

CHAPTER FOUR: Children of Distress

A. Without Motherly Embrace

Anyone who has grown up without a father and mother, without brothers and sisters, has seen conditions of distress. We are born into the world as premature beings, alone among the animals to require years of incubation. The parents' home is the natural setting for this process; the warmth and care we receive there is vital to our growth. At the same time, we are naturally drawn to our mothers' breast, eager for our fathers' counsel. A mother's kiss provides emotional fuel, while the father's pat on the shoulder prods us forward in the race. For the most part, the students of Hadassim had arrived at the school without such things.

Orphans of the Holocaust, like Ephraim Gat, had burst through their childhood shells in unparalleled distress, alone and unsung. But in Hadassim they were greeted with gentleness by Rachel Shapirah, and nurtured through their adolescence at the hands of Yehudit Frumin and Shoshanna Lerner. Rachel and Jeremiah chose the kind of teachers and counselors who could fill the void left by these children's losses, who could step into the shoes of their departed parents.

Avinoam Kaplan and Danni Dasa, both of them sabras, were there to offer praise and unflinching support; as was Sholomo Fogel – the field corps coordinator and hardened Palmach warrior – as were Michael Kashtan, Arie Mar, Shlomo Aचितuv and Zeev Alon. Rachel and Jeremiah asked these men to be fathers, not mere instructors. Thus was Hadassim not only a school but a home for the children of the Holocaust, and with clear goals and unsparing dedication Rachel and Jeremiah made our village into an unparalleled success.

They weren't philosophers. They weren't the sort of educators who preserved their insights in writing. Rather, the Jeremiahs were precisely the ideal men and women of action, who could apply their knowledge to demonstrate to the world how children who bore horrific scars could be lifted up, educated and set free to fulfill their original destinies.

Hadassim, as already mentioned, was also a home for Sabra kids whose families had either dissolved or else simply couldn't provide for them. These children bore their own scars, which required their own tending. One of them was Avi Meiri, a son of one of Petach Tikva's founding families. At the age of nine, after his father died in 1949, his mom had felt helpless to support her children and sent him away. Of the Sabra group to arrive in Hadassim, the child with the harshest background, by far, was Gideon Ariel -- the man behind this book.

While the predominant emotional state for the Holocaust orphans was one of deep shock, the principal emotional trauma for the Sabra kids stemmed from feelings of abandonment. Teachers and counselors were charged with pulling them together,

bonding them so that they would know that not everyone was against them, that they had a home in Hadassim.

Hadassim was also a place for a number of highly gifted children, whose parents simply lacked the means to further their intellectual enrichment. Home was simply too stifling a place for them. I myself belonged to this group. Hadassim provided me with a sphere of action within which I could criticize the way of things, dispel myths and dream of alternatives. But just as Hadassim was a good fit for this group, so too were we a good fit for Hadassim; we helped Rachel and Jeremiah realize the goals they had set for themselves.

Then there were the rich kids, born into privilege but sent to Hadassim in order to discipline themselves, to let go of their worldly goods and built up their hearts. One of them was Uzi Tzinder. His family owned a book-binding company, but their prosperous living didn't stop Uzi from being held back a year in school and bullying his younger brother. His parents decided that he needed a place like Hadassim to put him on the right track, and they were right. Uzi and the other brats were literally rescued by Hadassim from their softening and corrupting backgrounds. Hadassim toughened them up. The staff had a hard time of it with them, to be sure; Micha Spira (Professor Moshe Schwabe's grandson), for example, graduated from Hadassim only after a lengthy series of crises and disciplinary nightmares. Nevertheless, Micha was a central figure at the school, excelling with the dance troupe and thereby shaping the life that enabled Hadassim to become a leading Israeli institution.

The children that assembled in Hadassim, deserted and defiant, were therefore an improbable but dynamic mix. It would seem implausible that European orphans could engage in organic dialogue and form a creative community with Sabras and discipline cases, that all of these children together could eventually ascend to the nation's social elite. Most of them had arrived there with heavy psychological barriers, unproductive of a healthy development. But Hadassim made it happen. Understanding the phenomenon of integration between children borne of the Holocaust and Israeli children borne of distress – understanding how their disparate psychological shadows were neutralized – will enable future educational systems to repeat this achievement. If we can alter the course of deterioration for other such children today, if we can even partly stem that tide, we will reverse the earthly diseases of tomorrow, the destructive scourges of poverty and war, each of which originate with distressed conditions and unfortunate childhood backgrounds.

The Hadassim model will fit this endeavor better than any alternative theory. The super-theories of education in our enlightened countries should be derived from this model.

B. A happy woman

My first sight on my entry into Hadassim, in 1952, was a young black girl. The Ethiopian wave of immigration hadn't yet begun, so the African workers who are now a common fixture in Israel weren't familiar to our eyes then. Being black in those days

was still something rare, even bad, in our minds. A black cat symbolized catastrophe; evil witches were always portrayed in deepest black.



Six years later, when I served in a paratrooper division, a group of soldiers from Uganda and Congo trained with us. One of them turned out to be Idi Amin. Our meeting with them was surreal: they might as well have been from outer space, as far as we were concerned. Aside from the few African ambassadors serving Israel, blacks were still only seen in films. And yet, here she was in front of me, a black girl in Hadassim. I had to rub my eyes to check that I wasn't dreaming. Her name was Miriam Sidranski-Katzenstein; she was one year below me, in unit B, and apparently well adjusted and accepted socially.

I was part of unit C, with Danni Dasa. Without him as our instructor, Hadassim would have been an entirely different institution. The same evening I arrived, Danni gathered everyone into the club and said, "Rising time

Miriam Sidranski-Katzenstein tomorrow is at 6:00. At 6:30 you're to present yourselves on the kurkar [a trail of limestone] in front of the dining-hall for running competitions."

As with most kids, I had my own macho dreams of becoming an athlete, though I never gave it sufficient effort. I always considered sports as a means and not an end. For me, the ultimate arena was the swordplay of ideas, the eternal dialogic back-and-forth between the gods Moses and Demosthenes, in a competition for truth. But I loved running matches insofar as they stimulated my own intellectual fire. I readily adopted the Greek maxim: "A healthy mind in a healthy body."

That night I went to sleep with a happy heart, hoping that Danni could turn me into an athlete. Chilli asked me how fast I'd been able to go so far.

"Worse than the worst," I answered.

Chilli encouraged me: "Well, you just sit on my shoulders, then. We'll come in first together!"

Everyone laughed because I was big and Chilli small, and then we all fell asleep. I was the first at the kurkar the next morning. (I'm always punctual.) The black girl stood next to me. Everyone had presented themselves by 6:40, and then matches were held between the boys of units B., C. and D., ages eleven to thirteen. Chilli came first in the boys' group, and the black girl took first in the girls'. What was surprising was that she also managed to place third in the joint boys-girls race.

“Who’s that black girl??” I asked Gideon Ariel, in envious disbelief.

“Don’t ask!” he answered. “She’s the Hadassim Queen.”

Naturally, as I followed everyone to the dining hall for breakfast, my thoughts went immediately to the biblical Queen of Sheba.

Miriam eventually joined Israel’s national sprint team – when she was in the eleventh grade. She broke Israeli records in the one-hundred and two-hundred meter runs, and went on to represent Israel in the Tokyo Olympics along with Gideon Ariel.

Miriam was born in 1941, in the Belgian Congo, to Luisa and Yechiel Sidransky, an African mother and a Polish father. Yechiel had studied medicine in Belgium, so he was spared the agonies of Auschwitz as a government doctor in Congo during WWII. Miriam’s mother had died in a car accident shortly after her birth, and until 1946 she was raised by Congolese nannies while Yechiel saw to his patients day and night. In 1946, about half a year after WWII ended, her father returned to Belgium. In the meantime, she was sent to live in a convent, where she spent the next four years under a strict Catholic educational regime.

In 1949, however, one of Yechiel’s friends came to visit from his Polish shtetle, and he was shocked that a Jewish girl should live in a convent. He persuaded Yechiel to send her to the summer camp in Hadassim, then directed by Walter Frankel, the Jerusalemite agriculture teacher. The kids were mostly well off, sent there by their parents to experience a summer in paradise. Within a few years, Jeremiah had succeeded in attaching to Hadassim a reputation as an inland Garden of Eden.

Miriam: “I spent July and August of 1950 in Hadassim, and after that I told father that I was going to stay there. I decided that my place isn’t in some dark European convent, but in the shade of Israel trees. He went back to his Belgian projects, and later moved back to the Congo. Hadassim became my true home.

Miriam continued to live in Hadassim through her graduation, even through her studies at the Wingate Institute (Israel’s National Center for Physical Education and Sport). She refused to live with her father, because her dialogic existence in Hadassim had lifted her above the mainstream patriarchal values, above her contemporary civilization.

“There was a cultural gap between my father and me. He hadn’t raised me or educated me; I was an independent spirit, and here, suddenly, he wanted to tether me to his own ways of life.”

There was no vestige of discrimination in Hadassim; Rachel and Jeremiah had purged their community of the racism in the culture. Hence, Danni Dasa was able to identify and cultivate Miriam’s unique attributes. Miriam: “My skin color was treated as insignificant.” At the same time, fate had assigned to her the wonderful dance coach, Greta Salus. “When she first saw me in class, Greta came up to me and told me that I was a beautiful woman, that I moved beautifully, and she suggested to me that I should

take up dancing as an antidote to the masculinity of sports.” Greta guided Miriam with motherly intuition and helped her locate her feminine identity, something she had lost touch with in her infancy, when her mother was taken from her. The two of them, teacher and student, formed the mother-daughter intimacy that Miriam had always craved.

Years later, I would eventually meet Dr. Yechiel Sidransky during his temporary stay as a family doctor in my residence. I asked him what had originally moved him to send Miriam to Hadassim.

“My work in the Congo was my life’s mission. I didn’t have time even to learn to care for her...Hadassim seemed a convenient arrangement, and I suppose it turned out an ideal setting for her. The result speaks for itself.”

In 2005, we met with Miriam and her husband in their home in Kfar Shmaryahu. We sat together on their balcony and drank orange juice. The grass that filled the outlines of their estate was pristine green, and the trees blossoming. Today, she works in physical education for the elderly – and it’s safe to say that we don’t often meet anyone as irresistibly happy as this woman. “Hadassim meant the world for me. I’d never felt so good, never been received with such open arms. I was really loved there. And what is life without love? That especially was what shaped my personality and helped me as an athlete. I’m a happy woman today, only by grace of that magical first home.”

C. From The San Diego Orphanage to Municipal Corporations’ Development

Hillel Grudzinsky-Granot, nicknamed ‘Chilli’ in Hadassim, is easily one of the great optimists in the whole land of Israel. He sees the positive in every aspect of every issue, and the same goes for his appraisal of Hadassim. It is men like Chilli who always keep in



mind the ideal Israel -- Israel as it was meant to be -- during moments of national crisis. But if the profession of psychology and the wisdom of conventional educators are to be trusted, his early childhood in South America should have made him a pessimist – an angry, frustrated and hostile human being, rather than the ebullient man we know, a man whose joie de vivre is manifestly contagious.

Chilli was born in Buenos Aires in 1939, the second son of Yael and Meir. His parents had emigrated from Bialystok, Poland, in 1938, and settled in Argentina with their daughter, Hanna. Of course, it turned out that they’d left the frailest country of Europe on the very eve of WWII, leaving behind the death and destruction that would easily have befallen them. That fact

Hillel Grudzinsky-Granot

alone constitutes the deepest source of Chilli’s optimism, who senses that events have been guided for him by an angel from on high.

He was a one year old child when his family picked up and moved again, this time across the Chilean border, where his father opened a furniture store in San Diego. Two years later his father was dead, leaving the mother and children, an eight year old daughter and three year old son, alone in a new country and a still unfamiliar language. Though Yael continued to run the store, Chilli was sent to a Jewish orphanage. His most intense memory of Chile is still the spontaneous and heart-lifting jubilation of Chilean Jews on the day the UN General Assembly voted to ratify Jewish statehood in Eretz Israel. That event, incidentally, is the kind of moment that anyone from the time will remember; they remember it the same way Americans of tomorrow will begin asking, “Where were you on the morning of 9/11...?”

In 1950, Yael Grudzinsky decided to immigrate to Israel. She had sent the children, now ten and sixteen, ahead of her to their new home, until she could sell the shop. Hanna and Chilli would spend over a month at sea, transferring to another boat midway to their new homes. Their aunt sent the boy to Hadassim within three days of his arrival, while the older sister went to the Ayanot Youth Village.

Chilli: “I was ten years old when I settled in Hadassim. I only spoke Spanish, so I couldn’t communicate with anybody. I didn’t understand a word of what people were saying to me. But there were two languages I learned immediately: fighting, and marbles. They called me ‘Chilli’ because of the way I held the marbles and because of where I’d come from, and the name stuck. There were many kids there from Romania, Poland, and the Arab countries, so everyone but me could at least talk amongst their groups if they didn’t have any Hebrew. What the hell was I going to do? I was a short, sheepish, chubby, freckled – all the ingredients of a sorry childhood. And I was terribly homesick; all my relatives in the country were too busy for a visit.

“It was Rachel and Jeremiah Shapirah who rescued me from this, giving me the personal and familial attention I needed. Rachel asked Yehudit Zeiri to give me Hebrew lessons, even though she didn’t have a word of Spanish. Happily, I found I could start chatting with the other kids in a matter of weeks.

“The way I see it, the miracle of Hadassim consisted in a community of both wisdom and cultivated friendship. My very first Friday in the village, the children were all gathered on the fields, the boys in their white shirts and khaki pants, the girls in blue skirts. Those uniforms helped stress the ideal of social equality: no distinctions between rich and poor, masters and servants. Everyone danced in one collective formation, as Danny [Dasa] instructed, and though I didn’t speak their language I could still join hands in the circle. That kind of Folk-dancing was the first Israeli language I came to understand; it was a unifying language for all of us.

“Our social counselor was Avinoam Kaplan. He’d been a commander in the Hagana before the state was declared, and he continued on as an officer in the IDF. And he was also a natural science teacher in the village, a capacity that enabled him to spread in us the love of the land. He embodied, for Sabras and foreigners alike, the genuine Israeli.

“My mother immigrated after a year. I was so excited at the prospect of seeing her that I was speechless for two days, but then she told me she wanted me to leave the school. I refused. I’d fallen in love with the Israeli spirit in Hadassim; I’d finally come into my own, I was good at sports – I was really part of something there. Danni Dasa had built up my self-esteem as an athlete, and it wasn’t long before I’d lost weight and made good friends like Gideon Ariel. In time I’d become active as a labor coordinator, a member of the student committee and its representative in the student council. I’d begun tutoring younger kids in the eleventh grade, which helped finance my studies independently. All of these roles helped solidify my identity with others; Hadassim was an



Gideon and Hillel

irreplaceable experience in this regard, bonding me with my fellow Israelis to the end of time. And just as it made me an Israeli, it was also where I met my wife, Talma.

“When I joined the IDF I became a major, and then a senior officer. When I was done with the army I headed human resources for the cities of Kiriat-Gat and Petach Tikva, where I helped economic development by involving urban corporations in the public sector. Local companies, of course, are the financial level the government needs to manage life for its residents and further social goals. That type of thinking was only possible for me because of Hadassim.”

Nurit Gantz was Chilli’s girlfriend at the school. She tells us that he was “popular, a great dancer and a capable social leader. It’s a pity that he didn’t go into politics. He could have raised the bar for Israeli politicians.”



Chilli: “Nurit was a real beauty. We were together only briefly, spending time at the movies or sitting in the quiet on the garden bench. That’s what dating consisted of in those days. Two months went by and I was asked to replace one of the counselors in our unit, so it was part of my job to start off the communal meals with “Bon Appétit.” And that led to an incident. One day at the dinner table, as I opened my mouth to commence the meal, Nurit interrupted me and started giggling. I asked her to stop, but she just kept laughing. So I stopped talking to her. She sent me a letter, asking me what was wrong, why the silence. Anyway, I explained why, and that was that...”

“Chilli and I have been friends for 56 years,” says Gideon. “As far as I’m concerned, he represents more than anyone the magic of Hadassim: an orphan in a strange land, surrounded by strange customs and a stranger language, became the center of our social life – so much so that Hadassim would be *nothing* like it was without him. I even doubt that it would have reached the academic heights the way it did if it weren’t for him. Had he gone to another school, without the principle of dialogue

and creativity, without the dynamic social engine of Hadassim, his social gifts would have gone undiscovered and undeveloped. At the same time, whoever owed his personality to Hadassim owes at least part of that to Chilli!”

Chilli has always been a friend to everyone. The three of us, Chilli, Gideon and I, recently went to visit Maghar in the Upper Galilee, to discuss the Hadassim model with the educational directors there. Chilli immediately established a rapport with the three Druze brothers who represented the village, members of the Dagsh family. In addition to educational matters, he offered to help solve their budgetary problems. It was obvious, from his entire attitude, that he did it out of comradeship; his whole presence made it easy to talk and share ideas openly, and it wasn't long before we started planning for a Hadassim-type school for the Druze, Christians and Muslims in the village.

D. “I thought, how come successful people graduated from Hadassim”

Abraham Korkidi, Rosa and their three children enjoyed a happy, prosperous existence in the city of Bergama, Turkey. Abraham had his fingers in various businesses in town, and there came a day when one of his workers told him that the authorities were planning a pogrom for the next day. He wasted no time dragging his entire family to Eretz Israel, relieved but penniless. Back home, the worker's advice had proven sound, and meanwhile the Turks took little time disposing of Abraham's erstwhile possessions.

Despite their sudden break with their lives in Turkey, the family continued to flourish in Eretz Israel; Abraham was successful in his new business, and was soon blessed with three more children. The youngest, Esther, would become a good friend of ours. She was the same girl we were so smitten by in the Filtz Café on the Tel Aviv shore, on the morning of the Normandy landing.

Esther: “I lived my first years under the shadow of my mother's terrible illness – breast cancer. She was always in bed, in constant agony, so the atmosphere at home was one of burden and anxiety. I learned to read at a very young age, and from the age of four I would wile away the hours reading romance novels. That was probably why it seemed a natural thing to me when Rafi Shauli¹, one of the neighbor kids (and a year older than me), used to tempt me into the restroom, where he would undress and coax me into playing sexual games with him. Unfortunately, that was something that made it hard for me to get close to boys when I was older.

“My father used to take me along to the Filtz Café on Fridays and show me off to his friends, flaunting my beauty. That was where I met Gideon Ariel, Asher Barnea and Uri Milstein for the first time. I liked Gideon: He was handsome, in his own quiet way, and he radiated a kind of inner strength. Uri asked if I'd heard about the Normandy landing, and I answered that it didn't interest me. Uri scowled in contempt. I told him, pointedly, that he was being a little conceited...”

¹ Subsequently a famous Israeli restaurant owner.

“I saw Gideon again a few days later, and he invited me over to his house. I was hoping that he had something in mind for us similar to what Rafi Shauli was so fond of doing, but what Gideon really wanted was to show me a secret door in the wall and what was behind it: guns. He told me, very proudly, that his father ‘kills the British.’ I ran home straight away and never said anything to anyone about it -- not until today.

“My sixth birthday came and went without any celebration, as mother’s situation was really terrible. She was finally taken to the hospital a few days later, where she died within days. I was kept in the dark about this, told that she was alive and awaiting recovery in the hospital. They told me that for the next nine years.

“I was sent to a boarding school in Naharia as soon as mother was out of the house. I spent three years there, and they were good to me. The director of the school, Gershon Dahas, was extremely friendly. More significantly, though, he was active in helping refugees safely off their boats and away from prying British eyes. The whole school was part of the general operation, doing everything possible to stump the occupation authorities.

“Meanwhile, father had remarried, and his second wife ended up controlling most of her property. I absolutely despised this woman. He brought me back home when I was nine, and my step-mother had me live in the utility room next to the garbage. Father had become sick, too; he spent his last two years in bed, weak with heart problems. I was eleven when he passed away, at the age of forty. I was sent to Hadassim.

My stay in Hadassim was certainly an interesting period of my life, though by no means a perfect one. I couldn’t dance, I was bad at sports; I didn’t have a boyfriend. I was incredibly lonely, and horribly jealous of all the girls strolling back from the orange groves with hickeys on their necks. So I found refuge in books.”

That’s what Esther told us; yet she continued to reflect, in almost the same breath:

“I always asked myself why Hadassim had bred so many successful people. I was the youngest of five siblings; my parents had died young from severe illnesses, which made for a difficult environment for a child, to say the least. My brother and I were fortunate to be sent to live in boarding schools – the others suffered more than us. Hadassim was huge benefit to me, in that respect: the secret of its success for children like me – the reason we were able to persevere and become successful -- was the solidarity it provided for us in those difficult times.

“I never went home on vacations. I always joined my friends, as all of us felt so comfortable with each other. They were the true family and support that we lacked from our parents and homes. It was a safe and easy atmosphere.”

The Hadassim experience gave Esther Korkidi the power to overcome her fate. There she was free to roam the expansive library, using knowledge to build up her self-worth. And that led her straight to her university studies in English Literature, where she

continued to excel. Learning the value of labor in Hadassim was therefore an indispensable stepping-stone to her successful thirty year career as director of the export-import division of Gideon Oberson's company.

But the fundamental ingredient of her upbringing in Hadassim was: Love. The dialogic connection between teachers and students she found there would ultimately lead her to Shiatsu therapy, where she could fulfill her yearning for attachment to the world.

Esther had arrived in Hadassim with a negative self-worth and sense of life, as well as a negative predisposition to the world in general. Negative energies tend to obstruct positive action. So while Hadassim gave her necessary social support, it didn't immediately cure some of the dark spots she'd accumulated in her early childhood. It would take her another forty years before she discovered her calling in Shiatsu. On the other hand, it's doubtful whether she would have gotten there at all without Hadassim.

Esther: "The toughest woman in Hadassim, Fili Alon – almost everyone was intimidated by her – showed me love; she said I was an ugly duckling, that I would turn out to be a beautiful woman someday. I was assigned to her work station, where I found a means of escape in manual labor. That experience later helped me see that my hands were my connection with the world.

When we interviewed her in her cozy and picturesque apartment in Jaffa, we found not only a workstation with an office but also a partner for conversation, someone who was willing to open up and answer any question, and even ask her own. We found someone who smiled intelligently but not cynically; someone who could even take a bad joke. As we parted, it struck Gideon and me that, while we may have missed her all this time, she hadn't missed us. Hadassim's contribution to her life was to help her discover herself.

E. Theorizing from Situations



Asher Barnea and Gila

I had five close friends in Hadassim: Asher Barnea, the freckled boy who arrived at the village in the sixth grade, the same time as me, in 1952; Gideon Lavi, who arrived a year later and was a year ahead of us; Daphna Urdang-Hadanni, a classmate whose intimate friendship with me was transformed to hostility after I ended our relationship after graduation; Arie Mar, our social instructor in the ninth grade, who along with Gideon Lavi helped implement my Lamed Hei project; and Michael Kashtan, my literature teacher (and another contributor to my project) with whom I kept in close contact until his death.

Gideon Lavi wasn't terribly athletic, but he was certainly one of the wittiest and sharpest men I've known all my life. His witty repartee was a symptom of the *Homo Ludens*²: a high intelligence mixed with joy de vivre and playfulness – a high-powered spontaneity. These combined in him with attributes of the *Homo Criticus*: a probing, satirizing cultural depth. He probed and diagnosed the fallacies of his age, and he had the courage to point them out above the objections of others. He cared not a wit what other students had to say about him, because he found they had nothing meaningful to say. People like Gideon Lavi are rare in our world; in Hadassim, he was one of a kind. The moniker "Philphel," meaning both "Pepper" and "Philosopher," stuck to him there. He was the top Chemistry student in Arie Mar's class, and this was a teacher who ran roughshod over his students with his harsh grading policies – the class average was 3.8 (on a scale of 10). Such notoriously low grades reflected his attitude toward grades as such as much as his estimate of his students' mental acuity. The professor was even more cynical than Gideon. Nevertheless, the boy always managed to score a 10, so by junior year he'd already skipped ahead to the advanced senior level course.

Gideon: "Arie Mar was detached and cynical -- yet we admired him for it. We'd never met someone so etched with irony. Most of the other teachers were properly serious men; Shalom Dotan, especially, had a kind of exaggerated austerity. That could be why he lived so long, whereas Arie Mar died very young. Even Jeremiah, for his part, was so serious that he considered it beneath him to smile. Into this mix came Arie Mar, a totally foreign element. He came off as American; he was light, almost complacent; he was a world apart from the other adults.



"Whenever a student called someone a 'Shmok' [Yiddish for "penis"], Arie would chide him: 'If you don't want something in your mouth, keep it out of someone else's.' He carried himself like he didn't have a care in the world, like some American movie star. He completely won us over with his biting sarcasm. He'd sit there in the middle of class, his right leg crossed over his left knee, almost carelessly. It was inevitable, then, that he wasn't terribly liked by his colleagues, and that he would experience tension with the directors.

"He was a man after our own hearts. After mine, at least."

Arie Mar

Arie Mar lived in the corner of unit E, at the end of the corridor. He, Gideon Lavi and I made our own little triangle, a circle of philosophical discussants, to reflect and theorize from our own situations. The three of us engaged in dialogue on the model of the *Homo Ludens-Criticus*. We'd sit for hours with him in his kitchen,

² **Homo Ludens**, or "Man as Player," was a book written in 1938 by the Dutch historian and cultural theorist Johan Huizinga. The playful human develops his potential and discovers his capabilities through play. Play is identified with freedom of action and presupposes independent and original thinking. According to Schiller play is a human achievement and only play can produce the whole personality from the human potential. Schiller imprinted the saying: "Man is absolutely human only when he plays".

sharing biscuits and coffee, surrounded by steam from Chava's [Mar's wife] rare cabbage soup that Mar loved so much. And we shared something else -- there was no distinction of age or wisdom between us, not during these moments. No aspect of any issue was left unexplored, whether educational method, the Arab-Jewish conflict, the spreading corruption, the role of mathematics in human knowledge, Quantum theory (including Schrödinger's Cat), or anything else. Prominent in our discussions was the topic of the Israeli state and its structural flaws, a subject not commonly delved into in the 50's. It was the era of myth, when most Israelis still believed that we were living in Utopia.

These conversations would frequently stretch long into the night, and they eventually stimulated my high point at Hadassim – my reconstruction and dramatization of the Lamed Hei episode.

Sometimes Shoshanna Lerner, our counselor, used to join and listen in to our dialogues in Mar's apartment, and her keen observation during those moments still impress me today. Even today, in 2006, she remembers the Lamed Hei performance with such crystal clarity, and such palpable interest, that she nearly convinced me my own memory of it was imaginary. She brought it back to me, alive, because of her rare capacity for love.

Yitzhak, Shoshanna's husband, had fought the Nazis in the Polish forests as a member of the resistance. Shoshanna would often retell his brave stories to us as our mouths hung open in rapture. It became clear to me then that the real Jewish heroes had fought in the European wilderness in WWII, not in the Katamon neighborhood of Jerusalem in 1948. And then the question occurred to me: why should Yitzhak Lerner be a lowly storekeeper in Hadassim, while Yitzhak Rabin, the man who slept while the Katamon battle was fought, was an IDF Brigadier General and head of the training division? After thinking over it for a minute, I raised the conjecture that Israel has built a mythological culture, one that would someday collapse. Arie looked at me for a second before his lips curled into an amused smile, and he said, "The solution, I suppose, is to leave the country – so long as it's still possible."

This time I didn't know whether he was being serious, or just his usual ironical self. For me, emigration was never an option.

F. "Crazy men can also cry"

Daphna was always interested in joining our philosophical circle. We never allowed it, as her over-sensitivity was something of a burden to us. At the time I was determined to break up with her, as our relationship was becoming an anxiety-inducing wreck. Unfortunately I waited until I was leaving Hadassim to follow through with it, when she came for a last visit in Tel Aviv. It was a painful moment for her. Luckily, Arie took a liking to her, and Gideon even stepped into the boyfriend role for a short while. But the final decision as to whether she would join our discussions was mine, and it was a resounding "No." I take it this contributed to the grudge that she bore me until the day she died. Today it strikes me that I made a terrible mistake. She had a deep and complex

personality, and dialoguing with her would probably have ingrained something valuable in all of us.

Daphna was a very talented girl, after all. Her imagination was rich and her capacity for abstraction plentiful, though she lacked the biting wit and peculiar shrewdness that seemed a badge of honor in our group. On the contrary, Daphna could be quite vulnerable. She was easily hurt over innocuous things, and it was burdensome to keep reassuring her and revitalize our friendships with every little spat.

Daphna believed in the conflict model of friendship: emotional proximity resulting from emotional crises. Sometimes we'd just laugh it off, but we could also be rather impatient and angry. She was in the habit of reciting her own poetry, and took to complaining that her mother liked her sister better (she called herself the "ugly" one) -- none of which we took very seriously. She seemed childish to us. In retrospect, her oversensitivity was an expression of a truly poetic soul, perhaps her only real means of survival. Metuka remembers her as a brilliant writer, who simply lacked the warrior-spirit we valued in those days. After all, Heraclitus had taught us that war was the mother of all things.

So Daphna went running to cry on her friends' shoulders, and they, in turn, declared social war on our little group. Tamar-Heibish-Keshet still harbors hostility toward me



because of Daphna, after all these years. Metuka still reminds me of how I once tore an excellent piece of hers to shreds, bringing her to tears right in the middle of class. It looks like we marked her for life with our teasing; she went so far as to condition her attendance at one of our friends' parties on my exclusion from the event. (Apparently, her son, Ran, still rails against me on internet forums.) Before she died, I wanted to ask her forgiveness for the way I ended our relationship. And so I ask, here and now, that the quanta will transmit my apology to her through my readers' minds.

Tamar Heibish-Keshet lectured me on the phone, in 2005: "You misbehaved toward Daphna. The two of you were intimate, and yet you insulted her. You talked down to her. But this was a gifted woman, a wounded soul. She endured through some horrible things in life – her father fell in the War of Independence, and her mother couldn't deal with her, so she sent her away to Hadassim."

Daphna Urdang-Hadanni

"Daphna and I were indeed good friends in Hadassim," I responded, "We had a great time together, much of it even stimulating. She wanted to pursue the relationship beyond Hadassim, but it was simply out of the question. It was the 50's: no internet, no Skype, not even a telephone, so I didn't think we could really maintain anything serious while

we were apart. She couldn't come to grips with my position, and the separation was hard on her."

I gathered from Tamar's reaction over the phone that she wasn't too satisfied with my explanation. From her and Daphna's point of view – perhaps it's just a general feminine point of view – the answer was more likely that I had enjoyed Daphna's company, but not for her own sake, not for the sake of understanding her. In their eyes it was never a friendship on my part, only selfish exploitation. To them, when I say that she was angry at me because I broke it off with her, even that constitutes an exploitative, egoistic interpretation.

Chava Mar was a nurse in the village clinic, and she was often there with us during our conversation. One evening, as she was serving us tea and cookies, she revealed the location of an extra key to the sickroom. Our ears perked up at this nugget of information, and we soon began using the "secret" room to hang out with our girlfriends – separately, of course. God knows it was more expedient than a heap of straw...

One Friday night, I remember vividly, Daphna and I left the dance hall (where both of us had sat awkwardly; neither of us was too eager to dance) and snuck into the sickroom in the clinic.

"If you look for the light in my eyes, I'll be able to see the light in yours. That's what the theory of Dialogue means, after all," I said to her.

She answered: "I love you so very much, with the same intensity as a small child tastes the sugar on his baby tongue. Hold me tight, Uri...you are everything to me, and I'm everything to you...let's come together as one."

"But salvation only comes through war. War is the only thing that can truly connect 'others' [people who differ from one another].

"But I interview your exclusive future, or I am only accompanying it with a counterpoint³ or an echo. Sir Richard Burton, the great explorer of the Nile, of women's nakedness and the rain, was the true anthropologist of forgetfulness, of everything which others call 'living': they lived in the past while he created the blue bird in a more miraculous race than dream. Therefore he said that his best poetry was the one not written – like the blindness of the singer in the heart of his throat. I am trying to write my best poetry with you. Therefore I will probably never write it.

"Who is Sir Richard Burton?" he asked.

"What does it matter?! He's just a metaphor I created for you. He also happened to translate *A Thousand and One Nights* from the Arabic and the *Kama Sutra* from the Sanskrit. My mother adores him, so I discovered his book in our library. He was a man of both the pen and the sword – a genius – who fought in the Crimea and in India,

³ **Counterpoint** is a musical technique involving the simultaneous sounding of separate musical lines

explored Africa and discovered the source of the Nile. He was the only non-Muslim white man ever to penetrate into the forbidden city of Mecca, disguised as a dervish...”

I wondered at that moment whether I could ever dare to do what Burton had done; I reflected on the Lamed Hei, on the “Hadassah” convoy where Daphna’s father was killed. Danni Dasa had tried to rescue him by aiming his sub-machine-gun at the ambush all the way from Mount Scopus. In contrast, the assortment of Palmach men who arrived in Jerusalem the same day did nothing to help. Who was the ultimate Israeli, I asked myself: Shlomo Fogel, the veteran of the Palmach worshipped in all of Israel – or Danni Dasa, a member of the Jerusalem “Etzioni” brigade so widely reviled? And I knew that it would be my gift to the village, on Independence Day, to reveal what I’d learned about Israel’s true heroes. Everyone would soon know our secret – Arie Mar, Daphna and my secret.

But this was our night. The Thousand and Second Night.
We snuck into the clinic, quietly, like two conspirators. There was always the fear that we could be discovered. Then we locked the door behind us and opened the window shutters, letting the citrus-scent and full bloom of flowers fill the room with intoxicating verve. Unfortunately, I wasn’t aware of my allergies at that point – the pollen nearly made me faint within seconds, and I felt a quick jerk in the chest, like my heart was crawling up my throat.

I sat there on the bed, and I could only think to say, “Forgive me, there are no short cuts.”

“I’m in love with you for your intellect, Uri. I love you for the searching animal within you, your willingness to give anything up for everything important.”

We sat together quietly for a while, and then I began to recite one of my Aunt Rachel’s poems:

*Looking upwards from below...
Thus
With the sad and surrendering gaze
Of a slave, an intelligent dog.
The moment is full and pure.
Silence
And a hidden longing
To kiss the master’s hand.*

“It’s an accurate description of intercourse,” she said.

“Do you feel like trying?” I searched her for an answer.

She didn’t respond. She felt a desperate need, in that moment, to whisper one of her own poems. I wanted badly to make love, though somehow she excited my mind more than my body. She was a mystery to me. I was still in the process of discovering women

then, and here was a woman who loved me but wouldn't reciprocate physically. It was an inert kind of love, almost indifferent. That's when it occurred to me that surrender was a necessary condition for love. She would surrender intellectually, spiritually – but not physically. Those triadic elements are necessary for true love, at least for me.

Today I think I understand why her body didn't surrender to me: she experienced love as a need, a desperate need that she projected onto me, not as an unbearable and irresistible joy. I was a means for her, not an end. But it all felt quite different then, when I was young. She might not have been sexy, but she was still a woman who loved me in her own way, and that was attractive. So as she kept reciting her short lines, seemingly oblivious to me, I moved closer. The poem was a lament about her love-hate relationship with her mother and sister. The lines revealed that she felt rejected by her family, that her sister got all the affection, that her mother, an art collector and gallery owner, was disgusted by her over-cerebral daughter. The hatred of intellectuals is a common phenomenon. Daphna didn't know how to cope with it, and was looking for me to help. Her friends were eager to show her kindness, of course, but she desperately needed someone who could understand -- someone to empathize with her.

“How's your relationship with your mother?” She asked innocuously.

“I suppose I'm the beloved son,” I answered. “She certainly doesn't hold back her love – it's probably even excessive. It's a problem when a mother feels so much love that she forces her way on a child, no matter what he can or wants to do.”

Daphna looked at me with what was clearly envy, and as she began taking off her shirt she said, “I'd be happy to exchange your life for mine. Even here, everyone seems to be against me.”

“The skirt also,” I commanded, and she obeyed.

We were fifteen years old then. I was already determined to leave Hadassim at the time; Daphna wasn't going to keep me there, for sure, though I was happy to pursue the dance of love in the meantime. I was reading Plato's Dialogues, where I found the notion that truth could be found through love. I still hadn't learned that Plato was referring to love between men.

As she lay there next to me, naked, Daphna told me that I was ugly. Naturally, I asked what could attract her to me, assuming she was telling the truth. She answered with a wry grin; she was still bitter at me -- she wouldn't forgive that I wasn't reflecting her in my eyes. As we sat naked together on the lonely sickbed, staring at the stars, we said no more that night.

At four in the morning we came back into our building in Unit E, disappointed and dejected, and we parted without saying goodbye – she to the girl's wing, and I back to the common room. I knew that she deserved to be happy, but she was absolutely livid. Happiness is the very peak of an “I-Thou” dialogue, so the people who qualify as truly

happy are genuinely few in number throughout the whole country. That night was a lesson for me that the dance of love is a precarious one; that it can lead to great sorrow as well as happiness. The dance of love doesn't allow for a middle ground. At the same time, one would have to sever one's own wings to avoid causing pain altogether; and then there would be no mountains, no chance of peering at the big bang and surviving a big fall. A middle ground would merely serve as our graveyard, which our enemies would happily replace with a small lot once they've conquered our lands.

As I sat down in the common room, I grabbed a copy of one of the "Davar" newsletters spread out over the table, and began writing a kind of summation of what life had taught me.

A crazy man can also cry
Though his cry is more a groan
And his tears don't taste of salt
But who will taste an insane tear?
A pitch dark street
In the sober-minded sleeping city
I know it well,
We are old friends
The pavement is too hot
To be the man's bed
And the light post -
His pillow.
A crazy man can also dream
And his dream is simple and ordinary:
A woman in a gown and a couple of kids
And a smile not tinged in irony
But a voice can already be heard shouting:
Crazy man, go away!
And hands pull on his beard.
His eyes are glimmering
His head is pulsing violently
He is forever chained
To a dream⁴.

When I was finished, tears were welling up in my eyes. "I'm not like the others. But am I really crazy?" I asked myself. Just then I felt the warmth of a body breathing behind me, and a hand cupped my shoulder. I knew it couldn't be Daphna; her palm had always pressed hard and clumsily, while this one was soft and caressing. "Uri," I heard counselor Shoshanna Lerner's gentle voice.

Shoshanna and I shared a non-verbal, secret dialogue, one that continues to this day. She'd always seen the spark within me, and somehow I felt that she would always be faithful to me, come what may. This woman had also lived through the Holocaust, and

⁴ The poem was published in a literary journal during the early sixties, as well as in my 1963 poetry anthology "After All" (Kiriath Sefer publishing house)

back then I was already looking to understand the enigma of so horrible an event, to counter its future spread.

“Would you like to recite your poem to me?” She said.

“It’s not a poem, really. It’s my testimony.”

At this, she kissed me on the cheek, and said: “All sorts of adventures still lie in store for you, I can see that...”

As I read out my lines, tears began gathering in her eyes, too. It was already six in the morning, so she led me back to my room for an hour’s sleep before wake-up call.

As I opened the door, Gideon looked up at me, wide awake. “Uri, where have you been, eh How many girls did you manage to fuck?” He asked, laughing uproariously.

“I fucked myself,” I answered.

I rolled from side to side in my bed, unable to sleep. I kept coming back to my misfortune, which in the final analysis turns out not to have been unfortunate after all.

I didn’t keep any of Daphna’s poems from those days. In 1975, she published a book of poetry for children. The title poem, which the book itself is named after, is, “Mrs. Frog cries in the bathroom.”

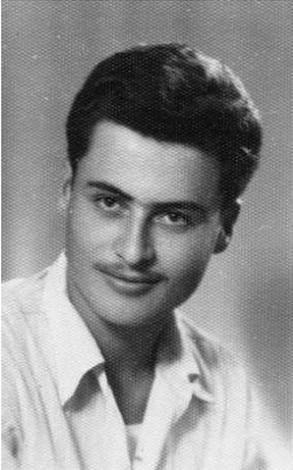
Mrs. Frog cries in the bathroom
Cries in the kitchen and cries in bed,
But if she stands unrivaled throughout her whole pond
In making an omelet
And though her cakes are always a grand success
And her house always glitters
And she is elegantly adorned
With every charm
Why then does she cry?
Who has all these and a lovely husband
And pleasure, too, from her dozen children
And also status?

Quite the autobiographical poem, no?

G. From Matzpen Till God

Arie Lavi, the gardener from the Achuza neighborhood on Mount Carmel in Haifa, brought up his son up with a leftist education. In the two years we had together in Hadassim, Gideon Lavi’s leftism wasn’t blatant, partly through my influence – the left is a manipulative parasite: it melts whenever confronted with heat. After I left, however, it was a whole other story. Though he disclaimed leftism during our recent interview, the

nature of his political activism has been there for anyone to see. It was born of his father's influence, of his friendship with Arie Bober, and without a doubt our own little philosophical-critical "club" at the school had its say on his development as well. He was subsequently active in Matzpen (The Israeli Socialist Organization) together with Arie Bober.



Arie Bober

Arie Bober was born to a poor family in Haifa, in 1940. His parents were actively religious, as his father served as a cantor at the synagogue. He was eight years old when his father died. Shortly thereafter, his mother sent him and his sister, Chava, to a religious boarding school, only to send back for them eight months later. After another few years, they were sent away again, this time to Kibbutz Kfar Ruppin as "outside" children (children who aren't native to the Kibbutz, and have to be adopted by other parents there). According to his lawyer, Avi Bardugo, "His life started as a Greek tragedy – his mother gave him up and favored his sister. One day he discovered a document his parents had written up in preparation for their

divorce (which became moot when his father passed away), in which he found that his mother intended to keep her daughter and for her son to remain with his father. When the father died, she gave all her attention to his sister, giving him up completely"⁵.

Gideon Lavi: "Matzpen was the 'Sabra' branch of the communist party, founded in 1962 by several dissidents of MAKI [The Israeli Communist party], who had challenged the leadership of Meir Vilner and Moshe Sneh. These included Moshe Machover, Oded Pilavsky, Akiva Orr, Aharon Bachar and Chaim Hanegbi, the latter coming up with the name "Matzpen"⁶. The principal aim of the faction was a solution to the Israeli-Arab conflict and self-determination for all in the region. Their involvement with the social struggles in the country came later, with the Histadrut [the official trade union] as the principal enemy. The Histadrut had consolidated its role as simultaneous employer, worker's union, and mediator in trade disputes, and Matzpen wanted to found an authentic and independent trade union as an antipode."

Arie Bober wasn't so much a leftist as he was an ego-maniac when I knew him at Hadassim; he acted like the wisest man in the world, but he was willing to exploit his sexuality for political survival. He talked a big game, echoing all the leftist mantras, and at the same time he was surrounded by a whole slew of beautiful women, each of them under his spell. Metuka was one of them: "Arie Bober came to us from a Kibbutz in the north, in the seventh grade. His experience was of a rejected child, as he had already been through several institutions. He had a surprising mastery of English; he was charismatic, an autodidact – a handsome and irresistible intellectual. I fell for his charm.

⁵ Neri Livne, "Haaretz", 5.16.2003

⁶ Given the history, it constitutes an historical irony that "Matzpen" now refers to the magazine of the Manhigut Yehudit ("Jewish Leadership") movement headed by Moshe Feiglin.

He'd always felt unwanted back home, always sent from one place to another; his family was always looking for a 'solution' for him. One byproduct of this, however, was that he had learnt more about sex than I could even imagine. An older woman had instructed him.

Nurit Gantz: "Arie was in love with women. He was a real gentleman: knowledgeable, engaging, always making an effort to endear himself. I wouldn't put myself at risk with such a person, and he wasn't my type anyway."

Gideon Lavi: "He realized way back in Hadassim that he could make a living from various ladies' devotion to him. Once, when we were hanging out, he mumbled something about all his women, how he had always prayed to have his way with them as a child but that 'you should be careful what you pray for.'

"So there was always some besotted female worshipper willing to support him, to the point that he never became independent. He died while still indebted to half the world – most of them women, naturally. He tried to make his living translating some science fiction essays, and Ouspensky's "The Search for the Miraculous" and the like. He replaced Marx with Ouspensky after he was thrown out of the party [Matzpen]. His new esoteric guru's philosophy served his superman-complex well, providing him all the support he needed for his self-worship and illusion of personal growth. He radiated charisma, and displayed the propensity for being generous despite not having a penny to his name."

In our view, Arie developed addictions to sex and mysticism as a post-traumatic reaction to abandonment. By a similar mechanism, his exaggerated charisma helped provide him with an illusion of his genius, as compensation for the early trauma. Clearly he wasn't the only one to do this, in Hadassim or elsewhere; nevertheless, his personality and good looks made his later addictions add up to an idealistic icon in the eyes of his followers and worshippers.

It looks like Hadassim failed to neutralize Arie's distresses – perhaps it was the fact that he only stayed with us for two years. The testimony of his girlfriend, Nurit Barmor, offers a glimpse into the source of his wounds, the resulting addictions and involvement in cults. The virulence of those wounds can be seen in the numbing effects of his behavior on his girlfriend.

Nurit: "I came back from Poland at the start of junior year, right after summer break, and immediately started seeing Bober after he stopped going with Metuka. We were in the same drama class, with Bomba Tzur, and we used to walk back together and argue endlessly. So there was an intellectual friendship there that led to an attraction, but he seemed like having sex with the brain before actually having sex, which was tiring.

"We had a lengthy relationship. He accompanied me to the harbor when I left for Poland again, and he was still interested in me when I came back; but at that point I'd already decided that our relationship was too demanding. I broke it off with him as he walked me

back to my room, at two in the morning, and he told me he didn't want it to end. Then he fixed himself on the grass outside my window and sat there where I could see him, to make me feel for him.

"He had a bitter streak, characterized by self hatred -- which subsequently led to the hatred of his people. He ended up involved with the New Left in the U.S., and we got in touch again when I became pregnant, after which he came to visit frequently. Around that time, there was one occasion when he came to pick me up from work and we started arguing about the philosopher Ayn Rand, whom he adored. He started calling himself an objectivist, and joined Uri Avneri in 1963.

"Bober had a rare intelligence; he was extremely gifted, but his personality worked against him and eventually led him to start hating his people. His father was taken from him and his mother rejected him. She wanted to keep her daughter but not him.

"He wrote to me once that 'my mother is more important than my matriculation exams.' He needed validation. His intellectual activity was all meant to put him in the center of things. He got what he wanted as a history teacher; one of his pupils, Micha Shagrir, told



Arie Bober and Gideon Ariel

me that they all greatly admired him. He was an eminently charismatic autodidact." Bober came to believe in the doctrine of the war between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness, and became a good friend of Moshe Kroy. I met him around Kroy's social circle in the philosophy department at the Hebrew University. His magnetic hold on people was a thing of the past; it was Kroy who was a kind of guru to him at that point. Kroy was sharp enough to refute an argument without holding to a position of his own: his was the shallow kind of intellect that Plato had warned against when he'd forbidden anyone younger than forty from studying philosophy. The same danger holds true with respect to the Kabbalah. I remember telling Kroy, during one of his meetings, that he was moving toward a dead end and heading for a fall. Bober burst out laughing and said I shouldn't be taken seriously, but Kroy only shrugged him off and pursued the argument with me. He seemed to agree that I'd found his Achilles' heal. Later, I remember watching Kroy interviewed on television and nodding my head as he spouted that the Sons of Darkness were searching him out to kill him. By morning he had already disappeared, and his body turned up several days later.

Gideon Lavi had his own words regarding Arie Bober's psychological dependency and its deleterious effects. "When Matzpen split, Arie Bober remained with the Tel Aviv faction. But even there he was bitter and was always quarreling with them, so they kicked him out. Then he went to Jerusalem, to Sharem Al Sheik, and took up with a girl there – until she'd had enough of him. So he moved on to the Shaar Hagay farm and quarreled with everyone there, too. Only Debora Ben Shaul would talk to him, and she even supported him for a while, until it was finally enough for her, too, and she threw him out. That's when he came to Rosh Pina to live with me for a while, until I found a rent-free place for him. At some point he even started paying rent, at ten dollars a month. He made a little commune there, inviting people to stay on as his guests. It was the 70's, when many of these communes became the thing in the North. There were marijuana plants all over the place then, as tall as Eucalyptus trees."

The lawyer Lea Tzemel was his girlfriend for a year while he was still with Matzpen. She recounts: "With all his spirituality, he was still interested in power. He'd been able to tame his appetites and live in poverty – he'd only eat a little bite of something here or there, add lots of marijuana and that was enough. But he still kept his tongue sharp and his criticism biting. He was an ardent student, and he loved teaching – the younger generation was important to him. They followed him around like their guru and he would read to them and enthrall them with his speeches. You couldn't deny that he had undergone a serious transformation: from an urban bohemian type to a man of nature. He'd show me some new beautiful thing every time I'd come for a visit; there was definitely some kind of inner struggle, some fundamental change in him. His conversation turned from politics to spirituality and God, and in the end he leaned toward the Jewish religion. He was still healthy when I saw him on one of my last visits, and I remember hearing him say he wanted his daughter, Gaia, to see the Simchat Torah ritual at the Synagogue. I was shocked.⁷"

We, on the other hand, weren't shocked at all. Bober embodied that distinctively Israeli metamorphosis of the Frankfurt school and the Mount of Truth -- the inevitable jolt that happened when the rupture in the Israeli left between mind and body, the materialist Marxism of Matzpen versus New Age spiritualism, could no longer be contained. It was clear to us that Arie Bober and his friends in Matzpen were the spiritual children of Martin Buber and his following in the Talbieh School. Yossi Beilin, along with his friends in 2006, is merely one more branch of the same family tree. It's reasonable to assume that Arie Bober was drawn to the Talbieh way of things by way of a distressed childhood and severe emotional abuse. It shows something not only about him but about the school, as well as the origins of its power.

Let us now turn from our sad promenade on the life of Arie Bober to Gideon Lavi's first political footsteps.

Lavi: "Arie Bober served as a sabotage quartermaster in the navy while he was a chemistry student at the Technion [Israel Institute of Technology]. At some point he'd had enough of Haifa and transferred to Tel Aviv. He became friendly with Nathan Yelin-

⁷ Ibid

Mor, the editor of the magazine Etgar ["Challenge"], and one of the three ex-LECHI leaders, as well as Gabi Lachman. Both of us worked as technical assistants on Etgar's editorial board, so we weren't contributing any essays. But we knew that Uri Saar, the critical editor, was the same Uri Milstein who was studying philosophy and economics in Jerusalem at the time.

Arie was very jealous that Uri was publishing his essays together with Uri Avneri and Amos Keinan – it upset him to have to settle for the role of Nathan Yelin Mor's messenger boy. Uri Avneri was the financial backer for Etgar. Haolam Haze [a Israeli periodical] inspired us. Nathan Mor was an important man, and we were willing to work hard just to remain in his presence. We wondered how Milstein had reached a position of equality with him on the magazine.

"Working for Etgar gave me the opportunity to meet Chaim Hanegbi, an offspring of the venerable Jewish community of Hebron. He liked to claim that Hebron was his personal possession.

"Matzpen was just the sort of movement Dostoyevsky memorialized in *The Devils*. The setting: thirty ideologically armed men – sitting in a small room, talking. The group published a book, *Peace, Peace and There Is No Peace*, under the pen name "A. Israeli," where we reiterated all the repeated efforts by Arab countries to make peace while our leaders rejected them time and again, secretly, apparently because they considered it contrary to our interests.

Chaim Hanegbi won Bober over to Matzpen with a good cup of coffee. I followed him there to see what it was like, and what I found was heated political talk and flier campaigns. And yet, what was written in Matzen thirty-five years ago is the language of discourse today: two states, for two nations. That's where the ideas came from. A bunch of Trotskyites, and nice girls with provocative dresses – an alternative to the unfeminine, pioneer-like women's fashion of the day. Sexually we were still puritanical, however; the focus was on politics -- the clothes were merely decorative.

There was no sense of humor in Matzpen. We were hard-lipped Trotskyite Marxists; we read Chinese newspapers. Our spiritual ancestors were the Talabieh men, especially Martin Buber (who was nothing like Bober).

And so it continues: we are the spiritual ancestors of Peace Now [the Israeli Peace Movement], Yesh Gvul ["There Is A Limit"], the group that has shouldered the task of supporting refusenik soldiers, and Four Mothers. Even Arik Sharon ultimately came around to our view. We won.

H. The Learning Disabled Child Becomes an Educational Wizard

Gideon Lavi was born in Haifa in 1938, to Arie and Miriam Lavi. His parents had emigrated separately from Germany only four years earlier, right after Hitler's climb to power. Arie had trained to be a gardener in Germany, and that's how he made his living

in Haifa. He was a fifth-generation German in an assimilated, secular family that had embraced Zionism. Arie had already come to Israel prior to WWI with Hashomer Hatzair, on a pioneer stay at the Kibbutz Maoz Chaim in the Beit Shaan Valley, but realized soon enough that the lifestyle didn't suit him.



Gideon Lavi

In 1942, when Lavi was only four, his mother died from Typhoid fever. Arie had rushed her to Haifa's British medical officer and begged for antibiotics to save her life. The man answered: "You make me laugh. There are soldiers wounded in battle who've waited four months for this."

Gideon Lavi can remember the constant sound of Beethoven and Brahms on the kitchen-radio; he remembers sitting on the high chair, his mother busy cooking something on the stove. Listening to music – especially chamber music, where dialogue is such a crucial factor – would occupy him for the rest of his life, and enhance his mind. It would help him when it came time to understand Carl Jung's language of mythology, which he read in the Kibbutz library of his youth. It would help him understand the languages of chemistry and physics later on and

into adulthood, and even help him season and prepare the different mushrooms he collects in the woods of Rosh Pina today.

Lavi: "My first foster family was rather unconventional, and helped to add unique components to my "outsider" mentality, beyond the fact that I was an orphan. My father handed me over to a woman whose husband had returned to the Soviet Union for ideological reasons, and where he was living out of wedlock with a communist train worker. My foster mother lived on the edge of Kiriat Chaim, close to the train station, and raising children was her livelihood. There was bright big picture of Stalin right there in the living room. I used to hang out in the courtyard and play with the other neighborhood kids. One of them was Alisa Gur, who grew up to be Israel's beauty queen. She was already beautiful back then, and she taught me what love was.

"The train station was a big attraction, and every Saturday we used to run next to the train and send it off to Beirut waving our handkerchiefs.

"When I was six, my father whisked me off from Rosh Pina and dragged me off to a religious boarding school in Kiriat Bialick. I didn't like the environment there, and it didn't like me, either. I mastered reading and writing before all the others, so I was bored the rest of the time.

"Two years later, I was settled in with a foster family and a secular school. This was during the period of the War of Independence. I was an eye-witness to a bombardment of an Arab munitions convoy moving between Kiriat Motzkin and Kiriat Bialik; every last window in both towns was shattered in the explosions.

“Physical abuse was my new foster family’s stock in trade. When my father found out about it he quickly moved me to the Kibbutz Ein Hashofet, which was a step up, but still no great pleasure – I was the “outside kid.” The kibbutznicks thought they were sons of gods, which meant that I was practically invisible. But there was a good library, at least, so I spent a great deal of time reading, mainly about mythology.

“When my father realized I wasn’t doing too well in the Kibbutz, he decided to take me back home. He was remarried about the same time, but the marriage failed after only a few months – partly on my account, I’m afraid. I felt terrible at my new school in Haifa, where the educational counselor soon advised my father to place me in a learning-impaired school in Pardes Hanna. That place didn’t even have electricity, and most of the kids there were Moroccan immigrants who built up their own protection racket. I endured it as best I could until the ninth grade, when I finally moved to Hadassim.”

When Lavi arrived in Hadassim, he was classified as developmentally disabled. But the label didn’t make any impression on me or Daphna, or Arie Mar. In our eyes, Gideon Lavi was a sharp kid, worthy of conversation. He was a perfect fit for Hadassim’s educational conception, as embodied in our little circle, which combined existence and knowledge, values of discipline and improvisation – the combination of intellectual inquiry and playful dialogic creativity that power the spirit of Plato’s Symposium. It was a model without which Einstein’s creative process would be incomprehensible.⁸ Hadassim was a hotbed for the kind of cultivation that was needed for Gideon Lavi’s rare precocious abilities to flower. The fact that it allowed for those abilities to redound to our benefit is illustrated by the following story.

Gideon Ariel: “I was looking for friends at the time, and Gideon Lavi became a good one. He was the best chemistry student – while I was the best thief. Lavi asked me if I could somehow steal some Sodium and sulfur, and with his help I ended up getting a nine [on a scale of 10] in chemistry. So while we certainly pulled it off, we almost exploded into little bits in the process: I suggested that we should build a laboratory of our own. We co-opted an old Arab house, and I went off hunting for tables and minerals. He told me everything we needed, and I stole accordingly.

‘I’ll show you how to make nitro-glycerin,’ Lavi told me.

“We worked on it all morning. Two hours later, when we were done, he tossed away the heated test-tubes -- and the house exploded. We were lucky not to explode ourselves, which would have happened if the tubes had remained in his hands. The destruction was horrendous; we ran away as quickly as we could, and somehow lived to tell the tale.”

When I came back to visit Hadassim fifty years later, I discovered, near the stables, an old Arab house with broken, soot-covered windows, the last remains of that explosive

⁸Einstein spent most of his school days in play rather than attending lectures. His theory of relativity was the culmination of his regular bicycle rides by the lake together with his dialogic back and forth with colleagues in crowded cafes, both vital for his development.

incident. Some people, unlike Daphna, are willing to play and explore, even if it endangers their lives. There just isn't any other way to be human.

When he was finished at Hadassim, Gideon Lavi did his bachelor's in Chemistry at the Technion, and subsequently worked as nutrition engineer and Chemistry teacher in the Higher Galilee, where he guided hundreds of students through the subject. The learning-impaired child had become an educational wizard: every last student of his passed the matriculation exams. None of them required "special education," since they were being taught by a man who embodied the Hadassim spirit.

I. "It's Still Open Season on Us"

Nadiv Weisleib arrived in Hadassim from Netanya in 1954, the year I brought the Lamed Hei to life. I'd dedicated hours upon hours to studying Israel's wars (the War of Independence in particular) through reading and in ongoing conversations with Michael Kashtan, Arie Mar and Gideon Lavi. Nadiv was three years younger than me. Danni Dasa and Gideon wanted to enlist him in sports and he seemed interested, but that didn't rouse him from what seemed like permanent sadness. When I asked him to become a research assistant in my project, however, he reacted with uncharacteristic passion. I assigned him the task of summarizing all the books dealing with internecine violence between all the underground factions in the run-up to statehood, and evidently I'd hit the bulls eye. Those very struggles were engraved in his identity, and they were the root cause of his sadness.

Nadiv was born in 1943 in Tel Aviv, to Yoseph and Yehudit Weisleib. The family moved to Netanya after a few years. His father was a LECHI activist, and had to stay on the run both from the Hagana and the British authorities. Yoseph would hide with his friends in the citrus plantations of Raanana while the police searched his South Tel Aviv apartment.

When he found out he had a son, he wanted to name him after his father; his friends, however, begged him to choose a name from a Zeev Zabotinsky's Beitar poem, "Gaon, Nadiv Veachzar" ("Excellent, benevolent and cruel"). In mid-September of 1948, when LECHI partisans murdered Count Folke Bernadotte, the Swedish UN mediator, in Jerusalem, Yoseph (along with several others) was arrested and held in prison without trial. When he was released, he drowned at sea on a trip to the beach with his wife and child. Nadiv was only six years old.

"My mother didn't keep in touch with the LECHI people. She clearly wanted to keep quiet to me about the underground struggle," says Nadiv. "She felt abandoned, frustrated by the lot she was dealt in life by sticking to my father. She made very little money as a social worker assigned to new immigrants, so our situation at home was pretty dismal. She worked all day, and I spent my time on the streets. By the time I reached the sixth grade, the Welfare Bureau decided to send me to Hadassim and subsidize my tuition and residence there.

“I was an outsider there. I’d come from a traditional family, and now all the teachers and counselors were secular, most of them leftists. Even many of the students were Marxists, while I was very right-wing. Still, my situation in Hadassim was good; no one forced anything on me – I was free to think and do what I wanted. It was home, with a warm bed and good food to eat, which was a far cry from my mother’s house. Rising up at dawn and going to work was wonderful.

“When they forbade us from going to the Independence Day parade in Tel Aviv, I organized a strike: I simply couldn’t imagine myself missing the parade. So I informed Rachel Shapirah, in the name of all the students, that we would abstain from the village’s celebrations. But I gave it up, eventually.

“I became active in sports: I joined the village football team; I became a swimmer; I ran long-distance. Participating in athletics helped stabilize my personality and built up my self esteem. That didn’t change the fact that I was an alien in any society where people like Martin Buber and Arie Bober are taken as the standard. That feeling remains with me today: the culture and media in Israel is predominantly leftist, so nationalistic Israelis are almost seen as illegitimate.

That, in my opinion, is the true paradox of Zionism and the State of Israel. I guess it’s still open season us.”

J. A Young Delinquent Achieves the Summit of the Legal Profession

Nahum Feinberg is one the finest Israeli lawyers, a first-rate specialist in the field of labor relations. But his was a transformation from a near-criminal to a high exemplar of his profession, and it began with Hadassim.



Nahum Feinberg

At the age of ten, Nahum was on the verge of being sent to a juvenile institution. His bemused parents, Amnon and Tzipora, feared that their son would only dig himself further down to the netherworld of crime in the institution. Luckily, the father was a senior government official, a man who discussed Plato with Ben-Gurion himself. Amnon Feinberg managed to delay his son’s transfer to the juvenile institution, securing an agreement from the police that Nahum would be allowed to enter Hadassim instead, for a trial period.

“Hadassim probably saved my life. I was walking a thin tightrope at the time, one that would have led me farther down the road to crime,” Nahum concedes.

Amnon and Tzipora immigrated to Israel from Russia in the 1920s. Both came from orthodox families but had left religion and become atheists. They even passed on celebrating Nahum’s Bar mitzvah, something he regrets to this day. They were married in the early 30’s and built their house on Tel Aviv’s dunes. Opting for security, both availed themselves of membership in the Histadrut and joined MAPAI (the Zionist-Socialist party). Amnon initially worked for the Mandate government, but was later

appointed to the positions of director-general of the farmer's union and registrar for the community cooperatives (both on Mapai's recommendation), while Tzipora was a secretary for the labor union's health fund. They were never committed socialists, but Bolsheviks they were indeed.

Amnon was a tough man, but according to his son he was quite gifted, almost a genius – despite his lack of formal education. However, that wasn't a cure for an unhealthy tension between the parents, one which made it hard to raise a trouble-prone child. Nahum lacked the vital intimacy he needed as a child at home. On the other hand, the parents were proud of their older daughter, Simma. As Amnon puts it, she's a conventional person who went through the usual "Sabra" life course: participation in the youth movement; teachers' seminary; a teacher; a happy family.



Nahum Feinberg

Nahum Feinberg was born in Jerusalem in 1944. Subsequently, his parents moved to Tel Aviv and discovered, to their horror, that their son was uncontrollable. The tallest kid in his class, he was hyper-active, contemptuous of study, always ready to fight his friends – a genuine bully – and an indefatigable destroyer of property, "clockwork orange" style. And that was only in the first grade. He drove his mother crazy. She kept repeating: "If you don't want to listen to me you can get the hell out of my house!" Nahum took her quite literally: he climbed to the top of a tall tree in the garden and hid in the branches the whole night, looking on, amusedly, as his parents, the neighbors, and finally the police searched everywhere for him. He was only satisfied when he saw his parents beginning to lose their minds from worry.

Nahum: "Back then it was called a 'street kid'. In my case, they called me 'key kid,' which meant that both my parents worked hard to feed the family. That was what 'middle class' referred to back then. To their credit, it should be said that they did all they could to bring me up in a worthy home, but it's clear they didn't know how.

"My favorite sport at the time was sticking bean cans underneath buses at the station, to ruin the passengers' clothes once the bus got moving and the wheels burst the slippery contents in every direction. When I wasn't doing that, I was often hurling pine cones at people from the roof using my own slingshot.

"The throw that finally broke the camel's back happened when I was nine: I decided to take one of the trucks parked on the street for a ride. I managed to drive it a few feet until I hit a wall. The police told my parents that I would have to be transferred to a juvenile facility, but they eventually compromised and let me go to Hadassim instead.

"To this day I find it hard to grasp how I survived those days at all, or how my parents could continue to love me with all the trouble I gave them. I know that their decision to send me to Hadassim when I was only ten was the right decision, and must have involved

emotional sacrifice – not to mention the expense, since I wasn't being subsidized by Aliyat Hanoar [the department of the Jewish agency charged with educating Holocaust survivors] or the welfare Bureau, as we weren't poor enough.

Nahum arrived in the fifth grade, when I was in the ninth. He stood out for his height, his obvious strength and energy, as well as his acuity. The height lent itself to the nickname "Giraffe," which stuck to him for a long time. Naturally, we added him to the village basketball team, for which I was a central player. We had some lengthy conversations in between practice session (and on our way to matches), and I saw that he had a piercing critical power, very much like mine. I began to feel that he was my alter-ego.

There was one conversation with him, during my last year at the school, that I remember especially. I was fifteen and in the tenth grade, while he was in the sixth grade. Nahum worked in the shed, while I was helping with dairy farming, and one day, during a Saturday third meal, we started comparing the cows to the sheep. He loved tending to the sheep and leading them into the meadows, while he found the cows boring because they just stood there in the farm and ate. I told him that sheep were less civilized than cows, because the dairy farm was primarily founded on what cows could give us, not the sheep.

We went on to discuss issues I'd brought up during the previous Saturday third meal. I'd spoken about national myths like the Lamed Hei affair, about which everything being published was wholly false. It was my view that our culture was degenerating from precisely that kind of trend, and most of the teachers and students disagreed with me. To my surprise, Nahum told me in his telegraphic style that he thought myths needed to be uprooted with an iron hand, and that growing up as a nation would eventually entail the full truth, unpleasant though it may be.

It seems that this particular conversation had a marked effect on both our lives. We hadn't seen each other for fifty years after I left Hadassim in 1955. We'd parted in friendship, though still a somewhat distant one, and when we met again it was in his high-rise office at the diamond exchange in Ramat-Gan, in 2006. The twenty five lawyers working for him had already gone home, while he stayed in the office to deal with the Tadiran workers' over-long strike. Indeed, we were interrupted by several phone calls during the interview, but somehow it was still as if our old conversation had continued on, uninterrupted, for the preceding decades.

Nahum: "Hadassim restored much needed boundaries to my life. I'd been peering into the world of crime, and could easily have passed into it. But Hadassim specialized in goodness, in making people good. The school gave me the will and the platform to succeed; more than that, it allowed me to *need* success. The process saved me for the rest of my life. I'd always been a defiant child, but I adjusted to the discipline in the dining hall – I didn't leave the table until I'd finished eating my spinach. I let myself adjust to that, just as I adjusted to the fact that we couldn't play football on the grass."

During that meeting in Nahum's office, we both agreed that future children should also be granted the opportunity to reform in a school that follows the Hadassim model. We

agreed to join in that cause, because it was an ethical obligation for those of us who were saved by Hadassim.

K. Raanana Loves

Our colleague Nurit Gantz-Ben Yaakov was with me in Malka's kindergarten and later in the first grade; we used to wonder aloud about life's mysteries together -- two children of Raanana. Yossi Bartov and Ruthi Chrom were also there with us. We learned one of the crucial facts of life together, in 1942: that life was one long teachers' strike.



Nurit Gantz-Ben Yaakov and Gideon Ariel

Nurit, Yossi, Ruthi and I were a foursome in Malka's kindergarten, a veritable quartet. Aunt Shoshanna came to visit the kindergarten one day, to play the piano for us. She performed a poem of Rachel's, "And Maybe All This Never Happened," arranged by Yaakov Sharet, as well as Beethoven's "Für Elise" and Albert Ketelbey's "Persian Market". (Shoshanna seemed to nurse the dream that I would become a pianist.) Until her death in 1985, my aunt would visit us at home at least once a week, and she always played "Für Elise" and the "Persian Market" – once in a blue moon it was Rimsky Korsakov's "Flight of Bumble Bee" – even when she became deaf. She was forever testing my daughter, Dalit, on her weekly studies. Though I never managed to see Persian markets or flights of bees when she played, I could always imagine her four-hand performances with her sister, Rachel for farmers returning from their work in Rehovot in 1909. Nakdimon Altshuler, Rehovot's first born, told me that listening to the Bluwstein sister's concert was his most exciting life experience.

Even as a kindergartener, Nurit was hauntingly beautiful; her eyes were sad, suggesting renunciation in their depth. I couldn't reach her then or later, but I never surrendered those feelings. She still has those same melancholy eyes today, even when she smiles. Perhaps I never interested her because I tend to shrug off human sadness; in my view it emanates from an exaggerated romanticism, at the expense of grasping reality. Nurit and I still smile to each other, notwithstanding the distance between us, and we'll continue to do so even as I write these lines, just as surely as she'll be reading them.

Childhood sorrow doesn't fade, especially when its source is real and ever present: her mother. It's the theme of the story of Shula-Pratibha-Druker-Eastwood, and the theme of Nurit's story, too. The poet Rachel might have been echoing the same theme when she wrote: "Is it a blessing or a curse...?" and meant it about Masha Naumovna, her step mother.

I've been searching for dialogue for as long as I can remember. Dialogue starts with the eyes. Goethe knew it, which is why he probed the secret of color as a holistic phenomenon. Dialogue begins with the first sign of a baby's ability to see.

But Nurit's eyes didn't cooperate with mine in Raanana, nor even in Hadassim. I always tried to cultivate it consciously; I was forever dreaming about the possibility, since she'd always represented the blissful period in Raanana for me – but I failed. When Nurit and I came to the age of sixty-six, however, a dialogue did begin to form in my study, even as we were surrounded by bookshelves, computers, a tape recorder, printer, scanner, fax machine, telephones, CDs...

I am an obsessive information collector, and I develop insights with the help of Informatics. For most people, the science of informatics means dealing with the self evident, which they consider a waste of time. Nurit and I ignored my mechanical aids, focusing on each other. Fortunately, it's never too late to hold a dialogue – a fundamental principle taught in Hadassim. The two of us never developed a super-dialogue during our school years, and we would hope that such a dialogical encounter can finally take root with this book. Our recent conversation brought me back to our years in Raanana – the three happy years 1944-1946. My mom was still tolerant of our intellectual battles then. That was when I was still a wunderkind of sorts, a "genius," not the burdensome youth who could only be contained by Rachel Shapirah.

I spent my vacations in Tel Aviv with Grandfather Kalman and Aunt Shoshanna, and they often stayed with us in Raanana (earlier it was in Yavneel and Metula – my birth place). I had held an "I-Thou" dialogue with them from the moment I was born until they were dead. We spent countless hours together in front of the Tanur waterfall when I was a small child. The language of babies is musical, holistic, analogical – continuous with the whole universe.

When I was a baby of sixteen months, my grandfather and I both listened to the language of the water as it fell from rock to rock in the Tanur waterfall in Metula. Nature's bountiful music didn't intrude on his ability to tell me all about the Germany's success in their invasion of Russia. He admired the Germans' efficiency, and he went on to instruct that we would never subsist in Arab space without learning to claim that efficiency for ourselves. Before he died, in 1951, he told me all about our "Tanur conversations" in Metula, though he wasn't certain if they were monologues or a dialogues -- if he was merely talking to himself or whether I'd absorbed any of it. "And yet, your blue eyes listened intensely," he said. As for Aunt Shoshanna, she used to talk to me, as we looked down from the balcony of our apartment in Metula, about her life with Rachel at the girl's farm in the Kineret. She believed that I could absorb her stories, even as a baby.

It was through my grandfather and Aunt Shoshanna that I first absorbed the rich culture whence they'd sprung, and whence Martin Buber had developed his dialogic philosophy. The art of dialogue was natural for them, and they made it natural for me, as their foster grandchild. They linked their own heritage to me, a heritage that began with Ruth and King David and continued through Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki, (1040-1105) [One of the

greatest Jewish scholars and commentators of all times, more usually referred to by the acronym Rashi] ; through Shlomo Dilon, the financial minister of Tsar Alexander I during the Napoleonic wars; through Max Mandelstam, Herzl's friend and the president of the fifth Zionist congress; through the poet Osip Mandelstam⁹¹⁰; through the poet Rachel and Ella Goldstein, the pianist who lived on our family estate in Lilienblum St. in Tel Aviv. It is a genealogy that still burns in me, inextinguishable.

It was thus that I became a dialogic child and adult – to an even greater extent than most children and adults can bear. I've always felt that most people are against me for it.

When I came to Raanana I found conversation with Dina Qualer at the WIZO day care center, in the garden, in the orange grove and the small apartment where we both lived – her family in one room and mine in the other. When it came time for kindergarten and the first grade, I found conversation with Ruthi Chrom. Both of us resided on Rambam St. in South Raanana, at the Tcherniak sisters' house (they were the sisters of the world chess champion of the same name).

Early childhood dialogue is an incredibly formative experience, although most people don't remember it. I can remember it to the last detail. Dina was my first love – sharp, pure, more desirable than anyone I've known since then. She was the object of my dreams, my love during the year of Normandy. We were separated after only a year, and I've only seen her in my daydreams since. I was always sorry that we moved, because it meant leaving her. I'd tried persuading my mother to stay, but she'd been able to attain a much bigger flat, with a balcony, for the same rent. She was planning to get pregnant again, so she wanted more living space. Being separated from Dina allowed me to preserve my memory of her all the more, and remember it as a truly wonderful year. My connection with her taught me what pure love was, and she has been there, somehow, in every subsequent love of mine. She was only three years old, and I four. I doubt she can remember it, but I'll never be able to forget our mutual delights for as long as I live.

Dina was blond and quite tall for her age; she was beautiful to the point of stirring madness in a four year old. I was tall, too. I suggested that we should be "Imma and

⁹ Our family's genealogy reaches all the way back to Rashi, the offspring of David. Even before I was aware of this heritage, I'd crossed the Israeli-Jordanian border in 1962 and spent a whole day on a mountain observing Beit Lechem and composing a poem about King David.

¹⁰ As for Mandelstam, his tragic death made him a symbol of the secret resistance to the Stalinist dictatorship. Mandelstam's poetry became ever more critical of the government starting in the 1930's. In November 1933 he wrote the famous poem whose first lines begin thusly: "**We live without sensing the country beneath us, / At ten paces, our speech has no sound / And when there's the will to half-open our mouths / The Kremlin crag-dweller bars the way. And every killing is a treat / For the broad-chested Ossete**" (from 'Stalin') The poem ruined his life. He died in the Gulag Archipelago, in Vtoraiia rechka, near Vladivostok, on December 27, 1938, and was buried in a mass grave. His widow, Nadezhda Mandelstam, saved his corpus by committing the majority of it to memory.

Abba” (father and mother), but we were already Krishna and Radha¹¹. We’d steal food from the storehouse and then go play near the orange grove; I talked a great deal, and she laughed a great deal more and followed me around. I was already interested in the war at that age, and used to tell her how the battles were going. She looked at me with her big eyes, full of interest. Did she really understand? Did other girls understand?

Dina’s mother’s name was Fanny, and she was fat. In fact, she’d even played with Nurit’s mom all the way back in their own kindergarten days in Hanover, Germany. She used to wear mini-shorts; I can still remember it like it was today – these gargantuan thighs of solid cheese. She’d converse with my mother in German, which confused me, as I’d thought the language was off-limits because of Hitler. My mother didn’t appreciate it too much when I reproached her for it.

Dina used to suck all five of her fingers at once. She did that even while we hugged each other in secret -- she just couldn’t take her fingers out of her mouth. Her sucking pace would only accelerate when she saw me, even more so when her pupils bulged excitedly as I neared the end of my stories. But did she really understand? She was the bell of my kingdom by the sea¹²; a golden thread passed between us, she was my abyss, my judgment’s grace. She, who could remember whole epic poems that her father had whispered in her ears, would spin whole stories from the shadows she saw on her bedside wall.

She had a whole language of visions. She was always absorbed in daydreams, though today I know that her language was musical -- the abstract and non-programmatic language of music. In a way, I knew it then, too, because I could feel that my story telling had interfaced with her pupil and fingertips. Then her mother told her that there were these things called “germs,” which could enter the body through her fingers, causing disease. Dina asked who these “germs” were, and her mother answered that they were evil dwarfs. From then on, Dina stopped sucking on her fingers.

We used to buy milk together at the nearest dairy farm; sometimes we drank straight from the cow’s udder. We’d take my bicycles out on the sand; I’d turn the wheel from side to side while she stuck sand in my pants. This sand was something that really penetrated into my soul in those days, and it remains there still. Once, we snuck into the food storehouse and found a purple plum. She peeled it for me and I sucked it, imagining that it was ice-cream. We were connected to each other through shared objects. My mother and hers were talking in the kitchen, and I heard Fanny saying: “Sara, I’m not lying to you.” I didn’t believe her, of course, since it was clear enough to me even at that age that everyone lies. As far back as I can remember, I’ve known that lying is necessary to achieve one’s will. It was different with Dina, because I knew her -- and knowledge eviscerates the world of lies.

¹¹ The earthly love of the god Krishna for the shepherdess Radha is a Hindu allegory about the love of the human soul for God.

¹² See Edgar Allan Poe’s poem “*Annabel Lee*”

While my mother was busy teaching kindergarten, my father was serving with the British army. That left Dina and me plenty of time alone, without any grown ups. I met Gideon around the same time, at my grandfather's place in Tel Aviv. I told him about Dina, but Gideon wasn't really interested in girls yet.

Ruthi, my second love – and nowhere as exciting as my first – was about my age. We used to peep through the bathroom window when the Tcherniak sisters were taking their showers. Ruthi wasn't as beautiful as Dina, but there was certainly a dialogue between us. We raised the issue together of why the British were erecting barriers between Raanana and Kfar Malal, and why they were performing house searches. My father had been released from his military duties at the time, and he told me that Brits didn't like the idea that we were going to establish a state of our own. When I told Ruthi that “nobody could stop us from creating our own state,” she was enthralled; she told me I was a hero. We both listened to my father as he told us how he and his friends had repressed Rashid Ali Al-Kalibani's rebellion in Iraq (the Anglo-Iraqi War of 1941). The Iraqi politician had seized power in Iraq, as the British were busying themselves in Europe, and aligned himself with the Axis Powers. Britain quickly reasserted control over Iraq and defeated the Iraqi military.

Nurit was born in Raanana in 1940, to Sabina and Heintz Schule. They had escaped from Hanover in 1937 and immigrated to Israel, where Heintz made a pretty good living with his carpenter's shop. Sabina was an attractive woman, but very short – and domineering. She accused her husband of being a miser and eventually divorced him, while Nurit continued to endure a cold and emotionally repressive household. Sabina never kissed or hugged Nurit, something she's come to regret at the tender age of eighty. “I missed something by not kissing and touching you,” she tells her daughter. At the twilight of her life, she wants their connection to be strong. But while my early childhood in Raanana was blissful, they were hell for Nurit. She has no memories of that period except one: “Father abandoned us when I was five. I was sitting on a bench in the bus station and daddy gave me a flute, and then I never saw or heard from him again. I wasn't even allowed to mention his name at home – mother was a very harsh woman -- while he apparently didn't want anything more to do with us. Kids are supposed to be hugged and kissed when they come home from school, but in my case I always came home terrified that my mom was in an aggressive mood. She used to hit me every day.

“So a loving relationship never stood a chance of developing between us. When you met me, Uri, we were still in kindergarten, going into the first grade; I was Nurit Schule -- a scared, loveless child. You left us in the second grade. My mother remarried her first husband, Paul Gantz, the same year. He'd fled from Austria and come to Eretz Israel in 1937, and he took me into his heart enthusiastically. He was a very warm person – handsome, industrious and wise. He was a wonderful father. Mother didn't want anymore children since she loathed the work involved in child rearing. She lived in constant fear that Paul would leave her, and she envied our warm relationship. When he became ill, my mother reproached me for crying about it. “What's there to cry over?” she said.

“Mother held the household under a tight grip. We had a housemaid, so she didn’t clean or cook. Still, Paul absolutely adored her; he wanted comfort for her, and even took exclusive care of all the chores around the house. It was a strange situation: material prosperity combined with emotional instability. Mother would sometimes wallow in uncontrolled rage; she’d lock me in the bathroom for hours, for no reason. She arbitrarily forbade me from going out with my friends on Fridays. I remember fantasizing in vain about running away. However, since Raanana didn’t have a high school in those days, and since mother did not want me studying in Tel Aviv, the only solution for her was to send me to a boarding school. And that, happily enough, is how I was able to go to Hadassim.

“I felt so good there. I even had a boyfriend for a while, Chilli – until he stopped talking to me without even telling me why. Then I was Joseph Tanner’s girlfriend. He spoiled me. He was a diligent student and made me finish all my homework. We did not talk much: I was an introvert, and he didn’t like to gossip.

“I ended up spending two years in Hadassim. I went to visit my grandmother in the U.S. in the seventh grade, and by the time I came back it was already two months into the school year, so I had to leave my class. But the two years I had there stabilized me enough to give me faith in other men and women.”

L. We Didn’t Complain.

Iris Knaani was the most beautiful girl in Hadassim, and she was seeing Danni Dasa, the handsomest man in the village.



“My parents went through a divorce, and in those days a single parent couldn’t raise a child,” Iris remembers. “Today, of course, women do everything they can to keep their children. Things have changed that much even for mothers in the Kibbutzim, where children now sleep in their parents’ apartments. But in those days it was normal that I should be sent to a place like Hadassim, and I never complained about it. On the contrary, I adjusted to the new setting very quickly.

Iris Knaani and Yardena

“I remember going to Hadassim with my mother and moving into Unit B, where I was immediately received openly by Yardena and Zafra. They showed me into their room and added another bed for me. That made six of us, which wasn’t considered out of the ordinary or somehow inappropriate in those days. Looking back, we hardly complained about anything at all. We had nothing. Clothes? They bought me khaki shorts five sizes too big. Those only started to fit me in the seventh grade, by which time they already had two big patches sown in the back.



Iris Knaani and Micha Spira

“I went to my first dance in the seventh grade, at a night club in the Tadmor hotel. I dressed in a black corduroy skirt and a striped tricot shirt for the occasion. I’d hardly had any clothes of my own before Hadassim; I always borrowed my sister’s and grandmother’s things.

“Money? Who knew anything about money? I certainly don’t remember having any. We had sweets – we called it “good stuff” – and even mother would bring some with her on her weekly visit, even though she didn’t have a penny to her name. We used to share them. Having candy meant a celebration for

us.

We weren’t too mischievous in high school but we’d still sneak out once in a while and hitchhike to Netanya. And what did we do there? We’d have falafel and soda, maybe go to the movies.

“I always encountered people who were unsatisfied, who were always complaining about something. But that wasn’t part of my personality, when I look back on those days. And that was true of me later on, like when I brought my son to a new child care center, and while others complained, all I could think to myself was how fortunate we were.

“Of course, we had genuinely good reasons to be satisfied in Hadassim. There was a rich social life, there were great teachers, the regiment wasn’t that hard and there weren’t really any bad students. At most, some were more prone to mischief than others.

“I can especially remember two instructors who were outstanding, each contributing far and beyond what was expected, each in his own way and his own knowledge. Avinoam’s Kaplan would take us on nature trips, and he would revel in the raw green and abundance of nature, eventually teaching us every name of every wildflower in the region – and they weren’t few. That was before it was prohibited to pick wildflowers, and it’s a pity I don’t remember their names any longer. But there were plenty of others who followed him into the fields of biology and life sciences.

“Danni Dasa was a sports and folk dance instructor. Danni was always with the kids, playing with us ‘on the grass.’ He used to arrange morning marathon and sprint matches between the orange groves on the road leading to the dunes. Shevach Weiss, who was still a twelve grader when they made him an instructor, was a wonderful teacher in his own right.”

“I was always on the ‘inside’ and popular as far back as I can remember, but I was also an athlete. I used to spend whole days on the sports grounds, especially the basketball field. I think my mother and sister always found me there when they used to visit. I always picture myself dribbling the ball when I think back on those days. But I also competed at the state level in the discus throw. My love for sports continues to this day, as I still swim regularly and play tennis.

“The pool was opened in when I was in the seventh grade. We organized swimming competitions between the classes; I participated in that, too, but I only knew the breast stroke. I don’t remember the results for that race. No one in our class could do the front crawl, so I volunteered for that. I came in second place out of two swimmers – but at least I got to the other side! I still remember my classmates urging me on.

“We played many other games besides sports. We used to play ‘rings’ in front of the dinning hall. Do you remember this game? We played ‘Long Donkey’ in unit D. And marbles! Do you remember playing marbles? Zafra was my partner; she used to write me letters while we were on vacation, and she addressed them ‘to Iris – my marbles’ partner.’

“We used to play all sorts of games during recess, depending on the season. We relived some of that in our reunions, and I remember Moti coming with me and chiding me for playing silly little girls’ games at my age. Do you remember how we used to play two flags out in the dunes in the evenings? It still amazes me that we weren’t afraid back then – playing out in the dark, on the unpaved road. The attachment to games remains with me to this day. I’m still ready for a game, anytime. I guess it’s good there are also games for grown ups!

“There was also work to be done. Part of our tuition was forgone in exchange for three hours of labor, daily. I worked in the vegetable garden and the dining hall; I was assigned to do handiwork and clean the unit. But those were nothing compared to the organized efforts out in the orange groves and peanut fields. By the time I retired, I’d said it was enough to have worked from the age of ten to the age of sixty.

“After Unit D, we moved to live in the ‘train’. The conditions were worse because it was an old building and the bathroom was in an open corridor. Luckily we were young, and didn’t need get up and use it in the middle of the night. But the camaraderie among the girls made it a wonderful unit. There were five of us again: Yardena Strikovsky, Esther Korkidi, Nurit Barmor, Mushi Hiyun and me – Iris Knaani. We were young women by that time, not just girls, so there were eligible suitors coming to visit us from all over the neighborhood.

Although the ‘train,’ the shack, Beit Hanun and the school building were all old buildings, the landscape and overview of Hadassim was pristine. Some of the buildings were new; Unit E, for example, was only built a few years before we came to the school. The surrounding gardens were always well tended and flourishing. Today they have the Vera woods where there was once nothing, but we were the ones who planted the seeds, during one of our massive organized efforts. I remember Hadassim as a very important and positive stage of my life – though it felt hard at the time. I still feel very close to some of those people, though I haven’t seen them for a very long time.

M.Motherless

In the early 1920's, the Harris family sold their hotel in London and moved to Israel. They came for ideological reasons; Harris was among the founders of Karkur, a settlement northwest of Hadera. His wife soon blessed him with two daughters and a son. Around the same time, the Mizrachis emigrated from Iraq and settled in Jerusalem before moving on to Petach Tikva. Eliyahu, their youngest son, was three years old when they came over from Iraq, and he was seventeen by the time he joined the other workers in Karkur's orange groves, where he met the sixteen year old Chava Harris. The two soon fell in love and got married despite the strong resistance of the Harris family, especially her mother's, Esther.

Chava and Eliyahu lived together in Karkur before moving to Petach Tikva, where three sons were born to them. Their first born died tragically when he was still a baby, but Asa and David lived on to become our colleagues in Hadassim. Given his background and his mastery of Arabic, Eliyahu eventually joined the Hagana's Mistaravim – the special forces of their time, also known as the “Arab Platoon”. Disguised as Arabs, these special teams were involved in covert missions in Arab territory. When Ben-Gurion ordered the Hagana to end their cooperation with the other factions of the resistance, Eliyahu decided to join ETZEL and went on to participate in even more dangerous missions. The enemies he needed to watch for had grown in number, however, and this put the Mizrachi family on more precarious footing.

By 1943, the relationship between Chava and Eliyahu had reached a dead end, and they divorced. Asa and David stayed with their father, and Chava was now out of the picture for all of them. Eliyahu ultimately fell during The War of Independence, in the battle on Hill 69, south of Ashdod. The Harris family did nothing to contact the boys, so they were now practically orphans. And that's exactly what the defense department assumed they were – orphans – when they put them up in an orphanage in Talabieh, Jerusalem.

Asa: “We'd already spent several years in the orphanage in Jerusalem, when one day our mother and grandmother just appeared out of the blue. That was how we were introduced, actually. It made very little difference to our lives, since our bond with them was weak. My wife wanted to meet my mother before we got married; she was appalled when she heard me call her by her first name, rather than ‘Mother’.

“We were avid stamp collectors when we were kids. The philosopher Martin Buber lived near our orphanage, and predictably he kept up a broad, international correspondence. So we'd knock on his door every few days, and he'd kindly invite us into the living room and serve us cold drinks and cookies. We'd sit and glance around at all the lines of bookshelves while he'd go find the stamps he'd prepared for us.

“I wasn't aware of the Jeremiahs at the time, or that there was a youth village founded on Buber's dialogic philosophy where I would eventually study. But Buber was already affecting my life during those years in the orphanage, applying his principles in his attitude toward me.

“I moved to the Ben Shemen village halfway through the eighth grade, and I graduated in agriculture studies three years later. I was interested in a full four-year program, so the Defense Department subsidized two of those years for me at Hadassim. These were the best years of my childhood, the years that really launched me as a mature, balanced human being. The atmosphere was collegial, open and benevolent; close relationships were formed quickly, arising from the cooperative mode of life in the boarding school. There was also the fact that we all had similar backgrounds, having spent considerable time without our parents. There was a shared history and a common fate, though never a bitter one. On the contrary, the feeling was always one of active pursuits and interests, both academic and social. In my case, being good at sports also made it easy to accepted and bond with others. But each expressed himself in his own way, like in Gil Aldema’s music class.

“Hadassim laid the basis for my friendships in life. Close friendships can be a powerful influence during one’s adolescence, and the unique bonds I formed at the time continue to this day. Some of them extended into my professional life – I’ve worked with Chilli for a long time now, as both of us were involved in local government issues – but I’ve kept in close touch with many others. Every reunion still feels like just another day in our childhood, like it was just yesterday that we all met. As an athlete, I have a close affinity with Gideon Ariel; I still remember how we used to practice the shot put during recess, using sophisticated study of various throwing techniques. That laid the groundwork for an instinctive determination in my later work.

“As for teachers, I loved Arie Mar’s chemistry lessons. His was a rare personality for a teacher. I took a lot from Shalom Dotan’s philosophical depth. In general, we weren’t forced to learn by rote memorization; we were taught to think, to be fearless in searching out for new ideas, to be creative. Creativity, not knowledge as such, was the center of education in Hadassim. It was a focus that turned us into one of the most vital groups in Israeli society.”

Asa excelled as an athlete in Hadassim. As a runner, he was selected to represent Israel in international competition, and he was a member of the 100 meter relay team that won the Israeli championships. He went on to study Law at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and at thirty-four he became the youngest ever chairman of the Chamber of Advocates (for the southern region). Subsequently he was chief counsel for the city of Beer Shevah, then chief counsel for the city of Jerusalem under both Teddy Kollek and Ehud Olmert. In the latter role, he was involved in some of the most sensitive decisions regarding both Israel and Jerusalem.

Asa is the epitome of the child who comes from distressed conditions only to rise up to the highest callings of citizenship.

N. “I Left This Wonderful Place”



Gila Almagor

Decades before she won the Israel Prize for Cinema (2004), Gila Almagor shared the stage with me in the Hadassim performance

of “Spring Bells”. Tzvi Rafael was the director, while Gila played the witch, Zafra played the queen, I played the professor and the queen’s counselor, and Chilli was the soldier who carried me on a canopy to my missions. At the time I thought I was the star of the show, though it was clear that Gila and Zafra both thought *they* were the stars. That was Tzvi Rafael’s greatness at work. Our rehearsal started at the beginning of the school year and continued for the following six months.

Gila’s talent was really something to behold, and Rafael knew how to encourage it. She was assigned to read Shakespeare between classes and during breaks. I remember one conversation we had in particular, regarding the character of Hamlet. I told her that Hamlet symbolized the intellectual whose decision making is compromised and constrained, with attendant calamities on himself and his surroundings. She responded that Hamlet was multi-dimensional --that his intellect was only one of his dimensions. In her view, Shakespeare’s greatness was reflected in the richness of his characters.

“Spring Bells” was performed twice in the open air, on the square between the hall and the library. Besides the children, many guests had come for the performance. It was a grand success. The second performance was attended by the whole directorate of World WIZO, who were holding a conference in Israel around the same time. It may have been this performance that convinced Gila that she really had tremendous talent. There was one scene I can remember specifically: I was sitting near the queen, and Gila was walking across the stage, slightly bent-over, wearing a gray dress (designed by Chaya Alperovitz, Rafael’s wife) and reciting the play’s central monologue. When she was finished, the audience burst into applause. We were even forced to halt the performance for a few minutes. Within another half-year, Gila had left to study Theatre and acting in Tel Aviv. It seems, therefore, that I am connected to her success, as well...

Gila was born in Kfar Saba, in 1939. Her childhood began with cruelty, as with many others destined for Hadassim. She was orphaned early on when her father, a policeman for the British, was gunned down by an Arab sniper. Her mother was then in the fifth month of her pregnancy and suffering from mental illness.

Gila joined us when she was fourteen years old. Chilli: “I was on my way back to Hadassim from Petach Tikva on the last day of summer. Gila was traveling alone on the same bus, and she brought so much luggage with her that she practically took over the whole back area. It was immediately clear that she was headed for a career as an actress – a princess among actresses. She was showoff in Hadassim from the start -- a ‘shvitzer’. She didn’t let anyone go without noticing her. After a month or so the class went on a trip to Netanya to watch a Habima performance. The drama instructor, Matzke [Mordechai Mitzkevitch], allowed her to stay in the hall and watch an encore performance while the rest of us were escorted back to the village.

Her boyfriend in Hadassim was Ephraim Gat, the mysterious love-object in her book, “Under the Domim Tree”.¹³

¹³ Metuka confirmed that it was Ephraim. On Ephraim, see chapter 3.

There Gila had written that “Like all the other girls in the unit I loved him secretly, though there was little chance for me, since he was Sara B.’s Yorek...And maybe, after the fight we witnessed yesterday, he’s decided to end his relationship with her?...And why would he want me, especially? Besides Sara, there are other more beautiful girls in our unit than me...”

Gila explained¹⁴: “My Yorek, the real life one, was a Polish boy, the epitome of what girls were dreaming about then – he was really special, innerly and mysterious. No, I won’t reveal his name; it’s a private memory, it’s something that belongs only to me and my Hadassim friends.”

Ephraim Gat remembers things a little differently: “Well, our relationship lasted maybe a week...I don’t think it’s something I’d include in your book...”

“But Gila spent a great deal of time on your character in ‘Under the Domim Tree.’”

“‘The Domim Tree’” doesn’t really describe anything that happened, so the only thing it accurately portrays is Gila’s imagination with regard to me, with regard to Lea Nirkin and others.”

“In her interview for Yediot Acharonot she refers to you as a ‘very private memory of mine.’”

“Well, that would certainly have been interesting to know back then. She was a lovely girl back then, and not overbearing as she is today. She’s become more overbearing with all her success.”

“What did you two talk about back then?”

“We never really discussed what our lives been like before Hadassim and anyway, like I said, the whole episode was rather brief and probably unimportant.”

Gila spent one and a half years with us. It was this period she was describing in “Under the Domim Tree¹⁵,” which was later made into a film.

Gila: “I knew I’d write something about that group one day, this time from a Sabra point of view. I think I’m lucky to be a native Israeli, but I also have a tight connection to the Holocaust. I feel like I’m a Holocaust survivor, too. My mother escaped from Poland while the rest of her family perished. My father fled from Germany after Kristallnacht. I spent two years in Hadassim, where almost everyone had come from the Holocaust; I’d always thought I was the most miserable person in the world, but that changed when I

¹⁴ From an interview published in “Seven Days” that Anat Medan held with Gila Almagor on 6.19.1992. Gila refused to meet with the authors for her own reasons.

¹⁵ Her first book, “*Avia’s summer*,” was very successful. It was translated to several languages and performed as a one man show by Gila herself.

was confronted with new dimensions of life in Hadassim...My youth both began and ended in those two years...Several years ago I ran into somebody who'd studied there with me; he told me that his experience was a nightmare for him. I begged him not to say such a thing, that I couldn't imagine a happier place than Hadassim. It was paradise by day and a place that screamed at night. Children screamed in their nightmares, but it was a vibrant youth village, not a Dickensian orphanage."

Among many of her friends in Hadassim, "Under the Domim Tree" was the object of merciless criticism and even contempt – something that could only hurt Gila deeply. The main character was apparently based on Lea Nirkin, a holocaust survivor who literally experienced hell in WWII. Nirkin thought Gila's portrayal of her was a gross distortion, that it made her look ridiculous. She was so hurt that she refrained from any contact with Gila for seven years, claiming that the author had cynically exploited her history. All of Gila's appeals to her fell flat. The two met during a memorial service for Ofra Shapirah; Tova Shvartz had pressed Nirkin to forgive her Hadassim colleague and make peace, and Nirkin agreed. She walked up the stairs to Aloni's apartment (Ofrah's husband) in the German neighborhood of Jerusalem, where Gila was waiting, and forgave her. A month later, Nirkin was killed in a suicide-bomber attack at the Shuk HaCarmel Market.

"Gila has a very egocentric character," Metuka tells us. "She was a hyper-extrovert as a child. Of course her life before Hadassim hadn't been kind, but there were other children at the school whose lives were hardly enviable. We weren't accustomed to express every last feeling. Gila was the opposite, she flaunted her feelings, she was super-dramatic. At some point she learned that she was an illegitimate daughter -- that her father wasn't her biological father – which really unhinged her. She underwent a very public crisis at the time, proclaiming that she wasn't going to take the name of the man who'd raised her. We knew all about it – she didn't hide a thing. She was prone to severe bursts of anger. She also took to informing everyone in sight that she intended to become an actress, so whenever she inflicted one of tantrums on someone I used to tell her: 'Gila, get off the stage!' I wasn't a fan of her outbursts, and I was the only one who told her so."

I use to follow these scenes between Gila and Metuka with great interest. There was something hypnotizing in their dynamics. Gila's exhibitionism was a direct challenge against the opposite defense mechanism that prevailed with most of the other Hadassim kids: the defense mechanism of deep repression. Erick Bentley ¹⁶once said that the genres of Comedy and Tragedy both peer directly into the abyss, and the difference lies only in the manner of expression: Tragedy is direct, whereas comedy hides beneath a mask. For the Holocaust children, like Metuka and Ephraim, as well as other children of distress, like Safra or Gideon, the abyss was too deep to bear – so each carried his own mask in his own way. But Gila didn't hold back, she projected her abyss into the world in a chain of hysterical bolts. It was the only way for her to confront the nothingness (she admitted in a newspaper interview her fear of mental illness): namely, to project it into the world, into the characters she played and created. That was the basis of her drama queen persona – transforming her abyss into a mask...

¹⁶ Eric Bentley, 1916-- An American critic, editor, and translator. b. Bolton, England, grad. Oxford, 1938, Ph.D. Yale, 1941. A highly regarded and rigorously intellectual critic, specializing in drama.

And yet, I can see beneath that mask to the essence, the point of the abyss in the actress' face. I see the truth in her face even today, in the character she plays (the mother of "Avner") in Spielberg's "Munich".

Gila spent a year and a half in Hadassim. She interrupted her second year to go study in Tel Aviv, near the Habima Theatre, supporting herself by working in a shop for construction materials. She recounts about this period: "When I settled in Tel Aviv I was fifteen, and the hard life had begun. I was as lonely as a dog here. It took a year for me to have a boyfriend and start working at the Habima. I'd ride the bus and hear all the children talking on their way to school, and my heart would burst. I hardly understood what they were saying; I was a young girl whose youth was stolen from her. By the time I was married at the age of eighteen, I was in a rat race."

Her onstage debut at the age of seventeen was in the Habima play "The Skin of our Teeth," after she'd successfully passed through the auditions. In 1960, she played in her first film, "Blazing Sand." After taking advanced studies at the Habima's acting school she traveled to New York to study in Lee Strasberg's Actors Studio, in 1963.

When she returned to Israel, two years later, she began appearing onstage as an independent actress. She played on every stage in the country. She went through a harrowing artistic crisis in the mid-1980s, when the theatres stopped inviting her. But since then, and especially after the success of her one man show, "Summer of Aviya," her art has been in great demand, and today she's rightly considered one of Israel's great senior actresses. Prominent plays that have enjoyed her participation include: "The Bride and the Butterfly Hunt" (by Nisim Aloni), "Anna Frank," "Medea," "Master Class," "Kaddish for Naomi," and more. In 2005 she played the role of Lea Rabin in the musical, "He Who Dreamed," which tells the story of Yitzhak Rabin.

Gila has appeared in many films over the years, enough to earn the title of "Israeli Queen of Cinema." The ones that stand out from her early career are "El Dorado," "Sallah Shabati," "Matzor" ("The Siege") and "Malkat Hakvish" ("The Highway Queen"). All told, her filmography encompasses forty films.

When Michael Kashtan died in 1985, Gila published a short article, "A Letter to a Teacher Who Changed My Life," where one could see how Hadassim had helped shape the personality of the artist who went on to win the Israel Prize for Cinema:

"Michael, Shalom: What I write to you now you will not read, nor will you hear it if I could read it aloud from a blank page, the way I used to when you were still my teacher – you won't hear it, because you are not. For years now I've wanted to talk to you, to say thank you for being there for me. Actually, I owe you an apology for disappearing on that morning before dawn, in the tenth grade. The time was 5:30 in the morning. Rather than show up at my work station in the garden, I left this wonderful place, Hadassim, where I was home, and where you were my shepherd... I left without even saying goodbye. I'd heard someone say: 'An acting school is opening in Habima'. I think it

was Moshe Zeiri, God rest his soul. Then I heard: 'Once you're done with your studies here, you'll move to Tel Aviv, where they'll accept you. This is the place for you, that's where you're going to study, and one day you'll be actress.' I didn't need more than that.

"I left the very next day so I could be accepted immediately, so I could start immediately, because I was rushing to move forward on my road. I know that if I'd waited, delayed – I'd turned to you for counseling -- I would have stayed to finish high school and everything would have taken that much longer. You told me once that an artist must absorb and accumulate knowledge. When I came back to Hadassim after spending my break at home with my mother, after going to the theatre for the first time and being hit by lightning, I was transformed. You saw the difference in me, you knew that something had happened. You asked me, and I answered: 'I saw a play with a giant of an actress. Her name is Hanna Maron.' And then you asked: 'So, this is what you want?' And I answered 'Yes, I want to be there also, on the stage.' And then you brought books with you, you prepared a curriculum just for me. 'We'll start with the Greeks,' you said, 'with the Greek classics, because that's where it all started.' I read them all with you: Sophocles and Euripides and Aeschylus, and then Shakespeare.

"That was the first time I can remember doing my homework, and you were so proud of me, and I told you: 'If I ever become an actress you'll come, you'll sit in the theatre hall and I'll perform in your honor. Indeed, you came to see me many times, especially when you were living in Haifa. You'd always told me: 'You I'll never miss.' I hope I didn't disappoint you when I left my high school studies behind. I didn't have the time. But I feel I have to try to show something wonderful, even today. Because you always believed in me. Don't you still see me sometimes? So I leave you with a big hug – you who were so impossible to hug. Gila Almagor.

O. Digital and Analog

"God created Heaven and Earth and Hadassim," Gideon told me in our first transatlantic conversation. That's how he proposed – ever so simply, without any further introduction -- that I write this book. "You decide what to write and I'll accept your verdict, and add insights of my own," he pledged, with the ease of a man comfortable in his own charisma and certain he'll get what he wants. He continued: "I know that an educational miracle happened in Hadassim. And I know that only you can decipher and interpret this miracle. Explaining it in a book will initiate a new educational paradigm, because Hadassim will be seen in the entire world as a model worthy of imitation. Many won't take our claims seriously, and certainly others will mock us – a risk that innovators always face. I know that you are one. As am I."

As he ended this startling preamble, he sounded a gentle laugh, as if acknowledging (and apologizing for) the likelihood that my face would now be resembling a rather pronounced question mark. Indeed, his declaration left me rather perplexed – at least at first. That chuckle, in contrast with his initial, somewhat imperious tone, made it clear that I shouldn't take any offense, that he wasn't giving orders as a lord to a servant -- and

even that he barely understood what he was saying. And so it was, according to him, all his life: he would bravely walk the path of his vaguest dreams. Indeed I didn't understand him because I was so unlike him in this regard; my ideas are always clear – at least in my own eyes – so much so that it frustrates me when they aren't received and adopted.

Gideon's assertions seemed bombastic, his claims unfounded. But the problem was on my end. I had overlooked an essential continuity among his proposition's parts; I had strayed from the paradigm of continuity¹⁷ embodied in the methodology of Archimedes and Newton, which stands in opposition to the atomism of Democritus¹⁸ and of certain medieval Islamic philosophers¹⁹ who ascribed to Allah the power of shaping and connecting atoms at will, giving them a continuous meaning.

Of course, I understood Gideon's every word; but not the whole. I didn't understand what he meant when he said a "miracle" had occurred in Hadassim, or what that might have been, or, primarily, why I could be the only one to "decipher" that miracle. It's reasonable to assume that most of our kind readers will feel the same way as I did, even at the book's end.

Apparently, what was happening in that pre-dialogue phase of our inter-continental conference was that we were using different languages, different levels of meaning – a characteristic conundrum in our modern world. Our information about Hadassim, or about Gideon himself, was far from identical, and we attached different meanings to the word, "miracle."

The language of Gideon's thought is extremely digital and discrete, which goes a long way toward explaining the nature and magnitude of his achievements. My thinking, on the other hand, is analogical and continuous in the extreme. These two distinct strands of mental operation might seem irreconcilable, but if we consider the issue by analogy to the Non-Euclidian Geometry developed by Bernhard Riemann²⁰, there is indeed a possibility for dialogue between the digital and the analogical, the discrete and the continuous, the realistic and the holistic, considered as parallel phenomena. This is the marvel of consciousness, of human preeminence over the animal - whose thinking is entirely digital, since it lacks imagination.

¹⁷ According to Archimedes' and Newton's concepts, Matter is continuous, dividable ad infinitum, keeping its identity still.

¹⁸ In Democritus' concept, Matter is discontinuous, made from infinite undividable particles, separated by vacuum. Democritus is the model for the deterministic-mechanistic approach of the ontological reductionism, which bases all the entities in nature on atoms: he developed the atomistic-mechanistic approach in the Pre-Socratic philosophy, according to which the world with all its infinite components is made of infinite number of atoms, separated by vacuum.

¹⁹ Atomistic philosophy developed in Islam very early, and it consists of a synthesis of ideas from the Greek and Indian philosophies. The most successful form of Islamic Atomism was the Kalam philosophy, and Kalam atomism totally depends on God.

²⁰ Georg Friedrich Bernhard Riemann (1866-1826), a German mathematician who was ahead of his time. Albert Einstein used Riemann's theory to found the new paradigm which he created in physics.

Despite my initial confusion, my intuition was that Gideon was on to something, and I felt a glimmer of excitement at the prospect that our parallel languages would reconcile and fuse into one, new language, which would manifest in the course of our research and writing process. For what is a dialogue, if not the creation of a new language which transforms a timeless and placeless symbolic-analogical content into Rational-digital form -- characterized by time and space? The creative-dialogical education of Hadassim was essentially preparation for the creation of a new language. If we could but succeed in educating the people of all nations and cultures to hold dialogues and thereby produce common languages, a good portion of the world's myriad misunderstandings would be overcome. Our Buberian Dialogue was like an Archimedean fulcrum point of the mind, transcending the instinctive hold of our four-dimensional consciousness and allowing us to attend to the fifth dimension²¹, the dimension of meaning. It is in this super-dimension that Plato located his Ideas; there resides the hard-drive, singular in its eternity, of all the information about the universe; there exists our God, and we on Earth are his silhouettes - - a view one can trace to Plato²² and also, in a way, to Spinoza²³.

If only Gideon's discrete and my holistic mindsets could ascend to a Buberian dialogue, we would then enter the realm of the fantastic. The prospect of being able to partake in this realm was something I couldn't afford to reject out of hand: if we could but rise to that level of super-dialogue, the fantastic would give way to the real.

As in our very first encounter in my grandfather's house, after the Allies' breakthrough at Normandy, I again felt that Gideon's story had more to it than the surface would suggest, its potential far more promising than met the eye. But I hadn't known then what I do now, after a year and a half of intimate and vigorous association: Gideon's mind is a fortuitous mutation. His thinking reveals an extremely digital structure combined with a highly developed imagination and an almost absolute openness. I had once discussed the possibility of such a mutation with my late brother, the geneticist Ram Moav-Milstein, while we were collaborating on a book in an isolated Michmoret villa.

Gideon had returned to Israel for a visit, and decided on one occasion to spend the whole day with us. He was then at the peak of his glory, and my brother concluded from their interaction that Gideon was precisely the sort of mutation I intimated above. My brother said that his was a combination of a rare genetic mutation brought on by formative psychic shock: throughout the course of his childhood, Gideon was privy to his mother's continual extra-marital intercourse with two different men, Israel Rokach, then the mayor of Tel Aviv and later the minister of internal affairs, and Moshe Amiaz, the city's

²¹ The fifth dimension of meaning, Uri Milstein's concept, is here being described according to Archimedes' lever principle: "Give me but one firm place to stand, and I'll move the whole world."

²² Plato's greatest and most influential contribution to philosophy -- and apparently, the most profound -- is his theory of forms. Plato divides the world into separate parts: the world of "forms," knowable only by reason, opposed to and separate from the physical world, perceivable by the senses. Plato saw the mutable world of the senses as an imperfect facsimile of the rational, eternal forms (Ideas).

²³ Spinoza's Theology, sometimes identified with Pantheism, maintains that there is neither a transcendental (Deistic) God nor a personal, commanding one. According to him, God is nature, including all its components and nuances. God is primary substance, that which has no external cause and which is the source of being for everything else.

engineer. “Such unbearably traumatic experiences,” said my brother, “usually produce severe personality disorders. In Gideon’s case, mutational deformation produced supremely beneficial by-products.”

Gideon’s imaginative-digital mode of thought evokes strong resistance from most people, most of whom operate in the analogical mode (digital thinking presented little survival-value in the course of early human evolution, and thus hasn’t been common). His mindset is no less repellent for those of an evidently logico-mathematical persuasion, most of whom lack any imagination whatsoever. But Gideon overcame the preponderance of such reactions by his unshakable character and gregarious temperament. Never once, in the whole course of our close association for the last six months, did he lose his temper, not in the slightest, though reasons for anger or impatience weren’t lacking.

I met Gideon for the first time in 1944, when I was four. We met several times afterward in Tel Aviv, but our communication was discontinued when my family moved to Raanana. At the age of seven we returned to live in Tel Aviv, and our friendship resumed and then continued during our four years in Hadassim. Years later, when he called me from the U.S., I remembered him from Hadassim as a man who combined deep insight with bold athleticism. There was within him a tension between internal storm and external calm, between the mediocre student and first-rate scientist. Who could believe that such a great man had grown up amongst us?! I remembered feeling even then, in 1944 that something mysterious resides in his heart. I kept my eye on him in Hadassim, to try to get to the bottom of that mystery, which would manifest occasionally in his charm. I continued to follow his journey beyond Hadassim to the top of the world. His failures on the entrance exams for the Technion²⁴ and Wingate Institute²⁵ came as no surprise to me, since exams are adapted for the normal among us, the analogical, not for the hybrid digital-imaginative sort.

Despite all that, I initially hesitated about a joint project with Gideon; the man was somewhat of an enigma to me, and I couldn’t help feeling that working with him might ultimately cause some disappointment. Gideon read my mind, and wasn’t insulted. He recounted the admiration he’d held for me after I stood in class and “read” my composition on the Normandy Landing out of an empty notebook – I’d made it up on the spot -- and he suggested that it was worth a try.

“We’ll decipher the secret of Hadassim, the eighth wonder of the world,” he said.

“I’ll have to decipher your secret first.”

“But I have no secrets – I’m a transparent man. I told you and your brother everything at the Villa in Michmoret. We’ll start working and you’ll understand immediately. My whole capacity will be at your disposal. “

²⁴ Israel Institute of Technology

²⁵ Israel’s National Center for Physical Education and Sport

His soft voice and natural charisma eventually won out. I surrendered.

From the very start it became clear that our relationship functioned in seamless Buberian, “I-Thou” fashion, and this was a minor miracle in its own right, as such moments of mutual exaltation are rare. I arrived at the conclusion that if Hadassim was the greatest educational experiment in history, then Gideon would have to be its greatest success story, a lesson for similar institutions in the future. It isn’t his great wealth (in the multi-millions) or international prestige in his field that makes him the astonishing success story of Hadassim. It’s the salient fact that Hadassim prepared and launched him in a trajectory that otherwise might never have left ground. From his point of view, then, Hadassim was borne of God on the first day of Genesis, as a lever to pull himself from the lowest depths and thence, with his own hands, to the highest peaks.

Graduating cum laude from the Wingate Institute, which would normally have cleared the way for a good position as an athletics instructor, Gideon took a more ambitious route: he developed a new scientific branch -- Computerized Bio-Mechanics -- based on the most elementary concepts in physics and philosophy. Those concepts in their primitive form were topics of our frequent conversations in Hadassim, and though we each set out in different directions, those early conceptual gems were the basis for our lives’ work. Of those common roots, his great insight would be the principle of Dynamic Variable Resistance, and mine – The Survival Principle, based on the notion of information as a sort of fiber used to neutralize threats.

Hadassim’s creative-dialogical community had a palpable healing effect on Gideon’s psychic scars, tearing down the barricades of genetic and environmental trauma in his personality, and developing the intellectual powers locked within – powers otherwise lost to the world. For my part, I hope the conversations we held played a salutary role in his awakening, like when I would badger him for answers why he tied chains and cans to his weights. This sort of a weight, his own inspiration which he developed with some help from Danni Dasa’s, the athletic director, was so puzzling to me that I never stopped nagging about it. I constantly begged that he explain why he wasn’t satisfied, like normal people, with the regular weight.

Though he didn’t excel in biology or physics, Gideon inferred on his own that the hand’s joints respond differently at different points on the axes of extension and contraction. But this analogical insight, on the level of mere generalization, didn’t satisfy him. As we sat together with our physics teacher (who left after a month) after a tenth-grade lesson, in 1954, we discussed how it might be possible to measure the accurate resistance of joints. Our teacher said that science lacked the means to do so. Gideon declared, “From this day onward I’ll look for a way to do it. Then the world of sports will be radically changed forever.” We saw him as dreamer – kind of sweet, but not serious.

Three years later, in 1957, when we were in senior year, Gideon wrote to Danni Dasa, who was then in the U.S.: “In the Maccabiah [the Jewish Olympics] I won the gold medal at the shot put, at 15.63 meters, and a silver medal in discus, at 43.72 meters. I broke the national record, 16.2 meters, during training but I’ll be satisfied with first place (16.1

meters) in the national championship. It looks like I'll be moving to the adult league after the close of the Maccabiah, where the shot-put weighs 7.25 kilos. They predict great success for me at that level, as I have more strength than speed, whereas the 5 kilo level required more speed. Nevertheless I will have gone undefeated and taken 30 medals this season; only at the discus am I not constantly ahead. All my goals have so far been achieved, and I plan to compete in the Rome Olympics.”

In 1960, Gideon represented Israel in Rome at the shot-put and discus throw. What for others was a dream, for Gideon was a plan; what for others was an impossible mission, for him was one destined for execution.

A month before these lines were written, Gideon traveled to Israel to consult Israeli athletes using his technology. He exposed and analyzed flaws, then prescribed solutions and techniques. The result: Alex Averbuch, the pole vault athlete who many were expecting to retire, won the Grand Indoor Championship in Gent, Belgium, at 5.81 meters -- the third achievement of this kind in the world this year.

We conclude, from all the above, that the Hadassim model which unleashed Gideon Ariel on the world can stir the same impulse in other children in the world, transforming world education and thence human life.

Q. Childhood in Tel Aviv

Gideon was born in 1939 in Tel Aviv, to Tova and Moshe Ariel. Moshe Ariel was born in Poland in 1904, the eldest son of a middle-aged, religious Zionist couple. His three younger brothers all perished in the “Black Plague” of influenza which followed the devastation of the First World War. Moshe was short and scrawny, but cunning, almost slithery, rough as any hardnosed Prussian – in short, every bit the polar opposite of Gideon. The painful anti-Semitism he endured at his Polish Gymnasium drove him to the cause of Zionist military power in Israel. His arrival in Palestine would only inflame that ambition.

Landing on the pier of Jaffa in 1921, filled with all the excitement of the concrete reality of Eretz Israel, he was immediately attacked and robbed bare by Arab bandits. He escaped by the very skin of his teeth, and swore hatred for the Arabs – and total commitment to Zionist dominance -- to his last days. He found work the very next day as janitor for a hotel, rising to manager in five years.



Tova and Moshe Ariel

In 1931, the Biologist Yehoshua Margolin founded the Pedagogical-Biological Institute in a little shack on Yehuda Halevy St. in Tel Aviv. Its founding mission was the training of Israeli biology teachers, on the assumption that the study of nature was indispensable for connecting people to their land. It was the first nucleus of the academic community that later emerged as Tel Aviv University. The little shack that grew into a university had originally served as the first Tel Aviv synagogue.²⁶

As manager of the nearby hotel, Moshe was invited to the Institute's inaugural ceremony. While the mayor, Meir Dizengoff, was delivering a speech about the Institute's importance, Moshe took a seat next to Dizengoff's deputy, Israel Rokach. It was a fateful -- and eventually fatal -- encounter. The two struck up a conversation and agreed to meet again, soon becoming close friends. Rokach, who was an electrical engineer in England in 1920-1922, had connections with the British authorities. When the city council appointed Moshe Shelush as mayor after Dizengoff's death, in 1936, the high commissioner (of the British Mandate) overruled their decision and appointed Rokach instead. He was even honored with the rank of "British Empire Parade Officer."

Rokach had owned several utility companies and various import-dependent businesses, so as mayor he arranged for one of his men to head the customs office for the port of Jaffa – no doubt a lucrative arrangement. Having befriended Moshe Ariel, he persuaded him to join the enterprise and leave his hotel job; as time wore on, he leveraged his backdoor British connections to promote Moshe to joint director of Jaffa customs.



Israel Rokach

Tova Ariel, of the Goldberg family, was born in Jerusalem in 1911. Beautiful and highly gifted, she studied at the Beit Hakerem Seminary in the thirties and later joined Professor Schwabe's "Teachers-Scouts" group. After graduation she worked as a schoolteacher, but she also did part-time work as a stenographer in conventions and conferences, and it was during a Jerusalem conference for city mayors that Rokach first noticed her. He fell for her immediately (though he was already married to a well-known beauty) and soon enough convinced her to move and work for him in Tel Aviv, where she shortly became his mistress. He gave her brother, Samuel, the privilege of being driver (and go-between) for the high commissioner – Samuel would sometimes even take Gideon with him in the limousine – and gave Tova work as secretary in the city engineer's office, where large-scale development projects were underway. There she met Moshe Amiaz, at the time deputy chief-engineer, and became close with his girlfriend, Daniela, inviting her for weekend home visits in Jerusalem and serving as best-woman at their wedding.

²⁶ Avinoam Kaplan, Hadassim's biology teacher, had a close relationship with the Institute (by which he later founded a similar group of his own). Gideon Ariel, Yakir Laufer and Avi Meiri, used to hunt for lizards in the fields of Hadassim and sell them to the Institute.

The old synagogue in the shack on Yehuda Halevy St. was replaced by the Great Synagogue on Allenby Street, financed by my great grandfather, Isar Leib Bluwstein.

But Moshe Amiaz, dashing handsome and something of a playboy also fell strongly for Tova. When the feelings soon became mutual, she began a secret, passionate love affair with him even as she continued her relationship with Rokach -- all of this while Amiaz was already responsible for a son from a previous marriage (the son later died in battle during the Independence War, at the ETZEL²⁷ attack on Jaffa). Gideon fondly remembers Amiaz as a very charming man. Daniela, who appears alongside him and his mother in photos of their frequent beach trips together, would later tell Gideon that her late husband had loved only one woman in his life: Tova.

Given his position, exposed as he was to the media, Rokach contrived to keep the most honorable public appearance. He therefore had his mistress marry his loyal friend, Moshe Ariel, giving them residence at the city's official office (at the Worker's Apartment Complex) as a wedding present.

There was no intimacy between Tova and Moshe, though he admired her from a distance, as irresistible a love-object as she was for many. He was stingy to a perverse extreme, never indulging her delight in the finer things, never allowing their comfortable salaries to translate to comfortable living. Her love for Amiaz was intense, whereas Moshe was unromantic: they shared a bed, but as Gideon remembers, "They slept far from each other, back to back, like two strangers."

Though Moshe was abundantly aware of her other men, fear for his job and apartment made divorce unthinkable. Besides, Tova knew of her husband's ties to the anti-British resistance. Moshe hadn't told her anything, but he had occasionally brought home military equipment, and there was always the coming and going of mysterious people at unusual hours. He was even more anxious, then, of the possibility that divorce would lead to his arrest and even his execution. Thus, every parcel of anger he harbored would be discharged in habitual abuse of mother and son. When one day she finally complained to her brother about it, Gideon remembers seeing his uncle's limousine skirting to a stop and his father given a taste of his own medicine by his own brother-in-law. After that incident Gideon's mother spent very little time at home when his father was around.

Gideon was born in 1939. Given his mother's multiple, simultaneous liaisons, it is impossible to know for certain who his father was – the same doubt, incidentally, that obtains in many other cases. Gideon's first memory, at the age of three, consists of his father beating his mother, yelling, "You are a whore, and you sell your body!"...Gideon screaming, trying to intervene and protect his mother...his father, turning on him instead, brutally slapping his face...Gideon lying on the floor, hysterical, his alarmed father pulling him to his feet and trying to calm him down, "Quiet, the neighbors will hear you"...

Another youthful memory is from kindergarten, when he was caught stealing an envelope of rubber bands. The teacher called his father, who arrived and hit him in front of

²⁷ The National Military Organization, a pre-1948 Jewish military group dedicated to fighting the British and Arabs.

everyone, teacher and children. The shame, even now at the age of sixty-seven, fills his eyes with tears.

Yoram Elkon lived on 15 Reines St. His father was chief of the Tel Aviv water department. Yoram and Gideon were close friends.

Yoram: “Care for Gidi [Gideon] was largely in his father’s hands. His mother was never at home. When we were six years old, we were playing chess in the kitchen while his father stood behind him and watched. When Gidi made a not-so-clever move, his father would smack him so hard on the face and ears I thought his head would fly off. He yelled at him, ‘How badly could you possibly play, Gidi?! How badly?!’ Gidi was tough, he refused to cry. He folded over on the chair as if going into shock. His father kept telling him again and again, ‘Nothing will ever come of you.’ Even when he was Israel’s champion in disc throwing his father kept saying that. That insult racked his brains his whole life; he was always trying to prove his father wrong. Even after his father’s death, Gidi continues to prove it.”

From a very early age, his parents would leave him at home while they were at work - eight hours alone in his cradle in the kitchen, with a chamber pot. Moshe would leave all the rooms locked. All alone, Gidi would climb over the parapet and down onto the floor (though he was beaten harshly if ever caught), and by the age of five he’d figured out how to pick all the door locks in the house, even after his father installed double-locks to prevent this.

“That’s how I developed my kind of digital thinking,” says Gideon. “I learned to hack into anything. In the computer world there are electric ‘locks’ with millions of codes. I’ve broken every one I’ve tried so far, the same way I hacked into the university’s computer system and read all my secret evaluations and grades.”

Once he’d “hacked” into all the rooms in his house, young Gidi found a plethora of dazzling military goods. He found out later that his father had once belonged to ETZEL only to split from that organization to join Abraham (Yair) Stern at LEHI²⁸. As co-director of Jaffa’s Customs, he was able to help LEHI smuggle munitions into Israel. One smuggling method was inside refrigerators: Moshe had his clerks put those refrigerators among various spread-out cargo cases and delivered to the underground without being checked. Some of the equipment he took home and operations men would pick them up there.

“Father would bring home expensive presents he got for sneaking important items through customs. Sometimes strange men would come over to the house and talk very softly. Father would tell them which incoming ships to watch for at the port. He took me with him to the port, once, and I asked him, ‘why is this group of refrigerators separated from the others?’ He was surprised that I understood something of his business, and answered, ‘If the refrigerators stay exposed to the sun they’ll explode.’”

²⁸ The Zionist Underground Organization was founded by IRGUN factions which split from it after it joined the HAGANA.

From the age of about six Gideon remembers Israel Rokach, the mayor, and Moshe Amiaz visiting his mother separately. Both of them would give him money, or sweets – Rokach once brought him a watch -- and ask him to play outside in the courtyard. Then he would leave, but after a while, hearing their moans, he would tiptoe back. Peeking in, he would crawl to the foot of the bed. He would just sit agape and stare while they were in the middle of it. Sometimes he would sneak into the closet afterwards and listen to their conversations. Sixty years have passed since those macabre violations of his childhood home, and he still remembers them with heart-wrenching pain. Gideon, the digital child, had wanted to know exactly what his mother was doing with those men, and the way she was doing it. To this day, as of this writing, he wakes up screaming from vivid nightmares of those days; to this day, it is only his wife, Ann that has given him his good dreams back. She alone has saved him from Pentheus' fate²⁹. Together they have shared a life and a business for thirty years. At the age of sixty-six -- the same year he approached me about this book -- he finally asked for her hand in marriage, and she agreed. While working on this book with me his heart opened up, and he started retelling events which he had never dared tell anyone, not even Ann. Our joint research then uncovered a series of documents, and made certain connections – and these began to shed light on the shocking picture of Gideon's childhood.

R. The Horrible Secret

“I was a young punk-kid in a gang,” recalled Gideon. “I stole car valves. I hardly ever studied and had to repeat the fourth grade. Everyday we ran onto the beach and gambled at the pier. We met dangerous people, some of them homosexuals, aggressive types. I was strong enough to stave them off, as I was already weight-lifting at the gym on King Solomon St., on the corner of Arlozorov St. We used to have arm wrestling contests on the beach, and even at that age I beat everyone hands down. Older boys, even adults couldn't touch me.”



In 1947 our family moved from Raanana to a veteran's neighborhood in Yad Eliyahu, Tel Aviv. One day, in the early fifties, I ran into Gideon while hanging out with my friends at the pier. He remembered me immediately, and I felt he was treating me as his best friend. He told me all about his weight

²⁹ In Greek mythology, Pentheus was a Theban king. In Euripides' last, most tragic and paradoxical play *The Bacchae*, after Pentheus bans the worship of Dionysus, the god lures him into the woods, where he climbs to the top of a high tree and watches the Dionysian ritual orgy. The Maenads then tear him apart, and his corpse is mutilated by his own mother, Agave, who doesn't recognize him and tears off his head in her Bacchic frenzy, believing it to be that of a lion. The name 'Pentheus', as Dionysus points out, means "Man of Sorrows"; even his name destines him for tragedy.



Gideon Ariel

lifting and I told him how much I loved basketball, and as we walked together down to the beach I noticed how easily his sculpted physique attracted flitting looks from girls, and jealousy from other boys -- even as they looked up to him as a gang-leader. After sitting down for some corn on the cob at one of the kiosks, we agreed to keep in touch.

“I was always in need of money,” recalls Gideon. “On Fridays I’d skip school and work as a flower-delivery boy. That’s how we met [he tells me], when I greeted your grandfather on his porch. They’d send us with bouquets of a dozen roses each, but I was too smart for them – on every delivery I’d slip out one rose from the bouquet and give the recipient the remaining eleven. Then, after I’d accumulated fifteen or so this way I’d sell them to the florists on Ben Yehuda and Frischman St. They all loved me as the handsome boy who liked to greet them with ‘Shabbat Shalom! [Good Saturday!] Whoever sent these flowers loves you!’”

“Customers who wanted their flowers delivered would frequently ask for me specifically, so after a while I decided I needed a bicycle to up my efficiency and make more money. The ‘OPPER’ bicycle cost thirty Liras; the ‘RALY,’ the dream bicycle at the time, cost forty. So I stole a hundred valves from various cars and sold them. The five additional liras I needed I stole from my mother’s secret money stash. The bicycle served me for several years, hidden in a shelter where my father wouldn’t suspect anything. I kept it even while I was at Hadassim. Later, on a visit to Israel from the U.S., I discovered that my father had sold it. I was very hurt by that, even though I was already twenty-five, married and a father. “

The Independence War erupted when Gideon was eight years old. At that time Moshe had discovered that his wife was sleeping not only with the mayor but also the municipal engineer. Gideon remembers standing at the window with his father and watching his mother outside, on the corner of Frischman-Reines, as she waited for someone. He remembers seeing Amiaz arriving in his car, watching them embrace and drive off together. “Look at your mother, the whore, going out with other men,” said father to son. “Only a whore behaves like this.”

Eventually Moshe decided on divorce. He left the house on Reines St. and bought another apartment shortly thereafter.

“The apartment he moved into, the whole situation, it was all a mystery to me,” remembers Gideon. “Every morning before school, father would meet me downstairs on our sidewalk and feed me potatoes and sour cream. I was embarrassed by all the neighbors’ stares, but he would just tell me, ‘Don’t worry about it, they’re all idiots.’ One day it was discovered that my mother was pregnant. Abortions were out of the question then. Rokach and Amiaz got scared, and the mayor put her on paid leave to prevent office gossip. I took care of her myself, as she kept inside the house out of shame and let me do all the shopping. When it came to her ninth month I called my father and asked him to help out; he brought food for her but left it on the stairs, refusing to go up to the apartment to see her. When she started to have labor pangs I ran over to Yoram Elkon’s place, and they called for an ambulance. It took her to the ASUTA hospital. She

was very low on money, so father took care of the medical bills and hospital stay. A healthy girl was born, and father registered her under his name – Y.³⁰Ariel³¹.

“I was left alone in the apartment, with almost nothing to eat, while Father took care of my mother in the hospital. After about two days he finally came to visit me with some food, and said, ‘Gidi, you have a sister. Take a very good care of her and mother. They’re in grave danger now.’”

“‘Yes, father, I understand.’ I said. But I didn’t.”

“After several days the two returned from the hospital, and for the next ten months my mother stayed home without venturing outside. The city council continued paying her salary. The situation seemed perfectly natural to me at the time: I tended to our groceries and other essentials, and happily took my baby sister out for walks in Dizengoff Square.”

“When Y. was ten months old, however, one day an ambulance suddenly appeared on Reines St. Doctors and ward men in white uniforms climbed up to our apartment. They demanded that she come with them, without the baby, to Beer Yaakov Hospital. She evidently knew what that place was – a mental institution – and what they’d come for: to drag her off into a Coo Coo’s nest. Of course she refused, crying and resisting as they dragged her off the floor and forced her into the ambulance downstairs. Just like that, my mother had disappeared from me.”

In the late seventies, I interviewed the psychiatrist who had been chief of Beer Yaakov Hospital during Tova’s incarceration and who later became the head of Abrabanel mental hospital in Bat Yam as well as district psychiatrist of Tel Aviv County. When I interviewed him in his expansive apartment he was already in his nineties, childless and a widower, though he still maintained a limited counseling practice in a Nataniah retirement community. The sense that his end was near, apparently, freed him to speak candidly about Gideon’s mother.

The man was actually present at her brutal abduction, which, incredibly, wasn’t even an isolated incident. In her particular case, the Tel Aviv district psychologist had authorized the hospitalization per the eminent mayor’s wishes, leaning on the fraudulent diagnosis of Rokach’s doctor.

He recalled meeting separately with Moshe Ariel and Gideon, explaining to both that Tova Ariel would never be released. He confessed to me his enormous crime and expressed deep remorse, going so far as describing the other such mendacities in his career.

So Gideon was left alone with Y., without any clue as to where those uniformed men had taken his mother.

³⁰ My sister has asked to remain anonymous; “Y” will hereafter serve as her designation.

³¹ My sister took close care of my father toward the end of his life, in thanks for giving her his name.

[Gideon]:

Yoram Elkon and I left Y. in her cradle and went searching for my father, to let him know what had happened. I was certain my mother would return eventually, so I was constantly in expectation mode. I slept on the floor near the entrance so that I'd wake up when she returned. The neighbors helped me take care of my sister, and my father used to come over in the evening and bring food and anything else we needed. Soon enough, though, someone came to take my sister away and I moved into my father's place.

I was in the fourth grade at the time, but had to repeat the year. I kept asking where my mother was. Finally, one day father told me to go to Beer Yaakov.

I went there by myself. As a delivery boy, nothing was that hard to find. I went up to the information desk and asked to see my mother, and was led to her. She was sitting in her room wearing a black dress. "Mom?..." I said hopefully. She didn't respond. She didn't recognize me. I sat next to her, and after a moment she asked me what my name was. I couldn't believe it. "I'm your son, Gideon," I told her.

She looked at me, kindly, but without the slightest hint of recognition, and said, "I also have a son named Gideon. Do you know my son?"

All I could do was keep telling her, insistently, "*I am Gideon -- I'm your son!*" And I burst into tears. She looked as if she hadn't heard me at all: "My son is handsome and wise, and when he grows up he'll protect me..."

"I'll protect you, mom. No one will ever hurt you."

"If you ever meet my son, tell him to come to me."

"*I am your son...*" I could hardly keep from drowning in my own tears.

But she didn't respond. Her eyes, glazed over, looked right passed me. What tore at me then, immediately, like a knife piercing through my insides, was seeing her once acutely perceptive eyes reduced to that single, monochrome and empty expression. The meaning of those still wonderful almond eyes was the difference between now and then, between life and living death.

"Mother, what did they do to you?" I asked.

"I want my son," she whispered, "He is the only thing left for me, I want only him..."

And the more she withdrew, the more freely my tears came.

The nurse that was present through all this then led me out of the room. “Poor little boy,” she uttered miserably. “I’m not a poor little boy,” I raised my voice to her, “I’ll be bigger and stronger one day; I’ll get her back to life and out of this prison!”

The nurse looked at me with a knowing, ironic half-smile. “Only death can help anyone escape this place. Forget your mother.”

She took me to the hospital director’s office. A tall, lanky man with a heavy Russian accent, he asked me very firmly to sit down. He gestured hopefully toward a small plate of cookies – his idea of seemly kindness – and asked, “Did your mother recognize you?”

“No!” I yelled, seething.

“You have to be stronger than this. You don’t have a mother anymore: she is something else now, not the person you knew. You must learn to think of her as if she were dead.”

“She’s not dead!” I yelled through my tears, “She’s alive and breathing! Before you broke into our house she was fine! What did you *do* to her?”

The bastard caressed my hair, and looking straight into my eyes he continued, “Your mother did some terrible things, and now because of it she’s sick. There are laws - and we must live by the law. Always remember that.”

“What law did she break? What the hell does that have to do with being sick?”

“You’ll understand when you grow up,” he answered. He poured me some orange juice, reached into his drawer and took out some more cookies. I hurled them at the table and looked straight at him:

“*You* murdered my mother. I’ll never rest until I get to the bottom of this.”

At this, he nodded toward the nurse. She took me kindly by the hand and led me, through the hall and outside to the bus station. But before I left, as I was about to step onto the bus, she whispered, “You’re right. They killed your mother!”

As I sat alone in the back of that bus from Beer Yaakov to Tel Aviv, winding through narrow roads between orange groves, it finally dawned on me that my mother hadn’t recognized me. It was fatal blow: in spite of what I’d promised my mother and declared defiantly to the director and nurse, I now felt that Israel Rokach and Moshe Amiaz had destroyed her, that she was lost to me. That was the moment when she was really taken from me forever. This was it, the final stop in the piecemeal deterioration of my tenuous grasp for her as a mother – a process begun with my father’s growing violence and the terror of what I

witnessed in her bedroom: *they* had done this to her, my father, Rokach and Amiaz.



Moshe Ariel

I had no desire to go back to father's apartment, but where would I go now? Nothing could still the shock of that experience, and the rest of my day was no easier, as I wandered aimlessly through any and all alleys and streets that would have me. I came home very late, but to my surprise father showed no interest in hitting me (as he normally would when I happened to disappear for long hours). Neither would he ask me about my visit to Beer Yaakov. I assumed that he had gone there himself and learned what had happened. I'd always both loved and hated my father. Now I hated him even more. In my eyes, he was the guiltiest of all three men for what had happened. Even I felt responsible, for not stopping her abductors from dragging her out of the house.

"I don't want to live in this house. I want to move to a boarding school," I told my father. He just looked at me sadly, tentatively, and muttered his old line: "Nothing will come out of you anyway."

Still, a few days later he took me to meet Rachel Shapirah at Hadassim. Father had probably already told her all about me and I found her warm and even loving. Somehow, when she looked at me, I felt I'd found a second mother. "It'll be good for you here, Gideon," she said, "you'll find friends, both boys and girls, and teachers who care about you." She sent for Shoshanna Learner, my first counselor, who led us to my living quarters at Unit B. She showed me into my new room and picked out one of the beds for me. Father was about to hit me for not putting all the blankets on properly, but Shoshanna immediately stepped in forcefully and told him "Mr. Ariel, you have no right to that! Here *I'm* Gideon's mother, and it's *my* job to show him how to make the bed, not yours." He was rather taken aback, of course, and after watching us making the bed together he took his bag and headed back to the main road to Tel Aviv. I was happy to be rid of him, and even happier to feel that I had a home at last.

I told the other kids at the camp that my mother was dead.

While working on this book with Uri I found a shriveled, yellowed page folded inside my father's passport. He passed away thirty-five years ago, but I'd never once looked through his old documents. Now that I'd combed through them I found the following:

Tel Aviv, 7.20.52

*To the Mayor of Tel Aviv,
Mr. Israel Rokach.*

Most honorable sir,

My Mother, Tova Ariel, started working for the city of Tel Aviv in 1936. Even today her status is still listed as “clerk,” though her real job consists of occupying a cell in the prison of Beer Yaakov State Hospital. I don’t wish to enter into a description of how she ended up there; I want only to focus on one point – the cause of her current plight. Several of the residents in our apartment building (which belongs to the municipality workers) banded together to expel her from the apartment, finding clever devices to keep her interned in the hospital under “special guidance” and prevent her return home. It might have something to do with the apartment’s value, which is considerable. More to the point, her current situation doesn’t resemble even a wisp of humane treatment – but to do this to a colleague? It seems the weak and few have little value left in our time.

Most of my time is taken up far from the city, so I haven’t had the opportunity to understand her situation until recently. During my vacation, however, I have been able to see the extent of her suffering. I saw her only last Thursday – and God spare me what my eyes beheld there...

I’ll never forgive those who precipitated my mother’s miserable state. No, she is not there to heal, but the very opposite. Though I am now still young the day will come when they will answer for their barbaric crimes, and I would hope to spare you from any involvement in these matters when the time comes, since I am entirely certain this entire affair has proceeded without your knowledge. I also hope that after I’ve painstakingly brought this matter to your attention you will investigate it personally, and bring an end to this vicious episode and my mother’s torture.

*Thank you in advance,
And with much respect,
Gideon Ariel*

*Hadassim Youth Village
P. O. Box
Even –Yehuda.*

Though my name is signed to it, the above letter to Rokach is in my father’s handwriting. I never wrote it, nor did he ever mention it. Nor did I receive any reply from Rokach at my return address at Hadassim or elsewhere. What’s clear is that, despite his bitterness towards her, my father sent this letter in a cunning

attempt to help my mother through Rokach's influence, even if he was well aware of Rokach's principal role in her captivity. Of course, the mayor saw through the ploy, and in any case wasn't about to allow for the bad publicity that could result from returning my mother to her normal life.

I was fourteen when I burst into a Tel Aviv office and demanded to see the lawyer who worked there. The lawyer represented my uncle, Samuel Goldenberg, who I'd learned was actually my mother's legal guardian. Some guardian, I thought. I confronted him about doing something – anything -- for her, but he demanded that I leave immediately, threatening to have my uncle come and teach me a lesson himself. My reply was equally polite: "Let him come and we'll see who teaches whom a lesson!" My uncle never showed up.

Sometime during Gideon's first year at Hadassim, his mother and sister mysteriously arrived for a visit. But how did she ever get there? – was this an attempted escape, or a furlough of some kind? And how did she ever take Y. from her orphanage – did she kidnap her or did she have permission?

"When Gideon first joined us in Hadassim he came with his father," Chili remembers. "When we asked him about his mother, Gideon said she was dead. One day, though, I was looking over at the palm tree in the main entrance and noticed a woman and her baby carriage. I'd never seen anyone like that coming to visit – not to mention that carrying the baby and the carriage over that kilometer-long stretch of dunes must have been an excruciating ordeal. The sight was absolutely surreal. I thought I was hallucinating."

"While I was still rubbing my eyes in disbelief, I heard her yelling to me, 'Child, can you help me?' so I approached her. 'I'm looking for my son,' she said."

'What his name?' I asked her.

'Gideon Ariel.'

'Who are you?'

'I'm his mother.'

"I was absolutely stunned. Gideon had told us he didn't have a mother."

'This is his sister, Y.'

"She followed me over to unit B, and waited at the entrance while I went inside. I ran into Gideon's room and yelled, 'You lying son of a bitch! How can you lie like that?! You said your mother was dead, yet there's a woman standing outside who says you're her son!'"

“When he overcame his shock, he said, ‘Wait a moment, don’t go back outside! I want you to swear not to tell a soul about this.’”

“I agreed. He asked me to stay in the room with him in the meantime, and then he brought her in. My job was to stand by the door and not let anyone in.”

“Tova came in with the carriage, kissed and hugged him, and sat on one of the beds. Gideon was crying. ‘This is Y, your sister,’ she told him, still unaware that Gideon knew full well who his baby sister was. She asked how he was doing at Hadassim. All the while she played with her baby daughter. He was simply beside himself.”

“The meeting lasted for a half-hour, and then she hugged him and left. It was to be her only visit -- and I kept his secret. I used to visit his father with him, and Moshe Ariel, too, always spoke as if Gideon had no mother; I never revealed to him that I’d met her.”

[Gideon]:

Tova was eventually taken from Beer Yaakov to Beit Blumenthal in Haifa, where electric-shock therapy was used to damage her long-term memory, to keep the possible scandal of Rokach’s out-of-wedlock adventures under permanent wraps. This had been an intelligent, capable and highly educated woman. She’d been Rokach’s loyal secretary for years. There wasn’t the slightest bit of mental sickness in her -- not until they were through. She was turned into a mental patient for the sin of conceiving the child of someone important.

I came to see her in Beit Blumenthal once, with Chili. By this time she could hardly respond to me at all. I cried in Chili’s arms. They told me she would never recognize me again, that I should forget about her. They told me not to come back. In retrospect, they were probably doing their part to keep me from the truth behind her imprisonment.

Chili remembers that visit. “Gideon had been absolutely set on visiting his mother, so we’d hitchhiked to Haifa instead of his father’s house or my mother’s.”

“Tova didn’t recognize him. The nurses tried to tell her, ‘This is your son,’ and the only, painful answer from her was, ‘I have a son named Gideon! Where is he?’ She was a tall, very beautiful woman, just as I’d remembered. She was full of laughter the whole time; my impression was that she even seemed quite happy in her little corner of the world.

[Gideon]:

She was transferred some years later to the Mizraa Mental Clinic near Nahariah. In 1973, while in the U.S., I received a phone call from Mazraa telling me that they’d hospitalized her again -- after one of the gardeners had raped her.

I immediately took a flight back to Israel to visit her. The head nurse told me that “things like this happen sometimes.” That these “things” were known to happen, but went on anyway, *somehow*...I didn’t even know what to say. Even so, I didn’t go to the police. I come back to the States still very much in shock.

Two years later she was gone. I wasn’t informed of it, not until a good friend of mine, Dr. Gilead Weingarten, happened to spot her gravestone at the Pardes Channa cemetery. I came to visit there with him and Chili. The details on her stone weren’t right -- whoever had taken custody of her in the end had evidently falsified her records.

My sister had started out in an orphanage. After several years had passed, however, Moshe and Daniela Amiaz decided to adopt her. One time, an older worker at the city treasury’s office saw her and exclaimed, “You’re *Tova’s* daughter!”

Only a week before he died, as he lay in his bed Amiaz told me that he, indeed, was her biological father.

After Tova’s death in 1975, \$15,000 was still left in her bank account. The very source of her livelihood was one and the same with her destruction – the same people who conspired to make and keep her sick. The authorities sought out both Y and me separately and gave each of us information pertaining to our inheritance. This was how Y. found out she had a brother in the first place! After doing a bit of homework she finally managed to locate me, and we were finally reunited after years of forced separation.

[Chili]:

One evening, I got a call from Amiaz asking me about Gideon Ariel. “How’d you reach me?” I asked him. “I went through some records and found that you’re the one closest to him,” he told me. That same evening I went to his house in Afeka with my wife, Thelma, who is also a Hadassim graduate. I brought a photo album of Gideon with me. We stayed up for hours as I told them Gideon’s life story. Amiaz is a charming and intelligent man. His intention, it seems, was always to protect Y. Daniela, his wife, is an energetic woman and her love for her adopted daughter was obvious.

When I got home I immediately called Gideon in the U.S. Within a week he was on his way here, nervous and a little confused emotionally. He’d asked me to accompany him on his visit with Y, and on my way to pick him up at the airport I bought him a Nina Ricci’s perfume to give her as a present. When we arrived at her place he was nervous enough to ask me to go in first.

The meeting was wonderfully pleasant. The next day, on Gideon's wishes, we went on a visit to the house on Reines St., to show Y. where she was born. Gideon wanted all of us to stay together for the Sabbath, at my house; he and his sister, his father, my wife and I sat together at our table. Thelma lit the candles, I uttered the Kiddush, and then we ate together and opened our hearts. It was a little embarrassing at the beginning – Gideon and his father aren't big talkers – but the ice was broken once Moshe started talking about what happened when Y. was born and in those first months she had spent with her mother.

[Gideon]:

I was very affected by my father and Y's conversation, so much so that I excused myself and left the room in order to cry. Chili, who saw what I'd been through when we were teenagers, was also clearly touched by the scene unfolding at his dinner table, and tears started forming in his eyes. Then Y. was crying, and she put her arms around my father -- who had given her his name -- who had taken her home from the hospital when she was born. Thelma, Chili's wife, was also crying. That night, I heard vistas of detail in father's conversation that he had never dared tell me before.

I've met with my sister many times since then. I told her about our mother; I even told her, later on, that our mother had been with Rokach in addition to Amiaz – that Rokach could even be her real father. She hissed at me, not wanting to hear any of it.

Gideon was initially uneasy about telling his story in a way that would bear the full range of details covered here. We held long conversations via Skype, between Coto De Caza, California and Ramat Efal in Israel, on that very question. Y., in fact, begged us not to reveal the circumstances surrounding her birth. She wanted to protect Rokach's family, who are innocent in any case. In the final analysis, however, we decided that if we were doing autobiography, that it be true to the end.

Gideon's eyes are as piercing and inextinguishable as his mother's. Like her, he has a serene, unimposing beauty coupled with a rambunctious laughter. Many men loved his mother, just as many women have loved him. I immediately recognized in her picture that same mysterious charm of his, the faint hint of mischief buried in soulful calm. The strength of his charisma lies just beneath the knife's edge of memory, underneath the ashes of forgetfulness: the secret of the Phoenix – the secret of Beethoven's opus 110 Sonata, which Jeremiah revealed to us in Hadassim, in 1944.

On my sixty-sixth birthday, on the twentieth of March, 2006, I finally solved the mystery that has occupied me for the last fifty four years: Gideon Ariel is a Phoenix.

