

Part four

With Our Lives Ahead of Us

To live means to create. The principle that reigned in the culture of Hadassim, in our very hearts and home, was one of creative dialogue. And witness the results: fifty years have passed and each of us is engaged in creation. Shevach Weiss brought his insights into the realm of politics and fought to apply them wholesale to the Israeli political system; Micha Spira unfolded reams of insights in the field of brain research; Gideon Ariel applied the intuitive concepts he had charted for himself as a student at Hadassim in the field of sports bio-mechanics, and applied that new cognitive territory in the real world, paving the way for greater athletic achievements. Uri Milstein charted his own course with his early insights into the very nature of human behavior in the context of war. And while this chapter is devoted to the story of these four men, it bears mentioning that there were many others among our group that engaged in creation and were blessed by it throughout the whole of their careers.

Today, fifty years after our first adventures in Hadassim, we are motivated to spread the germ of the Hadassim miracle to the educational systems of the world. The four colleagues mentioned above were all part of the brainstorming team that initially gave flight to this book. All of them want to see the principles of the early Hadassim project gaining influence in the service of a better future. We invite our readers to join in this unique educational endeavor and contact us via email (see pg. 4).

Creative dialogue is destined to change the world.

Chapter Seven: The Lamed Hei Project

A. Corrupting the Youth

My third school year at Hadassim (1954-1955) seemed to hold ill-omens for me, and in retrospect that was a good thing. Today I can understand fully what was then only an intuition: given what we know about chaos and the uncertainty principle, good omens will always be false, even manipulative. Statistically, bad results are easier to predict than good ones. For instance, my high record of academic achievement in high school allowed me to gain a full scholarship for university study, but my social position left me in bad shape indeed. This is how I expressed it in my journal at the time:

“My world darkened, and all of a sudden I broke,
My arm was cut off; my flight had come to an end
My eyes were opened [I sobered up], and I discovered that I’m grown up
My foolish heart was pierced, just now, by an arrow .



Uncle Moshe and Uri

I spent the majority of my time in seventh and eight grades on my research -- with help from uncle Moshe, Daphna and Gideon Lavi -- on the War of Independence. My uncle not only coached me, adding his own bit to my work, but also edited the final product. Its final formulation was therefore a collaborative effort. My complicated dialogue with uncle Moshe also helped distance me from my age group; most of them saw me as a strange bird indeed, which is evident enough from their remarks in this book. But I was very proud of that fact, as I believed -- with all the naiveté of a fourteen year old boy, admittedly -- that I had understood something about the real nature of military and war, that I had successfully interpreted key military events, whereas the adults in my midst had failed to do so. At the same time, I was disappointed that nobody other than my uncle or Daphna or Gideon Lavi could really appreciate my new insights.

Uncle Moshe tried to comfort me: “Dead fish are swept aside in the current; it is the living alone who swim against it. You have to decide, ultimately, if you want popularity at the expense of your true self, or whether you want to cultivate your mind in glorious and painful solitude.” Though my reason heartily embraced this idea, my heart rejected it. I felt a jarring kind of loneliness at the time; today I know, however, that I was not alone: uncle Moshe had located the source of my uniqueness -- my interest in wars -- and helped cultivate it, though perhaps he was also using me for his own self-realization. But Daphna and Gideon also gave me succor with their friendship, partaking with me in what was nothing less than an exceptional adventure, when you consider that we were still in elementary school. Indeed, they were my troops. I couldn't possibly expect more out of their friendship in that regard.

And yet, it was the very possibility of a collaboration of this kind, a joint research-adventure among seventh and eighth-graders, that illustrated what the Hadassim miracle was really made of.

Toward the end of eighth grade, in June 1954, I gave a copy of my paper to Jeremiah and Rachel. They were acquainted with my uncle, from their days at the Teacher-Scout and Ben Shemen, and their opinions were split with regard to our joint project. They summoned both me and my mother -- along with my uncle -- before the trimester was over, to discuss the propriety of such collaboration. Rachel expressed several reservations, claiming that my research wasn't really my own; she accused my uncle of using me to propagate his iconoclastic notions. In her opinion, I wasn't yet mature enough to grasp the complexities involved in battles and warfare in general. She thought I should spend more of my time dancing and playing sports. She feared that I was missing out on the pleasures of youth, that my personality was going to be stunted, unless I could integrate better with my youthful peers.

Jeremiah, on the other hand, thought his wife was exaggerating on all counts. There was the fact that I'd recently played the principal character in "Spring Bells," for one, and there was also the general maxim that everyone needed to cultivate his own, inherent skills. In his mind, it was forbidden to impinge on the development of someone who partakes of a legitimate field of inquiry, no matter the person's age. "Mozart and Brahms' rhythm of development hardly corresponded to conventional definitions of childhood. They'd already composed music and become active musicians before reaching puberty," he said.

"More than this," Moshe interjected, "evolution has determined that we begin to mature intellectually no less than physically at the ages of thirteen and fourteen. There were many cases, during the Holocaust, of even younger children ascending to adulthood in every respect, or else they would never have survived. I became disabled in the first place [during the War of Independence] only because others around me weren't reasonable, because they wouldn't deign to think about hard issues like war from an early age. We paid a high price for that laziness, in six thousand dead and ten thousand wounded.

"Alexander the Great and Napoleon were both interested in military science and history at very young ages, and consequently they knew what they were doing when they grew up. We should encourage our children to pursue their interest in this kind of research, not deter them. My aid to Uri has always been in the form of a Buberian dialogue and the criticism of Schwabe. Our joint work will prepare him for adulthood; it will help him become not only a military historian, but a military philosopher."

My mother added her own words: "I sent Uri here precisely because his attitude of critical engagement was beyond my endurance. But apparently it's beyond yours as well"



My mother

"And what do you have to say?" Rachel turned to me.

"Wars are the fuel of history," I answered with a dictum I'd often heard from my uncle. "As Trotsky would put it: even if we aren't interested in wars, they will always be interested in us; thus we will be eminently unprepared when they come for us. I don't know anything more important than understanding our failures in wartime and correcting them. The very destiny of our state hinges on that."¹

Jeremiah had the last word: "Two months from now, the ninth grade instructor will be Arie Mar – himself a disabled veteran of

¹ My wife Shifra had something to say about all this: "I personally have a problem with this answer of yours, as it indicates that you're an obsessive man, fixated on a thesis from the age of fourteen. You've been engaged in this endeavor of exposing failures your whole life." She's right, of course, but I have to thank my Hadassim teachers, uncle Moshe and my friends Daphna and Gideon for enabling me to see the issue so clearly. Since the thesis on which I have been "fixated" is true, I see no reason to abandon it.

the war, as well as a chemistry engineer and a very intelligent man. For my part, I'm convinced that Uri will be able to learn much from him and expand his research." Jeremiah couldn't know yet that my encounter with Arie Mar would bring Hadassim to the culmination of its trajectory.

With regard to my social problems, Rachel's diagnosis was correct: I wasn't a member of the Troupe, nor did I feel like dancing on Friday nights. My athletic achievements were nil; I was chosen for the basketball team because I was relatively tall, but the kind of vigorous activity that Gideon, Iris and Asher Barnea reveled in was simply not on my radar. On the other hand, my ongoing obsession with the war didn't make sense to most of my friends, either. Some of them even mocked me. It didn't interest my teachers, who seemed intent on looking upon me as an alien being whose sole interest consisted in stirring up criticism and controversy. I made it very hard on the teachers, as they were inclined almost one and all to use myths as educational tools. I was very disappointed that even someone like Shlomo Ahchituv or Dotan or Kashtan – my history, bible and literature teachers – saw my work as a vestige of youthful caprice that needed to be abandoned.

Even Avinoam Kaplan, the biology teacher, and Ella Fogel, the village librarian (and a Palmach officer), were hostile toward my unveiling of the failures of the war. They viewed me as a corrupter of the youth, an attitude which both angered and flattered me, since it was Socrates who was originally sentenced to death for the same crime. It happened that I was deeply immersed in Plato's *Apology* just then, so the irony was palpable. Anyway, the only people who seemed to understand me were Gideon Lavi and Daphna Urdang, my girlfriend. It was partly for her support that we became involved romantically in the first place; in other words, I dated her despite not being in love, which became a source of psychological conflict.

As high school came ever closer, it began to dawn on me that disinformation, as a general principle, was an essential, built-in characteristic of reality. Men have an inherent interest in withholding the strength of their hand, in revealing little of the truth in their hearts. Just as reality becomes tougher and tougher, so do they tend to hide more and more of that truth lest someone use it against them. This overall intuition helped me conclude that most of written history, indeed most of what we think we know about reality, is untrue. Thus we continually fail in the face of our greatest challenges.

Moreover, I now had solid reason do doubt what people say.

My life changed dramatically, at the beginning of the school year in 1954, with the arrival of a new Chemistry teacher: Arie Mar, the new instructor for unit E. I quickly befriended both him and our new counselor, Shoshanna Lerner. What's more, I became very close friends with Gideon Lavi as a result of our mutual affinity for Arie. The three of us would spend our nights in our new instructor's apartment at the end of the corridor, engrossed in conversation.

Ephraim Gat: “Arie Mar was an outstanding teacher, and the reason I became a chemist. He was a master at conveying the material in a compelling way, with his sharp humor and disarming personality. He wanted to be close to his students, to break down artificial barriers, though our admiration of his knowledge made this a challenge. He occupied a higher sphere than we did, and he was born that way.”

Gideon Lavi, who went on to study chemistry at the Technion, was a super-star in Arie Mar’s class.

“Arie Mar had an easygoing, ironical way about him. He’d arrive in class wearing sandals, looking more like a student than a teacher. And he was more worldly than the other teachers.”

I never had the privilege of studying chemistry with Arie. Gideon Lavi and Ephraim were a year ahead of me in school, so I was doing physics when they were taking chemistry. And that was my last year at Hadassim. Nevertheless, he had a great influence on my personality, as he understood (as I did) to what extent men tend to distort reality, willfully and consciously. He paid a price for his dedication to the truth, in the context of our collaboration on the Lamed Hei project. The truth, indeed, is what we wanted to test. And we discovered, along the way, that bringing truths to light isn’t an easy venture.

B. A Shin Bet Target**

Arie was born to a well to do family in Kishinev, Bessarabia, in 1925. While still a boy his family transferred to Bucharest, the capital of Romania, where he went to high school.



Arie Mar

He was a brilliant student, mastering Russian, French, Rumanian, and Yiddish in a few short years. More to the point, he was an obsessive reader and book hunter, with a startling range of interests. From a young age, therefore, his knowledge began to dwarf the capacities even of the adults in his midst, which led to a lifetime pattern of conflict with his peers. His wife, Chava, told us that as he lay dying from a stomach tumor, in November 2000, he prayed that he would live long enough to finish the book he was reading.

With the eruption of WWII, his family escaped to the Soviet Union, spending most of the war years in Uzbekistan under very harsh conditions. He graduated from an Uzbek military academy, where he discovered the primitive state of military thought – and the price incurred by that kind of intellectual poverty. As the war neared to an end, he began studying chemistry at the University of Odessa. He stayed through his program even while his family moved back to Bucharest, when the war was finally over. Soon he was in Tel Aviv, having immigrated in 1945.

During the War of Independence, Arie served in the 32nd Battalion of the Alexandroni Brigade. He was severely wounded in the left arm during Operation Ben Nun Aleph, on

May 25th, and he spent two years recovering at Tel Hashomer hospital. Professor Eliyahu Spira (Micha's father) oversaw his surgery and saved his arm from amputation. There were about a thousand wounded men recovering in the same hospital at the time; many of them, like Arie, would suffer some sort of disability for the duration of their lives. Arie became the deputy chairman of the IDF Disabled War Veteran's organization.

His hospital stay gave him ample opportunity to fall in love with Chava, one of the nurses, and the two were eventually married. Once he was fit for study, he enrolled at the Technion, graduating in Chemical Engineering. Soon thereafter he and his wife, along with his young daughter, joined the Hadassim community.

Emanuel Garntzarj, a wounded veteran of the battle at Ramle, befriended Arie while they were both at Tel Hashomer hospital.

“Beyond his wide ranging education and his intellectual curiosity, which pushed him to explore the truth in every issue and realm, Arie had an extraordinary patience, an absolute dedication to hearing out every side of a dispute – a very rare thing indeed. He would always present his own views in a civilized manner, without a trace of contempt, always with an unassailable logic that spoke to the mind.

“The prevailing atmosphere in those days was one of hero-worship. The Sabras were wrapped up in some illusion of macho invincibility, without caring for what had actually happened on the ground, in the battles themselves. The Palmach was enthroned as the greatest thing in Zionist history. Arie's sober criticism was virtually heretical at the time. He was really exceptional.

“The MAPAI socialists who held sway in the government demonstrated little tolerance for criticism, even if it came from fellow socialists. Arie bore a heavy portion of this intolerance as editor of the Israeli weekly “Haolam Haze,” which was militant in its criticism of the regime. Arie attended a few meetings of Uri Avneri's, and the Shin Bet (who were tracking Avneri at the time) consequently associated him with the regime's worst enemies.

“Arie soon found himself blacklisted. Despite his obvious abilities and enthusiasm, and notwithstanding the dearth of men of his quality, the doors were kept closed for Arie. That was what led him to Hadassim in the first place, though his virtual excommunication in Israel eventually led him to emigrate.

Chava shared many thoughts with us about her deceased husband. The portrait she gave us of the man showed originality, intellectual independence. Predictably, he demanded much from his country and his peers, which led to more than one crisis in his private life. On the political issues of the day, what he wanted most, fundamentally, was for the young state to achieve full economic independence – to not be consigned to parasitism.

“What did Arie look like?”

“When I first laid my eyes on him, I saw an elegant man of modest height. The manner of his speech and behavior almost suggested nobility. It was an unforgettable experience to connect with him: he wasn’t just handsome, but kind and charming – despite not being easy to get along with. He wanted others to be like him. He wasn’t very forgiving that way, but as I learned his character I began to adjust myself to him. He had these adorable dimples and blue eyes. He’d recently shaved his head before I met him, so our first picture has him holding his wounded arm up to his bald head. In actuality, he looked so youthful and fair-haired through most of that period.”

“How did you meet?”

“Our paths crossed in one of the hallways. I was walking with a girlfriend of mine, but his eyes were clearly on me. We started talking. The next day he approached me in my pavilion, wearing a bright shirt with a wild Marigold flower on each button. Isn’t it funny? He was so full of kindness and warmth. He’d always recite Pushkin to his girlfriends – we all wanted to be with him.

“He had a deep scar on his upper arm, and he would frequently complain about the terrible pain. Dr. Catzenelson, the orthopedist for department 22, told him: ‘I don’t see a thing.’ ‘Hit my arm,’ Arie responded. Sure enough, when the orthopedist pressed on the wound, puss came gushing out. There were many patients suffering from Osteomyelitis [bone infection], which is so difficult to heal.”

“How did he feel about the injury, and the battle?”

“We didn’t talk about it much. Life was such an everyday battle for survival in those days, even after the Holocaust and WWII. The war in Israel meant he couldn’t graduate, which bothered him a great deal. He should have been able to resume his studies, but he didn’t have the money and he needed time to recover. He only mentioned how he’d received the wound, and that was it.”

“Were there any political discussions then?”

“Arie and his friend Ami argued incessantly. Often it got so loud that I would have to leave the room. But they loved it. Ami was a revisionist and an ex-ETZEL member, while Arie was a socialist”.

“What interested him?”

“Everything, from science to literature to music. But politics was primary. And everyone was talking politics after the war.

“Did he give up on Israel?”

“He hated the policy of Schnor [begging]. He wanted us to be self-reliant; he wanted Israel to survive on its own merits, to have a real economy. He couldn’t stay silent on what he thought were harmful developments. He thought we were going off track, and he was bitterly disappointed with our leaders. He expected the Jewish state to be virtuous. The great sacrifices borne for the birth of our state weren’t being honored...He would often say that the finest of us had died in the war, that they were now being betrayed.

“Why was he frustrated professionally?”

“His master’s thesis advisor was a charlatan, so Arie decided not to work with him. He left the Technion for the emerging Dead Sea Bromine industry, working around the clock in order to shape an efficient industrial model. After that he worked for the Zarchin desalination plant. He wanted to get a job with the Israeli nuclear power company, but after finally getting passed the admissions board, and making all the requisite arrangements, he was suddenly refused employment. One of the people who’d recommended him was a known leftist, you see. His vocal admonitions of our government, as well as his affiliation with Uri Avneri, had clearly gotten someone’s attention.

“Arie had escaped from the Soviet Union, a place he’d despised – and for what? How could someone’s name be stained so thoroughly and so quickly? He was quite hurt, even more so as he began to look for work abroad. He often spoke of it. It pained him so much [Chava began to cry a little at this point in the interview], I could see it on his face.

“He was forced into exile.”

C. “Adventures Are Destined For Us”

On an early September afternoon, on our very first encounter with our new instructor, Arie began retelling his war stories for us. His words didn’t interest most of the unit, most of whom were awaiting their sports session with Danni Dasa. But Daphna, Gideon Lavi and I were very interested in what he had to say.

“The Hagana was responsible for losing control of the main road to Jerusalem,” Arie told us. “The British had evacuated the Latrun police station on Thursday, May 13th. It should have been clear to everyone that whoever controlled the Latrun ridges was going to have control access to Jerusalem. Yigael Yadin, the de facto Chief of Staff, ordered Yitzhak Rabin, commander of the Harel Brigade, to have his Kiriath Anavim forces seize control of the Latrun district. But Rabin didn’t follow through with the order. Four days later, the Jordanian Legion entered and seized control of the ridges, blocking the Jerusalem road.

“This failure lost us Jerusalem, and could easily have led to Arab victory.”

“How do you know?” asked Daphna.

“During my two years in Tel Hashomer I headed the IDF Disabled Veterans Organization, and I had occasion to investigate some aspects of the war. I was curious as to why I was sent to Latrun in the first place, why I’d been wounded.”

Daphna: “There are many interpretations of the Latrun Battle. The siege on Jerusalem started long before the state was declared, before the invasion from Jordan.”

Arie: “The facts are unequivocal: These different interpretations, as you call them, all emanate from Ben-Gurion and his lieutenants’ desire to conceal their failures.”

At this point I interjected: “And why did supplies fail to reach Jerusalem before the state was declared?”

Arie: “Because Yitzhak Rabin had failed to return the April 20th convoy to Tel Aviv, despite the fact that the Jerusalem road was open.”

Gideon Lavi: “The Arabs of Eretz Israel were already blocking the road before the invasion of the Jordanian legion.”

Arie: “No. After Dir Yassin they all fled the region, afraid of being massacred.”

Gideon Lavi: “You’re really inventing a new history of the War of Independence.”

Arie: “History can be formalized in various ways. I’m not doing history, I’m looking at facts which can be validated or invalidated.”

At this point, Arie noticed that most of his audience was looking forward to the end of his lecture. So he ended the session, and simply invited the three of us up to his apartment. This was the first step in our intellectual fellowship, emblematic of the miracle of Hadassim: a creative dialogue uncomplicated by distance or age differences. It was the same with Dani and Gideon Ariel and Miriam Sidransky; with Greta Salus and Micha, Metuka and Ofra; with Moshe Zeiri and Gila Almagor and Livia Chachmon. I wasn’t forced to become half a dancer, just as Daphna wasn’t forced to become a half-athlete and Gideon Ariel wasn’t asked to become a half-academic. We were allowed to cultivate our unique personalities, just at the age when we were most ripe for it.

During our first visit with Mar, we told him all about our research with uncle Moshe about the Arab victory at Mamila Market and the massacre of the Hadassa convoy. Arie was interested in reading our work, so I ran back to my room to get it for him. We parted at lights-out.

Two days later Arie called me over to his apartment to give his assessment of our work. “We know from Newton’s first law, the law of inertia, that every being persists in its existence and activates forces to neutralize threats. That makes exposing failures of the military system nearly impossible. But without such exposure, one could never correct them and they would persist only to further damage our command. This dynamic of the military system explains the march of folly in history.

“I myself tried addressing flaws in our system after the War of Independence. But the clandestine organizations marked me and I became an exile in my own country. If you continue in your work, I can only assume that your fate will follow mine.”

I responded: “The state of Israel doesn’t belong to its prime minister, or to its Chief of Staff. It’s yours and mine as much as it is anyone else’s. If we stay silent, we allow them to press ahead with further calamities. I can’t think of anything more important than continuing with my work.”

Arie looked at me, and I could see there were tears welling up in his eyes. He slapped my shoulder and said: “Adventures lie ahead for us...”

D. A Secret Nucleus

Arie summoned the three of us to his apartment a month into the school year. “I had a long talk with Jeremiah. He told me, Uri, all about your work of the last two years; he spoke warmly of you, which is highly unusual coming from him...He’s decided to appoint unit E to prepare the Memorial Day ceremony this year. We should start work on it now, even it’s half a year away, because we want it to be something people will remember for years to come. Jeremiah promised us total freedom in this project. Do you have any ideas for a theme?”

Daphna: “You were wounded in the Latrun Battle. I suggest we dedicate the ceremony to the Latrun Battle.

Arie: “That’s too complicated.”

Gideon: “What about the Soviet occupation of Berlin?”

Arie: “A wonderfully heroic story, but unfit for our memorial day – even though many Jewish soldiers died in that battle and helped liberate our nation from the Nazi monster.”

Uri: “I came across a poem by Chaim Guri this week, ‘Here our bodies are lying,’ dedicated to the 35 warriors who fell on the road to Gush Etzion. The Lamed Hei Battle is the most famous myth of the War of Independence – there isn’t anybody in the country who hasn’t heard of it. I think we should build our ceremony around this story, but we shouldn’t stop at conventional recitation; we should dig deep into the affair and uncover its meanings, unravel everything our commanders have concealed – just as they tried to conceal the truth behind the Mamila and Hadassah convoy affairs.

Arie: “That’s a great idea, but what kind of event are you talking about organizing?”

Uri: “We’ll invite the parents and families of the Lamed Hei, and put their stories together with our own pieces and findings.”

Arie: “Excellent! What about you guys? Do you think you want to work on this together with Uri and his uncle?”

Daphna and Gideon committed to the project, and they agreed to keep it secret – even from our teachers – until a month before the ceremony. Every now and then Arie gave us permission to leave the village to interview families (of the Lamed Hei) along with some survivors. It was thus that a secret group was founded in Hadassim, in October 1955, to unravel the myth of the Lamed Hei and provide an interpretation of its meanings on Memorial Day. In contrary to Rachel’s concerns, it would turn out to be the most exhilarating year of my youth.

E. The Investigation

I had told my family about these developments. My brother, Ram, who was on vacation from his university studies in the US (he was studying genetics), had been a machine-gunner for the *Maoz* Platoon of the Palmach 1st battalion under the command of Rechavam Zeevi (Gandi)². Gandi was a lieutenant-colonel at the time. My brother introduced us, and the commander promised to let us interview everyone he knew that was involved in the Lamed Hei affair. Gandi thought we were really onto something with our project, because he believed that ultimately the Lamed Hei story would be known as one of the pinnacles of the Jewish struggle for independence.

Aunt Shoshanna was also eager to contribute to our efforts. At her Tel Aviv family estate, she introduced us – Gideon, Daphna, uncle Moshe and me -- to one of her and the poet Rachel’s friends, Shimon Kushnir, whose son Tuviah had fallen among the Lamed Hei. Kushnir told us about his son’s academic prowess, about how as an undergraduate in the biology department at Hebrew University, by 1948, he was already garnering international recognition for his research.

Tuviah wasn’t in the army when the war erupted, but his studies were interrupted and he joined his Palmach friends in Maale Hachamisha. He would accompany several of them on the journey to Gush Etzion, from which he was not destined to return. His father handed me his copy of Anda Pinkerfeld’s *Lamed Hei*, published in 1950. The book still occupies a space on one of my shelves; it was the first book I read on the War of Independence which wasn’t written for children. Shimon Kushnir told me that commanders in charge of the Gush Etzion expedition had made grave mistakes; that his son would already have been teaching at the university if he were still alive.

² Subsequently an IDF Major General, intelligence adviser to the prime minister, Knesset minister and director of the Eretz Israel Museum in Tel Aviv.

“What mistakes?” asked Gideon.

Uncle Moshe: “There are always mistakes in war. The original sin of WWII was the belief, on the part of Britain and France, that WWI would be the last war – a belief which led them to dismantle their armies. When reports accrued of Hitler’s war preparations, when Churchill insisted that Hitler intended to conquer Europe, British and French leaders ignored reality and branded Churchill a ‘sleepwalking right-winger.’”

Kushnir: “Moshe, the mistakes you refer to are strategic, but here the issue was one of tactics. They left for Gush Etzion from Har Tuv*** at 11:05 pm, rather than 5:00 pm during winter nightfall. They had to walk 28 kilometers in the mountains, carrying heavy materials, all the while careful to avoid an Arab or British ambush.

“They had seven hours left before sunrise. Specialists agree that they didn’t have a chance of reaching Gush Etzion by that time, while they couldn’t possibly survive in an Arab-filled area in the open daylight.”

“Who was responsible for that mistake?” asked Daphna.

Uncle Moshe: “The commanders are always responsible, though they always deflect blame on their subordinates.”

Kushnir: “The Jerusalem commander at the time was Israel Zabladowsky [Amir], and the Palmach 6th battalion commander was Zvi Zamir. They were responsible, and I blame them. Our soldiers should never have left on that expedition at such a late hour.”

Aunt Shoshanna served cookies and orange juice. She put her hand on Kushnir’s shoulder. “Nothing could be worse than having to bury your own son. I buried my own sister, Rachel. I know what you must feel.”

Kushnir: “Shoshanna’le, Tuviah didn’t have to die. The Har Tuv commander, Ben – Haruyah, told me that he warned their commander, Danni Mass, that it was too late to begin their journey. Danni Mas didn’t heed his warning. I also spoke with Arie Teper, the Palmach platoon commander in Gush Etzion (considered the top Palmach scout) and he added that there was no logic to the path they chose, that there were shorter and more accessible ways of reaching Gush Etzion.

Aunt Shoshanna: “What a disaster, what a disaster...”

Kushnir: “Daniel was Professor Karl Reich’s only son. He and Tuviah studied together in the Natural Science department; he was an honors student. But at least I have more children. Daniel was an only child.”

Uri: “Which way should they have gone, according to Teper?”

Kushnir: “They should have left from Ramat Rachel in south Jerusalem to north Gush Etzion, hugging the side of the road in the dark, a distance of only 7 kilometers. There was a curfew at night and the Arabs generally obeyed it. It would have taken them three hours this way.”

Uri: “So why didn’t they take that route?”

Kushnir: “Because Amos Chorev, commander of the Palmach 8th company in Maale Hachamisha³ in 1947, chose the longer course for them.”

Uri: “But this is madness!”

Kushnir: “Indeed it was.”

Aunt Shoshanna: “War is madness. Osia Trumpeldor was killed in Tel-Chai because of this madness. Had Osia been alive our entire history would be different. We worked together in The Jordan Valley in 1911. Hanna Mizel called him the greatest Jew of his generation. An astounding mind! And he was killed in vain.”

Gideon: “What a funny name, though – Osia?!”

Aunt Shoshanna: “It was Yoseph Trumpeldor’s nickname”.

Shimon Kushnir suggested that we go visit the poet Chaim Guri in Jerusalem, along with Karl Reich and Reuven Mass, the father of the Lamed Hei commander, and Arie Teper (who was still an IDF officer at the time). As we parted from Shimon, we had the feeling that our journey had only just begun.

About three weeks later, the three of us traveled by train to Jerusalem. We met first with Chaim Guri. He told us that he was serving as an emissary to Holocaust survivors in Hungary during January of 1948, so it took time for him to learn what was happening back home. He wanted to join his brothers immediately, but his command was to remain in Europe. Afterwards he was transferred to Czechoslovakia to take a parachuting course before returning to Israel. He explained to us the importance of myth in building a national spirit.

After Guri we met with Professor Karl Reich, in his laboratories in Talbiya. He told us about his only son Daniel, whom he and his wife had brought into the country from Lvov when he was only an infant. Daniel had been all over Italy and the Alps and the Dolomites with his parents, at the age of ten, and the journey had left deep impressions on his young mind. He went on to become an honors student at the Beit Hakerem High School, excelling in music and the natural sciences. He’d joined the Palmach’s Alumot

³ A settlement west of Jerusalem, founded in 1895 by immigrants from Bulgaria. It was destroyed in the War of Independence. The city of Beit Shemesh and Moshav Nocham were both founded near the abandoned site during the fifties.

training with the rest of his scout troop, and served for a year before returning to Jerusalem to commence university study (in biology). On the day before his fated expedition to Gush Etzion, he was pleasure-reading and playing Mendelssohn's "Songs without Words" on the piano.

"What did you learn from all of this?" I asked.

Karl Reich: "That we must do whatever necessary to make peace with the Arabs. We're a small nation; we can't keep paying the same price again and again." Professor Reich promised to attend our ceremony in Hadassim.

Next we met Reuven Mass in his publishing house office. He told us about how his son was appointed commander of the Gush Etzion block at the beginning of the war, how he was promoted to Zamir's second in command in the following months. When Uzi Narkis' telegrams arrived, telling of the many wounded in Gush Etzion and the urgent need of plasma supplies, Danni organized a supply expedition. Reuven Mass also promised to come to our ceremony.

Back in Hadassim, we met with Arie Teper in Arie Mar's apartment. Rechavam Zeevi had asked him if he could help us. He began by telling us that he believed the Lamed Hei affair to be one of the war's greatest failures. It was left uninvestigated in order to preserve Zvi Zamir's reputation.⁴



"How do you know this?" asked Arie.

Teper: "Not only did they choose the most difficult route possible, but they didn't even have a combat scout with them, no one to help them traverse that route to Gush Etzion. I knew every man in that group, including the 'scouts'. They were competent enough to pick some flowers on a Saturday afternoon, but they didn't have the kind of group that could successfully navigate at night. This wasn't an organic unit, it was a just a collection of some Palmach warriors and some members of the Jerusalem Brigade, including young boys who weren't even recruited yet."

Uri: "Who, for example?"

"Amnon Michaeli was sixteen years old. Two others were only seventeen. Another was thirty-six; but none of these four were fit for such an operation."

Arie Teper

Gideon: "Did the lack of experienced scouts contribute to their demise?"

⁴ Subsequently an IDF Major General and the president of the Technion

“Of course. You just can’t cheat your terrain; if you can’t navigate, you’ll fail. It’s that simple. They reached a fork in the creeks after they’d passed the Ella valley, where they should have continued on to the Jaba Creek, which leads to Gush Etzion -- with no Arabs on the way. But instead they got lost, continued on to Tzureif Creek and right into Tzureif village, where there was an Arab training camp. They sentenced themselves to death.”

Daphna: “How long did they go on fighting?”

“A whole day.”

Daphna: “Did someone go searching for them?”

“Of course. After they failed to arrive on time, a platoon from Gush Etzion went searching for them, backed by four airplanes from Tel Aviv. They spent the day circling the whole area.”

Arie Mar: “Where did they find them?”

“The planes reported a concentration of Arab forces on the path the 35 of them were supposed to take; the Gush Etzion platoon heard gun shots and received reports from neighboring Arabs of a battle taking place between Jaba and Tzureif.”

Uri: “But you said they were trapped in Tzureif...”

“Some of them were killed immediately, and others managed to extract themselves from the village to the hill immediately behind Jaba. The Arabs chased after them, killing most of them. Only a few managed to survive and reach ‘Battle-Hill’.”

Gideon: “Do you think most of them could have been saved?”

“In my opinion, yes. The battle occurred four kilometers from Gush Etzion. It should have been possible to send a rescue force to collect all but those who were killed immediately.”

Uri: “Why didn’t you assist them?”

“Well...I can never forgive myself for that. Uzi Narkis, the Gush Etzion commander, was shell-shocked from a battle that ended only days earlier. He was basically paralyzed...I begged him to allow us to help [the Lamed Hei], but he refused. I should have disobeyed. My conscience has never let me rest for it.”

F. “He died with the stone in his hand”

A month before Memorial Day we gathered at Arie Mar's to plan the ceremony. Arie told us that he'd had problem: Rachel and Jeremiah didn't approve of what we had in mind. After meeting with him they'd summoned a pedagogical board to discuss the upcoming ceremony, and Arie was asked to report on the activities of our secret nucleus. Most of the teachers were enraged, claiming that he'd behaved irresponsibly in allowing a boy "like Uri" to lead him -- and the whole village -- by the nose, without authorization. They were very angry that Daphna Gideon and I had lost many days of school without approval from any authority, that we'd traveled outside of the village without supervision, that we'd invited the families of the Lamed Hei to the village without prior authorization -- an invitation that would require the best amenities and hospitality the village could offer, as it involved important Israelis. The only reason we couldn't cancel the event altogether, in fact, was the undesirable prospect of retracting those invitations. Arie speculated bitterly that this could very well be his last year in Hadassim.

We felt horrible about what this meant for Arie, and Daphna suggested that we could recuse ourselves from the ceremony. To this, I replied that "there are fallen in any war. Arie might have to fall for this war. What's important is for the project to succeed." Daphna later told me angrily that I lacked feelings.

This was our plan: the Lamed Hei families would arrive around five o'clock in the afternoon, and Jeremiah would greet them in Unit E's dining room. We would thank them for honoring us with their visit and provide refreshments, and I would personally thank them on behalf of the students. Jeremiah would then take them on a tour of the village, arriving at the soccer field on the west side, at seven, where everyone would be seated around a large bonfire. The ceremony would then commence, lasting for an hour and a half. Afterwards everyone would leave for dinner while the high schoolers gathered in the main hall to attend our presentation. This would be followed by a general discussion. We decided to mention nothing of the battle's failures during the ceremony, but to leave nothing concealed during the later discussion.

Our plan proceeded in accordance with our every intention. Daphna began the ceremony by reciting the poem, "Here our bodies lie". Shimon Kushnir, Karl Reich and Reuven Mass spoke of their fallen sons. Michael Kashtan weaved together the whole narrative of our sons' martyrdom from the time of Yitzhak all the way down to the Lamed Hei. Uncle Moshe gave a talk on the nature of war research, and I gave a detailed account of the end of the Lamed Hei battle:

"On January 17th, the police journal contained the following item:

'The bodies of thirty-five Jews, riddled with bullets, shrapnel, and knife wounds, were found naked on a high ridge between Tzureif and Beit-Natif. Their transfer to Jerusalem was delayed by the darkness. They were discovered by military and police forces drawn to the area by rumors of Jewish casualties at a nearby battle. These Jews were apparently part of a force destined for Har Tuv on January 16th; they had disappeared on their way to Kfar Etzion.

‘It turns out that two Arab women initially spotted the force near the fields of Tzureif, at 8:00 o’clock, and alerted Arab fighters in the village. It was discovered that the Jews had fired on the village with automatic weapons for half an hour, withdrawing only when they spotted reinforcements. No further information exists on the course of the battle; unofficial reports state that ‘seven Arabs were killed and eight wounded, four of them seriously’.’

I added that a report sent to Palmach headquarters, several days later, mentioned that the bodies had been found near Beit-Natif.

Arab sources make clear that the Lamed Hei unit fought heroically to the last man. They’d conquered the whole village for two hours until the Arabs called for reinforcements from neighboring villages. At least 600 Arabs had fought against this unit of 35 men.

Hamish Dugin, the Hebron police chief, had reported the following:

“The 35 soldiers found shelter in caves until 3:00 pm, following the Tureif confrontation. Then they headed for Al Chur, under sniper fire from every direction. They couldn’t see their attackers, and most were hit from behind. Those who survived their bullet-wounds a little longer were stabbed to death. One last survivor, tall and strong, was able to maneuver to a higher position and throw his remaining grenades, until he too was brought down by a sniper.

In all of these descriptions, the story was told of the lone surviving warrior, tall and strong, aiming his remaining grenades and fighting to his dying breath with a stone in his hand. Every clue and rumor indicates that this last man was Yaakov Cohen.

The report prepared by the Hagana’s Intelligence Service read as follows:

The Jews had been fortified in the gulch since daybreak, while the Arabs were camped on the surrounding hills. Given this topographical relation, the Jewish couldn’t fire efficiently; but they fought to the last man. The Arabs finally approached the gulch when it looked like everyone was dead, but they were met with grenades heaved by one surviving, badly wounded Jew. The Arabs finally overtook and shot this man, and as he fell he reached for a stone and made one final effort to defend himself, until his powers faded – and he died, with the stone in his hand. Seven Arabs died in the battle and fifteen were wounded. This battle in the Jabba gulch [Wadi Jabba], much like the one at Kfar Etzion, would make a deep and abiding impression on the Arabs; the Jews had proven their skills and courage, they’d demonstrated that the struggle wouldn’t be easy or comfortable on the Arabs after all.

The post-dinner discussion was lead by Jeremiah. That was an unprecedented gesture on his part. He started by praising our research and organization, and spoke briefly before

giving me the podium and allowing me to present our findings, the core of which was the nature of failures on the part of every command level of the operation, as well as the heroism of the fallen.

Arie spoke after me:

“I took part in the Latrun Battle during the war. Many fell in that battle, and many more were badly wounded, myself included. This mission was a failure: the Latrun ridges controlling traffic to Jerusalem remained in Jordanian hands. The lesson I’ve drawn from Daphna, Gideon and Uri’s research is: those who didn’t investigate and learn from the Lamed Hei Affair paid a price in Latrun; those who failed to investigate and learn from Latrun paid the price at the Tel Mutila battle north of the Kineret, in May 1951.

“We’ve adopted a hazardous military culture founded on myths, rather than true inquiry and realistic interpretation. And for this, we will continue to pay a heavy price.”

Moshe Zeiri spoke after us. His face had been tinged with bitterness the whole day – bitterness at not being informed of or involved in our plans. The critical component of our presentation also disturbed him.

“A dangerous precedent has transpired here today. I’m talking about the presentation, not the fact that students were somehow involved inappropriately. Heroic myths are necessary for a nation to survive. If we begin by destroying the Lamed Hei myth, we won’t stop there; the myth of Yoseph Trumpeldor will cease to exist, as will others, until finally we won’t even have the myth of Judas Maccabaeus. Our interest in history isn’t in facts, but in their meaning, in their nourishing soil for the preservation of our people. This meaning and function has today received a heavy blow.”

Most of the discussion continued to revolve around the issue of myth-destruction. The Israeli society of the fifties was very much myth-oriented culture. In 1955, Ariel Sharon led the 890th Battalion in momentous retaliatory operations – like “Black Arrow,” the first retaliatory assault on Egyptian military bases in Gaza – which were praised to the sky by Israeli media. Not a word of criticism, of dissent on any level, was raised in the whole country. It was certainly more comfortable this way for the political and military establishment. Our intellectuals and media people are mostly inured against this kind of thing now. But it was an exceptional phenomenon at the time for a youth village – especially one comprised of holocaust survivors and children of distress – to criticize our defense systems. Hence, most everyone who spoke out during our discussion was fiercely critical of our approach; were it not for Jeremiah’s imprimatur, there wouldn’t have been such a discussion to begin with.

G. Disinformation is a Built-in Characteristic of Reality

Most of the men interviewed for this book, in 2005-2006, were able to recall in great detail the various athletic contests and troupe performances, but few could remember the Lamed Hei ceremony or the subsequent discussion. At some point I began to question whether any of it happened at all; then I met with Shoshanna Lerner, our old counselor, who told me: “Uri, the Lamed Hei Project was the most important educational endeavor in the school’s history. I followed you closely then, and I’ve following your endeavors ever since. You’ve been continuing in the course of the Lamed Hei project your whole life.” Gideon Lavi, of course, remembers every detail of our historical adventure.

Micha Spira couldn’t remember it either, initially. Then all of a sudden his eyes lit up, and he said:

“Now I understand: one of my teachers at Hebrew University was Professor Karl Reich, who taught zoology. He asked the first year students where they were from, and I told him I’d studied in Hadassim. From that moment he began treating me like I was his son. By sophomore year I’d already received assistantship, an unparalleled honor in the academic world. He was always a guardian angel in my academic life, even overturning the research committee’s decision to reject my thesis. I’ve never understood until now what lay underneath his affection for me. Life can be strange and wonderful sometimes.”



Shoshanna Lerner

Right there was another benefit from the Lamed Hei project: it assisted our colleague Micha Spira on his path to the pinnacle of brain research. The ways of life are wonderful indeed.

I met Jeremiah and Rachel during a last visit with my uncle at Raanana Hospital in 1961, before he finally succumbed to his old war wounds. I was on leave from my paratrooper unit at the time. His old scars had prompted the final blow; he’d been in bad shape for a long period, but his cognitive skills were still perfectly intact. I used to visit often carrying mountains of new books for him, discussing every issue under the sun – mainly the fundamentals of human behavior. Together we’d concluded that war is the most suitable anthropological model for the

analysis of behavior; the survival theory I’ve since formulated in my essays and books originated in our discussions on his bedside. Rachel and Jeremiah Shapirah had been his friends ever since the days of Schwabe’s Teacher-Scout group in Jerusalem.

On that particular visit, in 1961, I arrived to find them discussing the Lamed Hei project. Rachel admitted that she’d underestimated the value of the event at the time. Jeremiah looked at her with compassion. Uncle Moshe said that school curriculums should include a critical study of wars, if we wished to survive. I mentioned the recent training accident involving the Nachal paratroopers.

Uncle Moshe: “The number of these accidents could easily drop if our school system were deeply engaged in military studies.”

Rachel Shapirah: “That’s for teacher’s of the future to take on. We’ve already done our duty.”

Rachel didn’t look well; she seemed tired and a little sick. Perhaps she was already affected by the cancer that ultimately killed her?

In 1975 I met Arie Mar in Tamar Café, on Sheinkin Street in Tel Aviv. I made sure to have copies of our three research papers with me. He was visiting from Canada and wanted to see me. Our relationship had cooled after the Lamed Hei project; he’d considered leaving the country when they threatened to fire him, and I criticized him harshly for it. Now, twenty years later, we wanted to renew our friendship. It went without saying that we would talk about the Lamed Hei project; but Arie probed deeper, opining that our myth-oriented culture had led to the high causality-count in the Yom Kippur War. We agreed that the myth of military prowess was the strongest of all, the hardest one to destroy. “Our military is a religion,” Arie said, “and the Generals are public priests. After all, if we start seeing them as human, if we realize they don’t know what they’re talking about, who will protect us then?!”

Just then, Ohad Zamora, editor of the weekly *Davar Hashavua* (and founder of the Zamora Bitan publishing house⁵), entered the café. I was publishing articles in his paper at the time, so he joined us. When he heard about my early war research he asked to look at some of it, so I handed him the copies I’d brought for Arie. A few days later, Zamora proposed that I work on a full history of the War of Independence, to be published by his house. Fifteen years later, the first four of twelve planned volumes are already in circulation. The pressures on Zamora from the gate-keepers of the defense myth were onerous indeed, and Zamora surrendered to them eventually despite our friendship. He told me that my books constitute “the battleship” of his publishing house. The first four volumes contain my research on the Mamila Market and the Lamed Hei affair. My account of the Hadassah convoy massacre, on the other hand, is brought to light here for the first time.

It was in Hadassim where I first realized that disinformation is a built-in characteristic of reality. There was something tragic about learning this, and it accounts for the heartbreak in my poem at the beginning of this chapter: the knowledge that even the Prometheans among us are destined to be chained to the rocks of their blindness, their livers destined to be eaten by the eagle of their minds’ distortion. But I nevertheless treaded the path of a hidden promise: that by being aware of this distortion (if one can bear the cost in courage), one is liberated from it -- even if only for a moment. Thus, I chose to be chained to the hard rock of reality, where sleep leads inexorably to death; I chose to live the impossible, like the Beethovenian Phoenix of the opus 110 Sonata I first heard in

⁵ Subsequently renamed *Zmora, Bitan, Modan*, then later *Zmora and Bitan Publishers*.

Hadassim in 1953. This is my original sin – the sin of eating from the fruit of knowledge -- a sin that society can never forgive, because it stings too much.

But though it might sting, society must come to forgive it – or it shall perish from the earth.