to the combination of energies in Hadassim – not then or later.”

Moshe Frumin: “Zeiri and Bertini used to bring the IDF Orchestra with them on weekends. They were treated royally on Fridays, and then on Saturday mornings they'd perform for us. I remember best the flute players Eliyahu Gamliel, Uri Teplitz and Uri Shoham. The “Rinat” Choir used to rehearse at Hadassim. The greatest violinists in the world came to perform for us, including Yasha Heifetz and Yehudi Menuhin, on the platform behind unit D. The comedian Danni Kay performed on Hadassim's grass.”

I had some harsh criticism of Moshe Zeiri's work, which I made known to him and others. I thought his rituals were one-dimensional, too easily moored to propaganda and brainwashing. I told him that I had directed both *Othello* and *Hamlet* before I'd even enrolled in Hadassim, but he only mocked me, saying that I couldn't possibly have understood Shakespeare at my age. I suggested that he compete with me in analyzing either play during one of Saturday third meals. He declined the challenge. Much like Avinoam Kaplan and Shalom Dotan, he saw me as an arrogant and troublesome youth. Consequently he refused to allow me to participate in his various cultural activities. He positively cringed when Tzvi Rafael selected me for a principal role in the play “Spring Bells”. Likewise, he wasn't at all pleased with my research on the War of Independence. Michael Kashtan invited me to discuss my findings regarding the Hadassa convoy affair. For his part, Zeiri claimed that myths held the nation's spirit together, that tearing them down would hurt the texture of national culture – the very same texture we were working so hard to cultivate in our land. My response was that myth is an unfounded reality, a refined expression of lies. A culture founded on lies would inevitably collapse. When I said this, Zeiri became livid with me, almost disassociating with me completely. There was a stark dissonance between us, a strong confrontation between the power of his Zionist-artistic turbulence, allowing for lies in the political system, and the power of my intellectual turbulence, desperately engaged in the diagnosis of disinformation as the cornerstone of human reality. It was a huge blow to him when I stole the show he'd produced for the 1955 memorial of fallen IDF soldiers. Years later, I went to visit the drama library he'd founded in the Histadrut general council building. He barely even said hello to me. From Moshe Zeiri, I learned early on about the anti-critical culture which has overtaken Israeli society. This same culture lay behind the disaster of the Yom Kippur War, and that's just the tip of the iceberg.

In stark contrast, the actress Livia Chachmon gave a high appraisal of Moshe Zeiri. In her opinion, the man bestowed a valuable cultural heritage on us by means of ritual creation. He was responsible for all ceremonies, and through the power of ritual shaping, especially of the ritual of our third meals, Livia says she experienced the true value of theatre:

“Every Saturday we gathered for the third meal at dusk, ensconced by candle light at a long table covered in white cloth. Moshe would read stories and sing ‘The prophet Elija’ in his deep, sonorous actor's voice, with strict Hebrew pronunciation. Then every child would receive three solid chocolate squares.

“We used to see him walking on the village paths in his short khaki pants, his socks reaching up to his knees, wearing his ‘Trembel’ hat. His son Avner was in my older brother’s class, and they used to work together on the tractor. It was a matter of pride for me, it made him very much a part of my family. The holidays became meaningful events for me because of him. The theme of rituals and holidays was central in Hadassim for a good reason: it was a way of identifying with the world – an integrating experience for the whole village unlike any other.”



Livia

On the other hand, Livia thinks the underlying message of Hadassim was an ambivalent one: a valuable cultural-collective message aimed at recovery, through theatre and ritual and holiday ceremony – along with an unintentional collective-subconscious message of the terror of the Holocaust, imprinted in our cultural fiber through incessant horror movies.

Livia remembers Hadassim thus: “There was a strong identification with the Holocaust; the emphasis on fire during Chanukah; Shalom Dotan’s readings of “Peace from Modiin” -- it was really frightening.

“On the other hand, Zeiri’s theatre expressed the child’s world. I was utterly hypnotized by it. He always selected plays with the children in mind, with children as heroes. He let the children express and assert themselves in their world. When he directed ‘The Harmonica,’ that was really the formative event, the catalyst for my choice of theatre as a way of life. I fell head over heels in love with theatre. I was so energized by that play, even to the point that I can remember it better as an observer than the plays I actually participated in.”

The play is an integrated art form, in which music and dance have a dramatic function and are integrated into the plot. “The Harmonica” deals with the institutionalized youth’s archetypal drama: absorption. “The Harmonica’s plot-theme is about a child who can’t adjust. My brother played the role of the child who has the talent of Orpheus, the god of music, captivating the other children’s hearts and compelling them to love him. Music becomes an integral part of the dramatic plot. The harmonica itself becomes a ritualistic symbol. The folk dance in the drama embodies the collective-public-Israeli-sabra aspect, while the harmonica embodies the individual, who in turn is connected to the universal collective unconscious. Thus, the harmonica player didn’t participate in the dance. As a Sabra, I participated wholeheartedly in the dance. We worked with Zuki Hanania, who has taught for many years now at the acting school Beit Zvi. But it was in Hadassim that she began her career.”

Livia Chachmon remembers a broad spectrum of artistic experience in the village:

“Gary Bertini taught us to listen to music. Shimon Brown, the founder of ‘Jazz Plus,’ had us listen to Jazz music...but he also taught folk dancing – we debuted several cosmopolitan dances, like ‘Zorba the Greek’ and ‘Scenes from the Wide World’...And we learned how to weave – that was Philli’s artform. It was a kind of metaphysical



Gary Bertini

absorption by an osmosis of values, through an organized artistic environment that slowly became our natural environment. That's what the school was really about. Shaikha Ofir would show his sketches on Friday afternoons. Shalom Harari, one of the most charismatic instructors, used to train us with Shevach Weiss' riddles on Tuesday afternoons. Of course, there was plenty of Kishon to read. Moshe Zeiri used to bring Saadia Damari, and Ora Ido produced a play inspired by the bible. Being that I was so absorbed in theatre, I remember her very well, even if others have forgotten. This was the original educational conception: the joining together of competing arts."

Jeremiah Shapirah's high estimation of the role of musical education was due to Schwabe's influence. Jeremiah instructed Zeiri to bring the best music teachers to Hadassim, to organize regular performances, and to integrate music into the very fiber of our cultural life. The conductor Gary Bertini was Hadassim's first music teacher, but he was only there for a short while. Gil Aldema's own musical success came as the Israel Prize winner in 2000 for the "Hebrew Song".

Gil was born in 1928 in the Borochov Neighborhood of Givaataim. He was raised by a highly cultured family whose home was very much a center for artists, many of whom frequently performed in their courtyard. His mother had been an actress herself, working for the Ohel Theatre during the twenties. His father, Abraham, was a painting teacher for the Herzliyah Gymnasium. At the same time, their house functioned as a stockroom for Hagana military equipment.

Aldema began to study the piano at the age of six, and his gift for composition showed early on. He went on to study in the Herzeliyah Gymnasium, where he studied the violin and played in the school orchestra. He studied music theory at Menashe Rabinah's conservatory, where his harmony teacher was the composer Paul Ben Chaim.



Gil Aldema

During the War of Independence he served as a radio operator in the Palmach Yiftach Brigade. He had the misfortune of stepping over a mine in the Chochav Hayarden region, and his right leg eventually had to be cut off above the knee. He studied at the Jerusalem Academy of Music after the war, joining the Hadassim team upon his graduation.

Aldema: "One day I saw an older man wearing a Tembel hat walking through the entrance hall at my Academy. My colleagues Yael Tzimerman and Gary Bertini accompanied him. His name was Moshe Zeiri. Then, during recess, he suggested that I teach at Hadassim. He said, 'Take your parents and visit Hadassim on Saturday morning: I really suggest that you see this place before making any other commitments.

“I came to visit on a Saturday in 1952, toward the beginning of the school year. I saw all the children running around in every which direction, and I liked the place. So I said, ‘Okay, I’ll try this.’”

“I worked with a different group of kids each day. I’d come around to the entrance with my car, and the kids would fight over who got to carry my accordion. Then I’d hand out pages of music with lyrics, after which they would sing to my accompaniment on the piano. We used to prepare something for Chanukah: Michael Kashtan would write the text while I’d write the music. I loved it very much in Hadassim, but after five years I began to feel that I needed to move on and accomplish bigger things. I wanted to go to Julliard in New York.

H. The Troupe

The crowning achievement of artistic life in Hadassim was the dance troupe, which quickly grew famous in the whole country, winning major competitions. The troupe’s great success fundamentally hinged on two persons: the choreographer Greta Salus, and the dancer Micha Spira.



Gil Aldema and Greta Salus

Micha: “For me, the art of dance is the closest thing to the ‘real’. Dancing helped to neutralize the constant feeling of distance I tended to have between words and experience – a gulf on account which I never understood what my teachers wanted from me. I experienced the art as a physical kind of knowledge, through movement, not through words -- as a way of grasping Man’s deepest layers. My dancing is the unconscious, irreproducible thing, ungraspable at a single glance, in which I am fully alive in my complete self, the furthest thing from the corpses I was made to dissect in my anatomy classes. Dancing helped me find my *self*.”

Micha had never danced before Hadassim, and it was Danni Dasa who introduced him to the artform.

“Danni was an innately superior dancer. He was handsome, but there was also the rough, rugged masculinity that no one could match. Dancing was his whole world. I’d always been an excellent swimmer, but there was no pool in Hadassim. I didn’t play basketball, and I certainly wasn’t fit to be a runner. But I knew how to dance, I have a natural gift for it. And that’s where Danni started. I was swept up in it from the start. It just came so

easily for me, and luckily it was also a great social catalyst which increased my popularity.

“Then Greta arrived. The same immense love for dance that evolved in me produced the love between us. I was a rebellious youth, always looking to confront my teachers. There were many who wanted to fight me, to put me in my place. But Greta was like a big sister who both understood and appreciated me. She knew how to communicate with us directly. She was warm, though she’d had a tough life. Her daughter Naomi, also like me, grown up without father. Both of them lived at the end of the corridor in Unit D.

“She began teaching us unique dances, dances we’d never seen. But she was sabotaged, both within and outside the school. There were several women in the country who were vying for the title of highest queen of Israeli dance. One of them was active in Beit Hashita. Yardena Cohen was active in Haifa. Greta teamed up with Yardena, who had a



Greta

biblical and oriental cultural conception that Greta learned to accept. Greta produced a famous dance to commence every Shavuot ritual: *The Priestesses’ Dance*, performed by the priestesses Metuka, Ofra, Amida, Alisa and Lea, and sometimes Miriam Sidransky – all wearing white, symbolizing modesty. But there was no such thing as a priestess in the Jewish tradition. Greta was an originator. *The Priestesses’ Dance* was very slow, minimalist and lyrical, close to the style of the Japanese *Boto* dance – very intense yet restrained. Greta didn’t want any Hollywood elements in her style. She was both exciting and understated. One of her dances was inspired by my love affair with Ofra: *the Song of Song’s Dance*.

Gil Aldema composed all the music to Greta’s dances. The clothes were designed and made by Yafa Alferovitch. *The Song of Song’s Dance* was a half-ballet set in an orchard, with refined cloths, made of glittering textiles. It was elegant and beautiful.

“At the time, Yonatan Carmon was prone to a kind of noisy, flashy Hollywood style. Greta refused to surrender to it, though it was quite popular. She insisted on her own way. *The Reapers’ Dance* was also understated and refined. Greta was master of artistic dance, not folk dance.

“The Hadassim Dance Troupe was an important institution. All the most beautiful girls belonged to it, the most prominent of whom were Metuka and Ofra. The troupe was crystallized in 1952, when I was in the seventh grade. Most of the girls were in the eighth grade. It was the high golden age of Hadassim in every aspect. We performed the *Dance of the Wine* in the vineyards, near the Domim Tree in the village’s entrance. Greta was still a recent immigrant at the time. But she dominated us all the same.”

Greta Salus was born in 1910 in Teplitz, Czechoslovakia. A rare gift for her art was discovered at a young age, and she soon began dancing and teaching in order to help support her family. Her mother was a pianist, and the two performed all over the country. When she grew up she studied dance at the Mary Wigman school, which was centered in

Vienna but had a separate branch in Prague. Wigman, a pupil of Rudolf von Laban, was an exponent of German Expressionism, a movement that blossomed in Germany between the two world wars. Expressionism stressed the personal impressions of the artist and his anxiety with respect to a quickly changing world, the angst that followed from a declining faith in progress -- a faith that had permeated the 19th century. Wigman was close to the “Bridge [Die Brücke]”⁴³ group, and was befriended by its founder, Emil Nolde. Her brand of expressionistic dance was developed as a return to nature, a hope for the rekindling of the natural human movements so contrary to classical ballet. Before WWI Wigman and Von Laban had spent time at the Mount of Truth commune in Switzerland, and together they honed a style and technique of their own. They named it “Kinestetica” – a theory of motion, centered around the four components of movement: weight, flow, time and space. The space in which man moves was conceived as a three dimensional diamond in which there are rich and varied possibilities of direction and combinations of directions.

When WWI erupted, they were staying in Zurich as members of a *Dada* pacifist group opposed to every gesture of bourgeois culture and conventionality. After the war, Wigman founded a dance academy in Dresden, with a branch in Prague. The most prominent representative of this artistic trend today is Pina Bausch.

Greta Salus was an excellent pupil -- from whom Wigman expected a grand future. But in 1930 she quit dancing after she married the neurologist Dr. Friezt Salus. (There is something deeply mystical about the fact that Eliyahu Spira, Micha’s father, was also a native of Czechoslovakia, in addition to being an orthopedist and working with Friezt Salus in the same hospital.) In 1944, Dr. Salus was sent to Auschwitz and murdered. Greta survived after being transferred from Auschwitz to the Baddern work camp near Dresden.

“Mother returned to Prague,” recounts Naomi Bar Shavit, Greta’s daughter. “There she met Francis Lancer and became pregnant. Despite being older and relatively weak, she refused to abort the pregnancy, and I was born in 1947. We immigrated to Israel in 1949 and lived with her brother in Kibbutz Ein Gev for a while. Mother didn’t want to belong to a Kibbutz; she quit after two years and moved to Hadassim, in 1951, for what she expected to be a part time job.

“Mother met Yardena Cohen at a dance teachers’ prep course. Her own culture was thoroughly European, so Yardena inspired her with her Mizrachi influence. Every dance my mother created was based on a story, and she would then construct a special dance narrative within this story. The very first dance she wrote for the Hadassim Troupe wasn’t designed for Shavuot. It was a Polka constructed from the music of Smetna, a Czech composer. When she produced the *Song of Song’s Dance* she worked with the

⁴³ A group of German artists, architecture students, who published a manifesto demanding the cancellation of the concept of art as an end in itself, considering it only a means for the transmission of social theory. The name has an origin in Nietzsche writings, who in his book “So said Zarathustra” talks about a “bridge” as a central symbol, a means for a happier future. The group formally disassembled in 1913. The important artists in this group were Ludwig Kushner, Emil Nolde and James Ansur.

troupe in the vineyard, constructing a dance on the idea of women decorating themselves in the expectation of their men's return. *The Reaper's Dance* starts with girls dancing with plates made of straw.

Greta's life work in Hadassim was summarized by her two stars: Micha Spira and Ofra Shapirah:

"Greta arrived in Hadassim in 1951. Given the context of the times, the fact that she was selected as a dance teacher for Hadassim is somewhat surprising: she was a recent immigrant, a survivor of the death camps, lacking experience in Hebrew and Israeli life in general. Judging by Hadassim's mission of shaping a new Israeli identity after all that happened in Europe, how could Greta have been thought a worthy candidate for the job? Wouldn't it have been better to get someone younger, perhaps a Sabra role model for the new Israeli youth? It became clear in retrospect that she was a wonderful choice, and a rare success story indeed.

"There's no doubt that Greta was a unique and high caliber choreographer, among the greatest originators of the Israeli dance style, though she was never formally recognized as such. She wasn't part of the normal political 'clique' and she didn't belong in the mainstream trend of profession, which was prone to gimmicks borrowed from classical ballet or Yemenite and Slavic folklore. What she wanted was to discover the historical roots of the local culture. One by one, dances were born from her fertile mind, all of them tethered to a rich and varied repertoire: *A praise song, Reapers' Dance, Shepherd's Dance, The Song of Songs' Dance, Wine's Dance, Victory's Dance, Village's Dance*, and later *The Weavers' Dance, The Fishermen's Dance, and The Book of Ruth's Dance*. Greta, raised on the tradition of intellectual European culture, was able to recreate the Israeli-biblical story through the dance scenes of her mind's eye; indeed, it was almost as if such scenes had accompanied her since childhood. It was thus no accident that she chose Yardena Cohen, the great priestess of authentic Mizrahi dance culture, as her teacher. Yekke or not, Greta's Western techniques purified those oriental materials and reconstructed them with astonishing originality.

"Greta was utterly possessed by her ideas, and her enthusiasm inspired other wonderful talents for collaborative creation. The integrated art form was expressed with all its splendor in her work. Gil Aldema's well known folk songs were born together with Greta's dance movements; with Michael Kashtan, a real poet, whose texts gave vital meaning to the songs; with Yehudit Frumin, who watched over them like they were treasures, just as she watched over us, the troupe members.

"Greta founded the troupe which became the center of our lives and the source of our pride. Children who had never danced before could now become dancers. And this was her secret: like a master seamstress, she tailored her steps and movements to us – to our steps and idiosyncrasies. The result was that we moved proudly among the Israeli dance festivals – in Izrael Valley, Haifa, Dalia or Zemach. Greta's troupe became famous.

“The secret to her personal success is not so clear. She didn’t have a dancer’s figure, nor was she anything like the usual object of admiration. She was rather an object of mockery, on account of her poor Hebrew. She used the gong as a disciplinary tool, aiming it at people when she felt she couldn’t be heard over our voices. She would often kick out any troublemakers only to see them peeping through the window, as no one ever wanted to miss anything.

“And yet, somehow our spirits bonded with hers. She had a unique and deep insight into each of us, equally aware of our loves, secrets and troubles. And she cared. She was not only a true educator who often defended us against the other teachers – her colleagues – but she was also a personal counselor who could build our confidence. She knew how to identify with our psychological frailties as children. After rehearsals, we would frequently gather in her small apartment, absorbing all manner of culture from the big world that lurked outside of our little bubble: Music and art books, and especially dance books – books about great dancers like Isadora Duncan, Nijinsky, Martha Graham and Mary Wigman, her own teacher. It was there in her apartment that we fell in love with the art of dance; some of us continued to engage in it for the duration of our lives.

“Greta eventually left Hadassim and traded her dancing for two other arts: writing and painting. But her heart remained with the school, and she would often visit and stay in touch with the troupe, following the course of their lives to make sure they fulfilled the expectations she had for them. And they certainly did fulfill them, each in his own way: as public figures, artists and scientists, each kept his humanity. And that was her influence, her empowerment. It’s doubtful whether she really knew, late in her life, how deep her imprint was on our souls.⁴⁴

There was no small amount of intrigue behind the scenes, however.

Greta’s success made Zeiri look like a midget. He was no more than her assistant during the central event of the Shavuot ceremony. Consequently, he wanted to kick her out of the village entirely and replace her with someone else. Moshe Altshuler, the village treasurer, had his own motive for helping him: he wasn’t happy with the troupe’s expenses. This really was Zeiri’s “Agon” comedy in reverse: instead of struggling to realize the gods within him, he fought to annihilate an actually existing goddess like Greta. It was truly a microcosm of Zionism’s human tragicomedy. His intrigues revealed the psychology of a Mephistophelian⁴⁵, Zionist “actor,” a social climber and phony who would resort to diversion -- not only in a political-public context, but in a private one as well -- to expel Greta, the self made creator. Zeiri, behaving in this case in the fashion of a Homo Distractus (destroyer), as petty, second-handed man, a fraud without an identity of his own whose self-esteem depends on the esteem others grant him,

⁴⁴ Drora Aaroni and Shifra Kolat “Our Hadassim”(editors)1998, pg. 64-65.

⁴⁵ In the movie “Mefisto”, the superb Hungarian director, **István Szabó**, portrayed a figure of a known German actor, who “sells his soul to the devil” in exchange for his dramatic career’s advancement. He becomes an instrument of Nazi propaganda, a process which exposes his identity’s absence and its destructive power, like a “Homo Distractus”.

was the total and absolute opposite of Greta -- who lived as a liberated woman, raising a daughter out of wedlock.

He succeeded in convincing Rachel, and Greta was just about to be sent packing, at the very height of her success. But Greta fought back: She met with WITZO leaders in Tel Aviv, persuading them to overrule the decision. They even enlarged her budget, taking account of the importance of her projects for Hadassim's success. So at least the treasurer was placated. It bears mentioning, however, that Jeremiah also voted in Greta's favor – against his wife's decision.

Toward the end of her days, as Rachel lay sick at home, Greta was there at her bedside, applying physiotherapy to ease her pain. It was then that Rachel asked Greta's forgiveness, admitting to her that accepting Zeiri's demands had been the worst mistake of her life.



The Troupe

Lidia Chachmon's current view of the confrontation between Zeiri and Greta is more mature:

"Today I can see that Moshe Zeiri's marketing was more internal, whereas Greta's was more external – much like our Israeli nation and the Diaspora. The Festival of the First Fruits was a propaganda stunt

which many tried to use for their own benefit.

Greta was "Channel 2" and Zeiri was "channel 1".

Greta was very dominant; she was a powerful Yekke woman, unparalleled in our society today: her power came from discipline. Zeiri was the man of the theatre, the word, the text, whereas Greta's language was the body and the silent expression of the eye. Her ballet discipline was simply stronger than his theatre discipline.

"Ritual was used in Hadassim in order to give rise to the first secular holiday, and we poured our new, collective content into it, one of Jewish identity – all the values and symbols one can dream of...of humanism, of building the country, were imprinted through Hadassim's ritual... It was Greta's discipline that created a school, a language of rhythmical pulses...Her art came through the eyes and ears...while Zeiri's art –through the word. His were not the monumental plays in the old spirit of communism. His plays were centered around holidays, ritual, and the *third meal*. These are things which penetrate into the mind far more subtly. It was a unification through celebration of content, and it could only be accomplished by a people with an idealistic spirit, unlike today's egotism -- Hadassim's idealistic spirit."

Yehuda Amichai, one of the most prominent Modern Hebrew poets, spent a weekend in Hadassim. The Hadassim miracle which so fascinated him also inspired this poem: *End of the School Year in Hadassim*:

Here, among trees, their dark tops
Move like oaths and vows,
Like life cycles separate from each other
Accompanied by a melody, the big windows are lit
And open like pages of a pictures' book

The big iron fence, like wings
In an open-close flap⁴⁶.

⁴⁶ Drora Aaroni – There, pg 148.