

## TEL AVIV AND BACK, LETTER 1

## Inclement Weather

The weather here is as changeable as the "matsav." Outside, the wind is howling, the blinds are kicking up a storm, and it's beginning to rain. Yesterday was a beach day. I arrived in the midst of the attack on the military outpost where six young soldiers lost their lives and this morning they're talking up a temporary cease fire. ("Representatives of various factions of Fatah report to our correspondent that Fatah has received no instructions whatsoever from the PA concerning a cease-fire.") Before I finish composing this e-mail, the drive-by attacks will have resumed in full force. As always, the classical music station (Reshet Bet) has a calming effect, though right now they're playing Wagner, a taboo that must have been broken since the last time I was here for a lengthy stay. I have worked myself up in the world. Back in the early Seventies, I lived in a fifth floor walk-up with no heat that was exposed on four sides. The apartment I've rented for this semester is a third floor walk-up in Rehavia with central heating and--wonder of wonders--wall-to-wall carpeting in the bedroom. Best of all, Teddy Kollek built me a jogging path that runs along the Valley of the Cross (which we used to call Emek Hamatsleimah when we were still struggling with Israeli Hebrew), which is almost as good as my Riverside Drive route next to Grant's Tomb, and this morning, despite the wind, I noticed that someone had spray-painted the Arabic names on one of the signs, which reminded me of another one of my homes--Montreal--where French Separatists routinely spray painted the English on all the STOP signs. Thanks to the inclement weather I am wearing my sweats, so having over-packed by a factor of three, I feel somewhat vindicated. Otherwise, with my very-short haircut and a cell phone strapped to my belt, I'm looking very Israeli, and jogging is about the only dangerous thing I have not been expressly prohibited from doing, for unlike Hillary, who will be visiting Ground Zero (the Midrechov) later this morning, and issuing her personal recipe for a lasting peace, I have not yet been downtown, because my spouse (unlike hers) won't let me take municipal buses or ride a bicycle. What else has changed? At Yedidia yesterday, Ruth Langer told me that everyone's been thanking her for coming to Israel, and people in the supermarket went out of their way to be helpful, but when I went to Supersol last Wednesday morning, what I noticed was a Moroccan-born salesperson consoling a Russian-born salesperson over the terrible loss of life, both of them apparently, mothers with sons in the army. Maybe that's why I'm trying so hard to make my friends laugh. I tell them about the two balconies in

my Rehavia apartment, and how I run from one to the other to marvel at the view. I tell them how well Ari is doing on his T.R.Y. program, how all the boys have a crush on their madrikha (Aliza) and leave art work outside her door every morning. (She really is fantastic.) And Shabbat in Jerusalem is unlike Shabbat anywhere else on earth. Is a foretaste of Shabbat in the world-to-come. Which I generally don't believe in, except when I'm here.

This year, for all the troubles, Purim won't be canceled, either here or at Minyan M'at ( I am remembering back to 1996), and as I jogged past the Lower School of Evelina de Rothschild (not the Upper School that Beverly Gribetz runs), I saw a girl dressed up like a Coke bottle. A number of girls appeared in lavish wedding dresses, one even accompanied by her "groom," whom I wished MAZAL-TOV, My nephew, Benjy, dressed up like Ariel Sharon, and learned to imitate his distinctive laugh, as satirized on television. But my friend Elie Yassif, head of the department of Hebrew Literature at Tel Aviv University and a distinguished folklorist, tells me that political satire cuts so close to the bone that it hurts to laugh.

Someone ought to study the impact of cell phones on society, with Israel as the test case. I am happy to report that on the 480 bus people now answer their phones (an average of one call every five minutes) much more quietly than they used to. Someone laughed at me on Shderot Rothschild when my cell phone rang and i stopped dead in my tracks to answer. Any "real" Israeli, from the age of five, can chew gum, ride a bike, talk on the cell phone, and read a newspaper all at the same time. But Chanah Naveh, head of the new Women's Studies Program at Tel Aviv (the first in the country) reports that women are far less likely to turn off their cell phones at a meeting than men, because women feel they are on call everywhere, all the time, and leaving for work in an age of cell phones ain't what it used to be, when you left everything in charge of the metapelet and hoped for the best. Now, the moment you hear the sirens, you call each of your children, or daughter-in-law, as the case may be.

There's a terrific falafel place just up the block from me. It's called BEIN AZZA LE-BERLIN, i.e., it's located on the corner of Azza and Harav Berlin. Check it out!

2.25.02

TEL AVIV AND BACK, LETTER 2

Purim Play

I came late to the Megilla reading at Yedidiah, because I misunderstood their flyer, which announced two consecutive readings: one raucous, the other--straight. I thought the raucous one was only for families with children, analogous to what goes on in the Sanctuary, while the real fun was reserved for the grownups, the way we do it at M at. Turns out, there was only one reading, for everyone. Except for the mehitsa, the lace curtain of which was pulled back, it was exactly like ours: everyone in costume, the leyening equally divided among men and women, and a few master ventriloquists. The kahal added its own sound effects: a shofar blast to announce the presence of Ahasuerus, and the stamping of many feet in unison, to mimic riders on horseback. My mind was wandering. The day before, I had bumped into David Resnick on my way to the Super-Sol (passing the new site of Cafe Moment, where the Savyon Restaurant used to be), and though I hadn't seen him in six years, he launched immediately into one of his shtick, that this year, he was planning to cancel the Purim Seudah. Why? If the purpose of the Seudah was to achieve a state of 'ad-lo-yada, of erasing the boundary between good and evil, we, citizens of the postmodern world, were already in that state, all the time. I assured him that in America, since 9/11, the battle lines had been redrawn, at which point Resnick rushed off, feigning great joy at my tidings. So here I am sitting among my fellow Jews, college graduates like me, and we're really into this story that never happened. (Theodor Gaster claimed that the Scroll of Esther was modelled upon a Persian romance about a royal harem.) And though not a person in this crowd is disguised as Arafat, the most popular costume this year (according to the news reports) being that of a "shoter," a policeman, gun-and-all, there is something uncannily apt about this carnival, not only because it celebrates the perils and joys of wielding power, and plays out our greatest revenge fantasy, but because each of us is encouraged to live someone's else's life. Why, just ahead of me, is someone in drag (a buxom babushka; turns out I know him from Ramat Orah), and Jonathan Sarna will later launch into a learned disquisition on the anxieties of cross-dressing, ~~but~~ in a sense, this whole country, this ~~whole~~ nation-in-formation, is a year-long carnival in which former Marranos are learning to live as Jews, and the children of Ashkenazim have become Mediterranean, and Shasnikim dress-up like guys from a Lithuanian kollel, and hasidic garb has come out of mothballs, and foreign workers from Romania, the Philipenes and Ghana are learning to speak pigeon Hebrew. Israel gives new meaning to globalization. Globalization here is an incredible mishmash, never more vibrant, zany, and raw than on Purim.

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Today, March 1, 2001, is the official pub-date of Amos Oz's new 400-page autobiography-cum-memoir, *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, which Gershon Shaked has proclaimed to be Oz's crowning work. How do I know this? Because I ran into Gershon in the parking lot of Beit Ha'am in Jerusalem, as he, Malka, and I were heading inside for the celebration of his, Shaked's, novel MEHAGRIM (Immigrants), an evening sponsored by Beit Hasofer, The House of Hebrew Writers. Gershon predicted that no one would show up, with two important games being played that night, one in soccer (which Hapoel Tel Aviv miraculously won against Parma), and one in basketball, and at first it seemed as if he were right: a few elderly Jews, mostly of the female persuasion, were scattered about, reminding me of the Yiddish gatherings I started going to at the age of fourteen, where I was also the youngest person there by far. But we were both wrong. By 8:20, they were setting up more chairs, and still more chairs, until the place was packed with about 150 people, including Haim Gouri, Emanuel Etkes, my old friend, Ben-Zion Fischler, and probably other VIPs. Haim Be'er emceed with great panache. I envy him. First of all, he looks like a writer. Secondly, he talks like a writer. And thirdly, he thinks like a writer. He seemed to have Gershon's novel memorized, and peppered his intros with wonderful passages. He did the same for each of three speakers, citing their own words and making it seem utterly effortless. (Afterwards he admitted to someone that he had spent a whole day preparing.) Tammy Hess was the first to speak (rather, to read a very densely argued paper). It was very gutsy of her, as one of Gershon's former students, to accept this assignment, and to begin her remarks with some very pointed criticisms of the novel ("overdetermined", "the work of a novice-novelist"), then to demonstrate how Shaked took the well-worn theme of the woes of new olim and added a whole new dimension: the terrible economic disparity between the haves and have-nots; the hypocrisy of the Zionist youth movements, where everyone was supposed to espouse socialist ideals, provided their parents were members of the petty-bourgeoisie. The protagonist's father, a wagon-driver, did not qualify the son for admittance. The next speaker was Gabrilla Avigur-Rotem, whose own novel, HAMSIN, AND MAD BIRDS, has been on the top of the bestseller list for six weeks. She also read her remarks, which focused on the theme of disguise and dissimulation. Every character, she showed, carried multiple names. The scene of the protagonist taking over the role of Willy Lowman in DEATH OF A SALESMAN, she stressed (and every speaker concurred) was the pivot of the

novel, because that is where he discovers himself in his father. So far, business as usual. What made this event unforgettable was the penultimate speaker (before Gershon himself got up to read): Professot Jonah Fraenkel, the preeminent scholar of Aggadah (and my beloved Talmud teacher on Junior Year at Hebrew U.). What was he doing here? he asked rhetorically, seeing as he is neither a writer nor an expert in modern Hebrew literature? He was here to compare and contrast his own experiences as a German-Jewish refugee, born in Munich, with those of the novel's two main protagonists (whom Hess demonstrated were essentially one-and-the-same). So he ran down the list, checking off the whole itinerary of that generation. Then he spoke--in amazingly personal terms, and anyone who has ever known Fraenkel would be astounded at his openness)--about his love of the Land and of his parents, against whom neither he nor his three brothers saw any need to rebel. Fraenkel spoke about his late wife. His hands shook as he spoke. He kept one hand in his jacket pocket. And he finished by describing his one and only visit back to Germany, to accompany his wife, in 1978, how he refused any personal contact with Germans over the age of forty, and how, despite his resolve, as they hiked through the mountains of his childhood, outside Munich, he announced to his wife that here he felt perfectly at home. This proves, said Fraenkel, that human beings will always remain riddles to themselves, as Freud taught us.

During parts of Tammy Hess' s paper, which she delivered at breakneck speed, I caught myself thinking about our own attempts to stage literary evenings, on the roof of Anshe Chesed, and elsewhere. Would all of Jewish New York ever await with baited breath the publication of a new novel? Even I, great cultural impresario that I am, where would I find four such varied speakers to respond to the work of a living Jewish novelist? But as I sat there last night, witnessing the celebration of a book about the very particular saga of some very passionate people, seeing how terribly raw everything in their historical experience still was, I understood something about the transcendent power of the written word.

Black Flag

TO TEL AVIV AND BACK, LETTER 4

Last semester, David Kraemer and I team-taught a course on Jewish responses to catastrophe. Teaching with him was a thrilling experience. I recommend it to everyone. My agenda, in the wake of 9/11, was to explore the contemporary relevance of archetypal modes of thinking. It was a tall order, which only some of the graduate students (and few of the rabbinical students) were able to grasp. Here in Israel, such a course has been rendered superfluous. Once you've mastered the lingo, and such ubiquitous terms as "kav hatefer," "eyzor hakhayits," not to speak of "makhsomim" and "minharot" ["minharot" used to mean just "tunnels;" now it means man-made tunnels connecting refugee camps to Egyptian soil for the purpose of gun-running]; once you stop confusing "mehablim" with its opposite, "hablanim," you are ready for the next lesson, for when it comes to listing the day's body count, even the most hard nosed secular broadcaster falls back on the ancient stratum of the Hebrew language: so-and-so, zikhrono lebrakha, will yuva limenukhot at such-and-such a cemetery at such-and-such an hour. And on Sunday, as the very hip anchor woman was reading out the names for the umpteenth time, there was a tiredness in her voice that I had not heard before. As if the litany were a silent protest. And on the same program, the five o'clock news, which on Monday was extended to six, seven, eight, and nine, among the many military experts and retired generals, there appeared a beautiful young Orthodox woman with her thirteen-year-old son, the very bar mitzva-bokher whose celebration ended in another suicide bombing. She was amazingly self-possessed, almost serene, except when she was asked whether she had visited the wounded in the hospital. Today, she explained, the relatives wouldn't let her in, because they blamed her for having had the celebration in Jerusalem, instead of back home, in Zichron. She had agreed to appear on television to plead her innocence before God. Then her son piped in, explaining that his mother was not to blame. The blame was with the terrorists, who perpetrated the crime.

Tuesday morning was a bit different. For one thing, I learned about the sniper attack in Tel Aviv from Ellen Braitman's e-mail, which I read at 5:30 and by the time I logged off at 6:30, regular programming had been superseded by the attack ("Intifada, All Day, Everyday, and All Through the Night"). It was nothing if not archetypal. The target was a banquet hall where brides routinely celebrate on the eve of their weddings. So there they were, on the screen, with streaks in their mascara, recounting who was killed and wounded and who "miraculously" escaped. The performers, from the Edot Hamizrach, were on too, with their wonderful inflection. Unlike the Jerusalem bombing, which targeted only Orthodox Jews, here no one invoked the age-old formula of "evel be-yom-tov." Which reminds me that on Monday there were lengthy interviews with the mothers of the reserve soldiers who were manning the "mahsomim," mothers whose sons were presently combing through Jenin, and these mothers were all in agreement that their sons were not sufficiently protected from harm. The discussion was pretty technical and I couldn't follow all of it.

So my Hebrew is improving by leaps and bounds, and in addition to such recent coinage as "arukha `iskit," a business lunch, which you can order for a mere 38 NIS, the first thing I was told at the Hebrew Lit. Dept. in Tel Aviv University was that all the reserve reading for my course on Sholem Aleichem should be submitted to the Wiener Library "lesrikah," meaning "for scanning." And in Kol Ha'ir (Jerusalem), there's a weekly column called "Degel shakhor," which means "Black Flag," the flag that goes up at soccer games to call a very bad foul. In this case, however, what is being "flagged" are acts of moral turpitude perpetrated by soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces. And this Jewish self-blame, this excruciating exercise in moral self-reckoning, is the oldest response of all, going all the way back to Eichah, as revived in an age of godlessness by the poet Bialik after the Kishinev pogrom, and again through the underground press in the Warsaw ghetto. From what I can gather, the Other Side too is enjoying a religious revival, and I'm very impressed by the way Israeli broadcasters have learned to pronounce "God Is Great!" in Arabic.

TO TEL AVIV AND BACK, LETTER 5

“The Russians Are Coming!”

In my prior life, I used to have many Soviet-Jewish friends here in Israel, people I met in 1971 who subsequently came on aliyah, who introduced me to their friends. When that life ended, so did my romance with Soviet Jewry. Still, I always enjoy hearing Russian spoken in the streets, whether here or in Manhattan. Two weeks ago, I walked from the Central Bus Station in Tel Aviv with a heavy backpack all the way to Dizengoff Center (1) to reexperience being footloose in Tel Aviv and (2) to observe the various immigrants and migrants in their first abode. There were Russian signs everywhere, in Russian only. I was tempted to go into a store and strike up a conversation, if only to support the stagnant economy, but there was a sign (in Hebrew) that invited me to come back later.

Last night (3.5.02), something marvelous happened. The death count was staggeringly high. The most seasoned news broadcaster was in grief-overload. My friend Suzi Goichman, originally from Rumania, the last pre-Freudian of my generation, larger than life, indefatigable Suzi, invited me to an evening of Russian folklore at the Ramat Rachel Hotel. I had no interest in going, but I had taken a vow not to turn down any invitations that came my way, to live here exactly the way I don't live at home, and Suzi's two sons are both in the army right now, on the front lines, and I thought she could do with some company. The traffic was particularly heavy because of all the roadblocks. I had never been to Ramat Rachel. I knew about it only from Agnon's novels. Turns out, it's the headquarters of MASHAV, Makhlakah le-Shituf Beinle'umi, the Department for International Cooperation, and Suzi, who is a polyglot, freelances for them. She had been called in in the eleventh hour to run a week-long seminar of experts on narcotics and drug abuse from all across the FSU. For some reason, it was they who were putting on a display of songs and dances from their respective lands: Estonia, Bulgaria, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Belarus, Russia proper, etc. There was a buffet dinner, actually quite tasty, and the delegates sitting at the table next to ours had already plied me with some first-class vodka when someone walked in who looked vaguely familiar. Very handsome, with longish hair, a greying beard, sparkling eyes, with a petite woman at his side. She recognized me first. They were my long-lost friends, Boruch and Elena Kimmelfeld, whom I last saw in January 1990 in Kiev. Kiev was freezing that winter, despite Perestroika, there was no food to eat, and I spent four hours in their tiny apartment on the outskirts of town making latkes with the Soviet excuse for a food processor. We had corresponded briefly thereafter; I sent them the article about my trip that appeared in COMMENTARY. Then they came on aliyah, and other things in my terribly busy life intervened.

I won't drag this letter out. (Nor will I send it four times!) That we couldn't stop kissing and hugging each other goes without saying. But last night was special for another reason: I saw Boruch (now Baruch) in his new role as Russian Tour Guide Par Excellence. In Mevasseret Zion, the Merkaz Klitah where they arrived 11 years ago, they chanced to meet someone who told Boruch about a course for madrikhim that was about to start at the Hevra Lehaganat Hateva. And since he had absolutely no idea what he would do for a living, he signed on. And although in Kiev, Boruch dreamed of becoming a Yiddish teacher (which is how we met), he has forgotten most of his Yiddish by now, and spends most of his time taking Russian- and Ukrainian-speaking tourists around the country, and while most guys in his profession are starving, Boruch is doing a thriving business, because there are innumerable joint ventures going on between Israel and the FSU, like tomato growing in the Golan for producing the ketchup that graces every (otherwise empty) Ukrainian table, and advanced seminars in wine producing for Ukrainians from the Crimea, and unlike American Jews, who are terrified of coming to Israel, these people from the Balkans and wartorn central Asia aren't afraid of a few "piguim."

The evening of folklore was Amateur Night at Ramat Rachel. The one thing I will say is that these narcotics officers have a great sense of humor. It was fascinating to watch each group of

them try to present some song or dance native to their region, but what brought the house down was when everyone joined in in Russian songs that everyone (still) knew, for Russian is still the lingua franca of these farflung territories, and now that the Soviet Union is no more, it doesn't feel like Uncle Tomism to sing in the language of the colonial power. One of the officials, a very young man from Russia, recited from memory the travelogue of Ivan Bunin to Palestine. Thunderous applause. Finally, Boruch came to the mike, and first he recited (also from memory; this must be the last generation that learned things by heart) Shevchenko's [rhymed Ukrainian] translation of "By the Waters of Babylon," then he led us in the singing of "Kol Ha'olam Kulo Gesher Tsar Me'od."

So last night I reexperienced the miracle of the Russian aliyah, the cause so many of us once fought for. Last night I glimpsed the vast reservoir of talent. The way Jews from the FSU now serve as our ambassadors to the East, the only friends we have in Europe. From reading HA'ARETZ, you'd think that Russian Jews are all profoundly alienated from their new motherland. Suzi should invite them over to Hotel Ramat Rachel, for an evening of all-Russian folklore.

Jerusalem 6 March 1902



## 6. TALKING TO LIMOR

When I was twenty, my most fervent desire was to walk along the beach in Tel Aviv, arm-in-arm with an Israeli woman of appropriate age, and speak to her in accentless Hebrew. I am happy to report that now, thirty-four years later, I've scaled down my expectations considerably. I would be happy to sit in a room conversing in Hebrew with an Israeli woman of any age without making too many egregious mistakes. Why still complicate things with gender? It must go back a long way, this fervent desire to wax eloquent in the company of women, be they my mother, sister, girl friend, wife, or whatever. Certainly it's the reason I went into literature. Who can forget Dan Pagis's opening lecture in Medieval Hebrew Poetry in October '67? The lecture hall on Givat Ram (Scopus, you will recall, was still in ruins) was packed. There were easily 100 co-eds present (it was a required course), but I was the only other male. And Pagis wasn't much to look at, either.

So on Monday I had my trial run with Limor, a grad student in the Department of Hebrew Literature. I initiated the two-hour-long meeting when I saw in the catalogue that she was teaching a course on the neo-hasidic tales of I. L. Peretz. Turns out, we had met once before, when I lectured at Haifa University back in May 1996, which was memorable for another reason. After the lecture, I got into the elevator on the seventeenth floor. On the fifteenth, the door opened, in walked A. B. Yehoshua, and even before the door closed, he walked right up to me and exclaimed (in Hebrew, of course): "Tell your sister that it won't do her any good. The Palestinians will have their own state!"

As much as I try to look Israeli, with my short haircut and cell phone strapped to my belt, the moment I open my mouth, the secret is out. To compensate, there's something irresistible about this middle-aged guy, here without his wife, teaching Yiddish, of all things--irresistible to some female students, at any rate, because this isn't the first time one of them has taken me under her wing. Limor advises me to read not only Ha'aretz but also Yediot, to really get the widest spectrum of opinion. Limor thinks I'm selling my students short by not wearing a kippah in Tel Aviv. (I take my kippah off as soon as the bus crosses the Yarkon River.) It wouldn't hurt them, she says, to study literature with someone from that world. (I do indeed come from another world. But is it "that" one?) Limor thinks I should disregard the fact that these letters of mine are being forwarded to total strangers. She urges

me to continue writing in the same voice and definitely not try to explain the Jewish-Israeli lingo as a concession to the uninitiated. Limor suspects that the next letter I send out into cyberspace will be about her.

Inevitably, the conversation turns to the events of Saturday night. On Saturday night, Limor and her friend Tami had tickets for a rock concert in the "cellar" of the Habimah, a premiere of songs set mostly to the lyrics of Hebrew poetry. That, and the fact that one of the musicians was a friend from school explains why Limor so wanted to go, because frankly, she doesn't look the type. But news of the Netania terrorist attack had just broken, and Limor was of two minds whether to cancel. Tami talked her into going, but in the car ride, it was Tami, in the driver's seat, who began sobbing when they heard about the successful attempt to blow up Cafe Moment and almost everyone in it. Like the Kaffit on Emek Refaim, these are places (unlike like roadblocks, for example), that "everyone" frequents, and just that morning, in the cab to the Central Bus Station in Jerusalem, my twenty-three-year-old driver told me all about one of the victims, also named Limor, about her divorce, her ebullient spirit, her beauty, and her current boyfriend. Driving to the rock concert, there was no body count as of yet, and certainly no names of the victims. Those names always come a day later, and you hear them recited over and over again, with their pictures, if you're watching television. (Limor doesn't watch television.) In the end, both Limor and Tami decided to go through with it, and when they walked into the "cellar" they were astounded to see the place packed with people of all ages. Apparently, the parents of the rock band were also present, and all the parents' friends. It felt like a high school assembly. But it wasn't until the band played the final number, a song set to original lyrics by the leader of the band, a song called "Ahar moti" (After I Die), that Limor understood why she came, why it was essential to be there.

Limor gave me an A. She marveled at my syntax. Only when I tried to throw in a colloquial expression did it sound as if I were quoting from a book. What she doesn't know is that I have the same problem in English.

Jerusalem, March 13, 2002

7. FIRGUN

Among the counter lives I get to play out by coming here--pious Jerusalemite, Tel Aviv playboy, Zionist settler--I can also make believe what it would be like teaching at a major university. During my last visit, I joined the English Department car pool, and for 15 NIS a ride, I could hear some very smart people talking shop two mornings a week. What made their kvetching and complaining so literary, so dialogical, was that in Tel Aviv I boarded with the Neshet family, and Hana Neshet was head of the English Dept. at the time, so over breakfast the next morning I invariably heard what was really going on. It was safe to confide in me--whom, after all, did I threaten with my two courses in Yiddish Literature, offered once in a lifetime? Did I get an earful about the internecine rivalry between Hebrew Literature and Torat Hasifrut, and the recent split-off between the literary theorists and Cultural Studies! It sounded like the Knesset in academic drag. Even though new buildings were constantly going up and new programs were proliferating, the jealousy, paranoia, and injured pride conveyed a sense that there wasn't now or ever would be enough to go around. In other words: a total lack of *firgun*.

I still remember learning this important word in 1974 from Dan Miron, my unofficial dissertation adviser. He took me somewhere off campus and while discussing my prospects of finding a permanent job, he threw in the warning phrase that here in Israel "*lo mefargenim otkha*." To my quizzical look he replied: "It's from Yiddish. *Nit tsu farginen*." Since "*farginen*," which has no English equivalent, means "not to begrudge," "*lo lefargen*" means the opposite: to put down, back bite, and otherwise view darkly someone else's accomplishments, no matter how modest the recognition.

Well, on Thursday, the positive and negative workings of "*firgun*" were driven home to me once and for all. I made it to the Tel Aviv campus in record time--an hour and a half, door to door from Hartman's--with just enough time to check my e-mail before heading off to 496 Gillman for a Yom Iyyun honoring the Hebrew publication of Hana's book, *City Scriptures*. It was a gathering of the clan: the whole English Dept., Torat Hasifrut (the copublisher of the Hebrew edition), a devastatingly handsome man named Yuval Portugali from the Geography Dept., assorted family and friends, and a smattering of architects. This is because Hana is the genuine *farginer(in)*: always collegial, inclusive, generous; a bridge-builder.

Before Hana spoke about growing up between two contrasting urban landscapes--a standard photo of Jews davening at the Kotel in the pre-State period and a photo of her parents in an English garden in Munich on the eve of their immigration to America--she was introduced by Ziva Ben-Porat, the Chair of Torat Hasifrut, who had organized the whole shebang. The love fest continued when Meir Sternberg, who rarely has a kind word to say about anyone, introduced the first main session on Narratology and Representation, where the focus, understandably, was on the manifold ways in which London and Dublin have been rendered in the classics of English fiction, while the late afternoon session, conducted in Hebrew, broke out of the mold. Most memorable, riveting even, was Ayal Dotan's lecture-presentation on Los Vegas, the prototype of "simulated space." We were all of us held spellbound watching a hyped-up documentary on the making of the Strip, showing, in full color, how all the major hotels were blown up to make way for bigger and better ones. One huge building after another, collapsing into rubble. (This also tied in with the cover design for Hana's book, which shows the Twin Towers in the distance, a huge field of wheat in the foreground.) In short, a day well spent, and many new Hebrew words to commit to memory.

On account of the "matsav," out of deference, that is, to the somber mood, Hana decided to host the speakers at her home that evening rather than at a fancy restaurant. I came late, just in time, though, to sit with Ziva Ben-Porat and the Neshers, and catch up on the latest academic gossip. Ziva is heading up a multi-million dollar project to create a data base and universal lexicon on intertextuality involving a team of researchers at a half-dozen major European universities. She is, for those who know, a pioneer in the field. Since Tel Aviv University is 40 million dollars in debt (I kid you not), this mega-grant comes at a particularly welcome time. But Ziva, who has just turned 65, is not yet a full professor, because certain of her colleagues (like the Chair of Cultural Studies) have managed to block her promotion lo these many years. We cheered at the news that the wife of said Chairperson finally threw him out of the house, though Ziva hastened to inform us that he just bought himself a new house in the bosom of nature, and in someone else's bosom, too. And so it goes. *Lo mefargenim.*

Ziva is also a *havera kibbutz*; General Secretary, in fact, of Kibbutz Re'im. From Hana's house, at 9:30 pm, she was heading back to the kibbutz, an hour-and-a-half car ride to a pretty dangerous part of the country, because there were important

matters to attend to. The kibbutz has always used Arab labor but ever since a Palestinian worker somewhere else in Israel murdered his boss of eight years, some haverim have been agitating for change. These workers are extremely loyal, she protests. If we fire them, they'll starve. During the "segirah," when the West Bank was hermetically sealed off, the Arab workers were sent their unemployment pay, as it were, through indirect channels. But what if, God forbid, something terrible were to happen? The kibbutz mothers worry that their children, who roam free during the day, are sitting ducks. How will Ziva look them in the eye? Tomorrow there's a crucial meeting to decide what comes first: the security concerns of the kibbutz or the livelihood of the Arab workers? How far to take the principle of firgun?

Jerusalem, March 16, 2002

PS: Erev Shabbes Suzi called to say goodbye. She's leaving for Moscow first thing Sunday morning. The narcotics people gave her a 4.8 (out of 5) in their evaluation of the program, and she received a \$500.00 bonus from the Ministry of External Affairs, something unheard of in Israel.

8. MIDDLE AGED MEN

When he bounded into the restaurant, his shirt sleeves rolled up, the two top buttons of his shirt open, to reveal a masculine chest of hair turning nicely grey, no one at Lilit would ever guess that my friend Shelly was a millionaire, probably several times over. Only the rimless glasses gave him away. Shana says he always affected a democratic demeanor. At McGill, this child of privilege who lived in Montreal's golden ghetto, always walked around with a cheap book bag flung over his shoulder. Like other children of privilege (myself included), my friend Shelly went on to become a no-fault student radical. As a Canadian at Berkeley in no danger of dying in Viet Nam, he started *The Jewish Radical* and made his voice heard, even in those very noisy times. Trying hard to rebel against his father, Shelly studied political science. Eventually, like me, he made aliyah. Then our paths diverged, Shelly did not leave after two-and-a-half years, just when his "zekhuyot" ran out and he was eligible for the draft. Recalling that moment in the car, when it was just the two of us, Shelly admitted to me that he had cried when he put on his smelly green uniform for the first time. All those generations of Jewish men who never wished to bear arms and were unable to protect their families when the going got rough! Shelly (he now revealed to me for the first time) served in an anti-tank unit, where he learned to man a very sophisticated kind of gun. Over the years, the unit stayed together, through thick and thin, a motley, your typical cross-section of storekeepers, school teachers, taxi drivers, garage mechanics, not men he'd otherwise hang out with, or the bar mitzvah of whose sons he would necessarily attend, but guys he knew so intimately that on any matter of substance--war or peace, Bibi or Peres--he knew exactly where they stood, just as they could predict what leftist views he would espouse. He was always the odd man out. In between stints as an anti-tank gunner, Shelly abandoned academics once and for all, discovered an aptitude for business, went into plastics (yes! just like in *The Graduate!*), and when the company went public, retired, a millionaire. Now he invests in start-ups; my friend Shelly, a venture capitalist. True to his old radicalism, he also heads up a campaign to rescue WUJS and other Jewish student programs that are about to go under. Shana pooh-poohed his claim not to be able to learn how to fund raise.

From his second marriage, Shelly has four sons, the oldest of whom is about to be drafted. Because this son is fabulously gifted, he was hand picked for the Talpiot

Program, in which the army will pay for and strictly supervise his academic training (math, physics--you get the picture), followed by basic training and a long stint in the army. Needless to say, he'll be set for life, and probably beyond. Question is: how does an eighteen-year-old mortgage his best years?

In the car, when it was just the two of us, when he was no longer intent on impressing Shana, Shelly moved on to the subject of middle age. For Israeli men, he told me, the onset of middle age is sudden and hits everyone at the same time--at 45, when the Israeli male must retire from the active reserves. That's when he gives up his uniform and the automatic right to bear arms. Worse yet, he gives up the chance to abandon his parental and professional responsibilities, and rejoin his buddies for a week or two or three, each and every year. What a *kef!* So long, that is, as he was still manning that anti-tank gun. When age and technology rendered Shelly obsolete, he still had five years left to serve, years of occupation. No, he was never forced to do anything that was morally reprehensible. The behavior of Zahal, so far as he could judge, was exemplary. Still and all, when the letter came, exempting him from further duty, Shelly sighed a huge sigh of relief, as did the other guys, not one of them a peacenik, like him. Is he worried on his son's behalf? I neglected to ask, (1) because Shana wasn't with me, and (2) because men are trained not to delve so deep.

To compensate for the onset of middle age, Shelly has remarried for the third time, not, God forbid, a woman twenty years younger, but his high school sweetheart from Montreal, also divorced, also with four children--four girls to his four boys. Are they a happy, merged, family? Not quite. The boys live in Ra'anana. The girls live on the Eastern seaboard. The boys are secular. The girls are very-frum. The parents are frequent fliers. And Shelly stays young by maintaining contact with all his old friends, which is how I learned that another mutual friend, let's call him Charlie, also divorced and remarried, is back in Israel, teaching in Haifa. Charlie was the original post-Zionist. After cashing in his subsidized apartment in French Hill, he returned to the States and wrote a book denouncing Zionism. Shelly, always the kibitzer, recently said to him: "Charlie, post-Zionism is passé. Why not become a pre-Zionist?"

Shelly had chosen the perfect place for our reunion. An incomparable "arukha `iskit" (calque for "business lunch"), and a perfect location. It's right off Sderot

Rothschild in a part of Tel Aviv that is undergoing rapid gentrification. And to top it all off, it's a restaurant with a social program. "The first of its kind in the country," Lilit "has opened its doors to the youth who have not received an equal opportunity and offers them a safe and supportive environment which enables them to acquire a meaningful career." The restaurant, in other words, is partially staffed by juvenile delinquents. training to become "culinary specialists." Leave it to our friend Shelly to take his friends to a four-star kosher restaurant that is committed to improving the world.

Jerusalem, March 20, 2002



9. CIVIL DEFENSE

Our friend Suzi, recently returned from Moscow, took us out for lunch at Rahmu's in the Industrial Zone of Talpiyot. We were greeted by a handwritten sign: as of Wednesday, erev Pesach, this branch of the restaurant was closing. Business was bad. But not so bad, argued Suzi, if by 2:00 pm they were already out of Yerushalmi Me'urav, their fabulous mixed grill. Even Haim Gouri and his wife, who came in after us, had to settle for second best. (In the *Ha'aretz* supplement for Passover we later read that Gouri is the only Jewish client who still eats regularly at Abu Shukri's in the Old City. This guy eats out more often than we do!) Suzi, I neglected to report in Letter 5, is your typical Yiddishe Mama: overweight, wears glasses, and loves to talk. Now that Shana is with me, I have someone else to do the "drawing out," and Suzi--at age 56--is telling us what is demanded of a member of the Civil Defense to renew their license to carry a gun. Used to be, the license was renewed if you could hit a stationary target 90% of the time. This past year, they made her load the automatic while running, then start shooting at a moving target, and only in the last minute was she told which of the silhouettes, the white or the yellow, was the hostage and which--the terrorist. If she failed to hit the target less than four times, she was out. Suzi managed to hit the "terrorist" alright, but missed his "accomplice" firing at her from the roof. She still got a passing grade.

When Suzi immigrated from Rumania many moons ago, the army quota for girls was already filled, so she studied self defense on her own. This she put to good use when her husband was posted to Moscow to reopen the offices of the JDC (Joint Distribution Committee). One morning, their apartment overlooking the Kremlin was broken into by armed bandits. One of them tried to gag Suzi while the other headed for the bedroom. But Suzi bit his hand and kicked him in the balls. She was knocked unconscious, her grandmother's diamond ring was pulled off her finger, and her husband was forced at gun point to open the safe and relinquish the money that was locked up there. (The cleaning lady, apparently, had tipped them off.)

So serving in the Civil Defense is a piece of cake. Suzi signed up just recently on account of the matsav, then took a special course to qualify as a shift coordinator. She now has the key to the East Talpiyot branch, and as we were eating Rahmu's

incredible humous, Suzi was informed by cell phone that she was expected that evening for the changing of the guard at 8:30 sharp.

Suzi was one of 10,000 civilians who were posted all over the country to protect us from a terrorist attack, and the combined force of the Civil Defense, Border Patrol, police, and army managed to foil two major terrorist attacks, one a truck bearing explosives that was heading for Jerusalem's major mall, and the other an ambulance hiding explosives underneath a kid lying on a stretcher. So we headed off to our respective seders feeling relatively safe, and except for the violent downpour that drenched us to the bone and that continued to rattle the windows late into the night, all went well. Not until our niece showed up for lunch the next day did we learn about the latest carnage in Netania, something, I am sure, that cast a pallor on your seders in New York.

Luckily, we here in Israel only have one seder, so there's a limit to how many more they can disrupt, and as I write, with the TV on in the background, I can hear the late-breaking news about the terrorist holed up on the ground floor of Elon Moreh who has already killed a few of the Zionist enemy and tomorrow morning I expect to hear the jets and helicopters heading for Hebron and Ramallah as the Israel Defense Forces retaliate.

Jerusalem, March 28, 2002

10. YOM HASHOAH, 2002

This was told to me by Atalia Gutwir of Machon Schechter. Her daughter's twelfth-grade class is in a state of shell shock after the suicide bombing at Café Moment, so the teacher decides to devote part of the class to open discussion. After about fifteen minutes, the teacher turns to the class and says, "*Bo`u, hevreh, nahzor la-shigrah*, c'mon guys, back to the routine. *Akhshav nitkonen le-Yom Hashoah*, it's time to prepare for Yom Hashoah!"

So what were 500 students and faculty doing outside at noon today on the main lawn of Tel Aviv University? (It was a glorious day. I came back with a sun tan.) They were participating in a Yom Hashoah ceremony, the first act of a week-long exercise in group memory that I like to call *Bein ha-Tsefirot*, Between the Sirens. This is the same campus where but a month ago, they were distributing a special issue of the student paper devoted to protesting the war and supporting draft resisters. At 11:45 the sound system started playing ghetto songs in Hebrew and songs of more recent vintage in a minor key. They played Sutzkever's "Under the Whiteness of Your Stars" not once but twice. Instead of throwing me into a rage, as this appropriation of Yiddish used to do, I felt happy for Sutzkever that at least one of the thousands of poems he wrote has entered Israeli civil religion, with or without an attribution. And anyway, at the Yiddish Holocaust Commemoration held in Beit Zionei America on Monday night, I spoke about Sutzkever and sang a stanza of the song in the original.

The two events had this in common: Survivors were invited to light each of the six memorial candles, and through their one-sentence bios one got a sense of the sheer physical expanse of the killing fields. At the Yiddish event, with front-row seats, Shana and I could count the many medals on the lapel of Survivor Number One, who had risen in the ranks of the Red Army, then fought in the War of Independence. Here, on campus, I was sitting too far away to see, and the candle lighting was interspersed with the performance of Israeli songs ("*Lekhol ish yesh shem*" was one I recognized) and three speeches. On the face of it, the speakers were ordered generationally. For indeed, the President of the Student Assembly introduced himself as the grandson of survivors, followed by the Rector, who spoke as a child of survivors, and ending with a survivor of the Warsaw ghetto. But afterwards I realized that the operative principle was the switch from first-person

singular to first-person plural. The student President described a recent trip to Poland that he made with his parents and grandparents, focusing on the tension between Saba, who survived the war in the Soviet Far East and Savta, who went through it all. In Poland, grandpa was in his element, chattering away in Polish at the drop of a hat, while she was angry and silent. And how different his war stories were from hers! Since for grandpa, hunger and disease were the common lot, his upbeat stories had no Jewish focus. Both repertoires the student President hoped to pass on to his (as yet unborn) children. The Rector was quite Rector-like, quoting from Primo Levi, Natan Alterman, but ending with a quote from his late uncle, the Yiddish poet, Moyshe Valdman, the point of which was the need to retain one's moral compass. Avraham Lantsman, the last speaker, spoke on cue about the activities of his Zionist youth group in the ghetto, about the brave resistance, about the hundreds of thousands of Jews who served with distinction in the various armed forces. Two things surprised me: (1) that he still blamed the Jews for falling back on time-tested tactics, instead of a generating a radically new response, and (2) that he ended with an appeal for Arab-Jewish reconciliation. The State of Israel, he reminded his young audience, was founded on the principle of reconciliation. Both assemblies ended with the singing of Hatikvah, only among the Yiddishists, it was preceded by the Partisans' Hymn, a powerful, almost too-powerful, juxtaposition.

So Israelis of all ages have raised the art of commemoration to a new level of sophistication. No wonder the Foreign Ministry has just sent the aforementioned twelfth-grade class to California to organize Yom Hazikkaron and Yom Ha'atzma'ut assemblies among high school kids. Because they expect to be bombarded with hostile questions about Israeli atrocities, Aryeh's T.R.Y group was enlisted to do a simulation.

Thirteen-year-old Shirale had a very hard time getting out of bed this morning because she stayed up to watch a remake of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, only instead of ending with the sounds of a siren offstage and of the Gestapo breaking into the hiding place, followed by a future flash to Otto Frank finding the diary, this version spelled out what happened in between: the arrest, the transport to Auschwitz, the works. What ever happened to the old sanitized versions?

Meanwhile, lots of Israeli kids have made pilgrimages to Poland. Responding to the news of a suicide bombing (who can remember which one?), our friends the Selahs

called their friends and relatives to check up on everyone. "Not to worry," they were told. "Nurit is in Auschwitz."

April 9, 2002

## II. TOUR GUIDES

The one thing I could never be is a tour guide. I once tried showing a visitor around the Upper West Side, where I have lived most of my life. Besides Grant's Tomb, Riverside Church, and the Firefighter's Monument, I couldn't think of anything of general interest to display, and the only reason I thought of the Firefighter's Monument was on account of the time capsule buried beneath the foundation, which I once compared to the Oneg Shabbes Archive in the Warsaw ghetto. So whenever I travel--or to be more precise, when Shana drags me off--to places I've never been to before, I always seek out a professional tour guide. Some high points: (1) our five-day trip through Galicia with Slawek, a James Dean look-alike, who specialized in vanished Jews, and the intimate prewar relations of Jews with the local peasantry; (2) our several trips in and around Moscow with Lena, a professor of English at Moscow State University, who needed the money; (3) a private tour of the Galil and Golan Heights with Shalom, who focused on ancient and modern sources of irrigation; and (4) various tiyyulim over the years with Haganat Hateva, the Israel Society for the Preservation of Nature. There was a time, not too long ago, when nature, flora and fauna, rock formations, and the like, were a surrogate religion here. Meir Shalev does a wonderful send-up of this in *Roman Russi/Blue Mountain*. Just two nights ago, on Dov Elboim's program, he interviewed 85-year-old Naomi Smilanski, granddaughter of Moshe Smilanski from the Second Aliyah, and with a radiant smile she pronounced her religion to be: Botanica. What these tour guides have in common, with the exception of Lena, who moonlighted, is their physical fitness. They climb everywhere, swim everywhere, and never age. It's as if the landscape keeps them rugged and ever-young.

Now then. Remember Baruch? My long-lost friend from Kiev? Last Friday he came over with his ebullient wife, Lena, their twenty-something daughter who's in the army, and their native-born son. Seeing Baruch through Shana's eyes I realized what a *hatikh* he is: suntanned, disheveled hair, fantastic body, and real charisma. (Petite Lena is no slouch, either.) For Shana's benefit, he rehearsed the story of how he fell into a training course for Russian olim with Haganat Hateva, but novelistically speaking, he was born to be a tour guide. Back in Russia, he travelled the length and breadth of the empire--the more remote, the better. And what a storyteller! As Sholem Aleichem would say: whole buckets full of jovial stories: about Birobidjan, about the utopian dreams of rebuilding Jewish culture in Ukraine,

about his own chaotic efforts at Jewish self-education. His most ambitious projects were the first post-Soviet Yiddish primer (Kiev, 1990) and an all-Russian conference of Yiddish teachers in Birobidjan, the so-called Jewish Autonomous Region just north of Manchuria. Last May, Baruch was sent by the Jewish Agency to four Far Eastern cities, ending up in Birobidjan, and as a memento, he asked to be photographed in front of the sign on the Khabarovsk-Birobidjan Highway, the only Yiddish road sign in the USSR. A memento, also, of the Soviet Yiddish orthography, which not only did away with such "superfluous" letters as *het*, *sin*, and *taf*, but also abolished the final *nun* and *mem*. Imagine Baruch's surprise when, instead of the old sign, he sees the name BIROBIDJAN spelled the standard way, with a final ~~mem~~! Upon closer inspection, he can see that the foot of the small nun had been painted over in white, and the horizontal line elongated. "What's this?" he asks. Oh, explain his hosts. Over the past several years, many Israeli delegations had visited the place and invariably ridiculed the locals for not being able to spell the name of their own region. What did Israelis know about Soviet spelling reforms? Sick of hearing these complaints, the locals took the path of least resistance and fixed the nun.

These and other droll stories Baruch tells us as we drive out of Jerusalem, heading due south. I'm sitting in the front seat, so I can't see the color of Shana's face as we come to a major army road block and veer to the right, or as Baruch then recounts how the first tunnel we're about to go through was built by Polish workers with a Russian design, and how the next tunnel was already built under American specifications. Does she know where we are? That this is the infamous Tunnel Road we've been reading about for 18 months, one of the deadliest places on the West Bank? She must, because Baruch is pointing out the new concrete shields that flank the open highway, and before we know it, we're passing through picturesque Beit Jalla, completely deserted, and are finally stopped by another roadblock and Baruch must get out of the car to show his ID to the soldier on guard duty. The place is swarming with jeeps and armored cars. One more steep climb from there and we're home: in Har Gilo, where the Kimmelfelds live, they and 58 other families, many with professional ties to the Society for the Preservation of Nature, for the original plan was to turn Har Gilo into a field school for all of Israel.

And why not? The view is spectacular. Just below the lookout, there's a Catholic agricultural school, and before the Intifada, the Arabs in the surrounding villages

enjoyed close ties with their Israeli neighbors. Baruch himself has attended any number of Muslim weddings. The land, we should know, was not confiscated. It had been a Jordanian outpost, with heavy guns pointed at Jerusalem. In the first year of the latest Intifada, you could see the Palestinian snipers firing into Gilo, every night. Right now the fighting is farther away—in Hebron, Jenin, Ramallah.

No sooner do we arrive than we are met by 84-year-old Sore Hauben, who recites her Yiddish verse to me from memory, and who with the help of a cane accompanies us up and down the paved streets, past bomb shelters that function instead as art studios and daycare centers, and I am captivated by her, as Baruch knew I would be. Her story begins with her premature birth at seven months, and from the age of five is governed by the Belzer Rebbe's personal blessing, that she never be harmed by the hands of an enemy. That is how she survived Hitler, Stalin, and soon, Arafat.

Before we take leave of the Kimmelfelds, and Baruch drives us back via the safe road, the route he could have taken had he wished to deprive us of the full Israeli landscape--something that as a tour guide he was loath to do--Lena gives us a bouquet of wild flowers picked from her own garden.

Jerusalem, April 12, 2002



12. A ZIONIST EDUCATION

Going off to Camp Ramah, for some, was their first act of individuation. Dad and especially Mom were against it, weren't ready for them to leave home, didn't see the point. Having held their ground about spending the summer in the Pokonos, Palmer, the Berkshires, Wisconsin, or points further west, signing up for the Ramah High School Program in Israel (TRY for short) was the logical next step, intifada or no intifada. Lately, each of them has been under terrific parental and grandparental pressure to come home.

One reason they won't budge is their love for each other. What ever happened to the backbiting, the cliques, the posturing that 16- and 17-year-olds are so famous for? Mutual acceptance rules. Silent Noah has the right to remain silent, so long as he can live with the nickname. The other Noah, born in Columbia, doesn't mind being called a drug lord, and can kibbitz as good as he gets. Equally divided among boys and girls, some of them have paired off, but for the most part, they hug each other, indiscriminately. I thought those group photos we were getting over e-mail was a lot of propaganda. Now I see it's really true.

Another reason they won't go home is their madrikhim. The English word "counselors" does not do them justice, because Aliza and Marshall are Jewish role models, first and foremost. Aliza is a Conservative Movement success story. Raised in Efrat, the hotbed of those very-bad religious fanatics whom the whole world excoriates, one summer many years ago she was sent to Ramah Wisconsin on "shelikhut" and discovered America. In the army, she specialized in drama education, skills she will put to excellent use on Games Night. Marshall is concurrently a student at the Seminary's Machon Schechter in Jerusalem. Next year he returns to the States to start grad school. He dreams of becoming a Jewish educator. Aliza and Marshall speak Israeli Hebrew to each other, not so that the kids won't understand, but to inspire.

The main reason they won't heed their parents' exhortations is Danny Laufer. In Zionist parlance, Danny is their "mehanekeh," Pedagogue-in-Chief. His spoken Hebrew is not nearly as fluent as Aliza's and Marshall's. Danny was still a kid when his parents came on aliyah, and returned with them to the States two years later. By the time he came back on his own, he had missed the linguistic boat. So

Danny speaks Ramah Hebrew. Otherwise, he is uncompromising. The ban against alcohol, drugs, and sex is strictly enforced. The stricter the rules, the safer they feel.

While in years past, roaming free in Jerusalem was the high point of the program, because of the "matsav" our kids are almost completely land-locked. No downtown, no free nights on Emek Refaim. Instead, Danny has arranged for Jerusalem to come to them. Is Meah Shearim suddenly out of bounds? No problem. Bring a former Haredi Jew to the Village to tell his story. Yes, the Goldstein Youth Village where they live is Israel in miniature. It is beautifully landscaped, Russian is the lingua franca, and the food is awful.

Danny holds the TRY program together. His Israel Core Curriculum, which covers the history of Israel from the Tanakh to the Palmach, involves a lot of reading, writing, and weekly tiyyulim. Shana, I, and two other parents are tagging along for this particular study-and-fun tiyyul to the Galil. On the way, Danny drills them on geography, not a particularly strong subject back home in America. They have learned the main regions of the Land; they understand the critical importance of the Galilee. A song repertoire is beginning to take shape. On their first tiyyul, to the Negev, a kumzits fell through because they had too few Hebrew songs in common. Now, not only are recent Israeli CDs blaring over the PA system, but the kids will also take turns teaching each other new songs from the liturgy. It'll never reach the point when every bus trip becomes a nonstop songfest. Those youth movement days are over. Chances are, Danny is too young to have experienced them, either.

On this trip, geography, group singing, literature, and history will jell. I miss the class where Danny covers the pogroms of the early twentieth century by brilliantly juxtaposing Bialik's "In the City of Slaughter" with Peretz's "Bontshe the Silent." I worried that the Peretz story would be misread as a peon to passivity. No need to. Danny's sales pitch, made explicit in Source Book #4 (compiled by him), is that Zionism was a revolutionary movement. The theme he's pushing throughout the trip, as we tour the Aaronson Museum in Zichron Yaakov, as he pulls off his sweat shirt on a miserably cold morning in the Kibbutz Yif at Agricultural Museum, with its commanding view of Emek Yizrael, and gets them to sing at the top of their lungs, as he discusses the myth and reality of Trumpeldor's Last Stand, and as we end the tiyyul at the grave side of the poet Rachel on the banks of her beloved Kinneret is--the nature of heroism. What is it that someone lives for if they're

willing to die for it? And what is it that they're been feeling lately in view of the ever-worsening matsav?

Of course adolescents plagiarize. When they talk in the first person they're invariably cribbing. It's not their fault that what they're experiencing is well-trodden ground. It takes years to find one's own voice, to really individuate. So Maya is unconscious of the fact that when she describes how alienated she now feels from her girl friends back home, whose greatest concern is what to wear for the prom, while here, girls her age are about to enter the army, have boyfriends who have just been called up, she is quoting, almost verbatim, Kitty's speech in the novel *Exodus*. The boys profess to be ready to die for Israel, to die for America, while the girls, exactly on cue, will sacrifice themselves in order to save their loved ones. Our Aryeh, doubtless drawing on an image he's seen in the movies, asks rhetorically: What good is it to the parents of a war hero when the army gives them a folded flag? How does this compensate them for the loss of their son? A good thing Shana and I are sitting off to the side. He'd be terribly embarrassed to see us crying.

Games Night <sup>was</sup> so cathartic, the last day so action-packed, and lunch at Sachneh so filling that they sleep all the way home. As we begin the ascent to Jerusalem the news comes on and we hear Bush's powerful speech on the Middle East, broadcast live, in English. It's not the Balfour Declaration, exactly, but it does seem to presage a breakthrough. Especially if you're sixteen going on twenty-two, your head is full of Hebrew songs, there's a girl asleep on your lap, and you just saw the hills of the Galilee ablaze with wildflowers.

Jerusalem, April 16, 2002  
Yom Hazikkaron 5762

13. AYALLA

Ayalla (with the accent on the last syllable) could stand on her head. That's what she was known for on kibbutz. A lightweight, in other words. Certainly, when compared to her father, Moshe Zahavi, a founding member of Tel Yitshak. Shana, if you ask her, will tell you the whole story of the Goldfarb Family from Kovno, how Fishl the Maskil married rich and had three children: Moshe, who rebelled and came on aliyah in 1936; the brilliant son, who got a scholarship to study mathematics at the Hebrew University, but his mother wouldn't let him leave home and he was killed serving in the Red Army; and Tsippy, who came to the States, was engaged to be married to a nice boy from the Bronx, went back to Kovno to arrange for the wedding, and got caught by the war. "Tsippy," Shana will say, later became "Soviet Jewry."

When Shana and I last saw Ayalla, exactly five years before, on Hol Hamo'ed Pesach 1997, she had brought her father to meet us in Tel Aviv, at the home of the Selahs. Moshe was very despondent, not only because he was old and ill, but also because of what was happening to the kibbutz. Privitization--*hafratah*--was taking its cruel toll. The Children's Home, once the temple of communitarianism, of utopian child rearing made real, had been turned into a Day Care Center for the Netania middle class. The swimming pool? Rented out along with the adjacent hall for weddings. Even the little bit of agricultural work was being subcontracted. Again, if you asked Shana, she'd explain that Tel Yitshak wasn't much of a kibbutz to begin with, its "work ethic" wasn't up to snuff, and the General Zionist Party to which it belonged was now defunct. Ayalla--flighty, athletic--was a case in point. She knew nothing about nothing. No wonder Moshe looked like a man presiding over the demise of everything he had worked for.

How ironic! Rich Fishl, when visiting his wayward son in Palestine, had bought some orchards as an investment, and had also managed to deposit money in an American bank. So when Tsippy finally got out, in the early wave of aliyah from the USSR, the sale of the properties and the accumulated interest in the bank allowed both her and her daughter Lyuba to buy very well-appointed apartments in Netania. Long live capitalism!

It's Hol Hamoed Pesach again, and we're sitting in the home of cousin Judy in Even Yehudah, a bedroom suburb of Netania (and Tel Aviv), at a long table that looks like it's set for another seder. In honor of our visit (Aryeh is with us too, and a friend of his from TRY), Ayalla prevailed upon her kids to come, third-generation kibbutzniks who don't take kindly to ceremonial occasions. Her son is late. Last she knew, he had rushed out of the house brandishing a pistol. He finally shows up and flashes us a big smile. The kibbutz runs a 7-11-type store that's open on Shabbat and until 11:00 pm--a veritable cash cow. What with all the suicide bombings of late, he decided to guard the entrance, and carrying a pistol would make it look official.

Ayalla has put on weight and smokes. For good reason. The future of the kibbutz now rests on her shoulders, and the main burden are the retirement houses for the very rich that developers are putting up on kibbutz land, at \$200,000 a unit. The kibbutzniks will provide recreational activities: folk dancing, crafts, gardening, culture. Will this save Tel Yitshak? What's left of the kibbutz way-of-life to save? And for all that the General Zionists are a defunct party, they still own a very valuable piece of property--the Goldstein Youth Village in Jerusalem. God forbid they should sell that off and the youth programs we cherish will go up in smoke. The future happiness of countless of our children rests with Shana's cousin, Ayalla, daughter of Moshe Zahavi.

As Shana and Ayalla get more deeply engrossed in equally weighty matters, my mind wanders back to the conversation at Café Attara with my cousin, Yitshak. Over great omlettes (I alone ordered the onion soup-with-complimentary-wine), he told us how and why he changed his name from Nachtigal. It was during the War of Independence when he was serving in the air force. With the school year about to begin at the Hebrew University, he applied for early discharge and the request was transferred to the Officer for Education, who agreed, on one condition--that Yitskhak Hebraize his name. One of Yitshak's uncles had already changed his name to Zamiri, but the i-suffix was already passé, so Yitshkak Nachtigal became Yitshak Zamir, made it to class on time, and went on to become Attorney General, and later still, a Justice of the Supreme Court.

Show me another country where so many ordinary people change their names so that they can change the world. Where improvisation is a way of life. Where penniless immigrants are looked upon as pilgrims. And where if women didn't have two legs to stand on, the place would fall apart.

Jerusalem, April 17, 2002  
Yom Ha'atzma'ut 5762

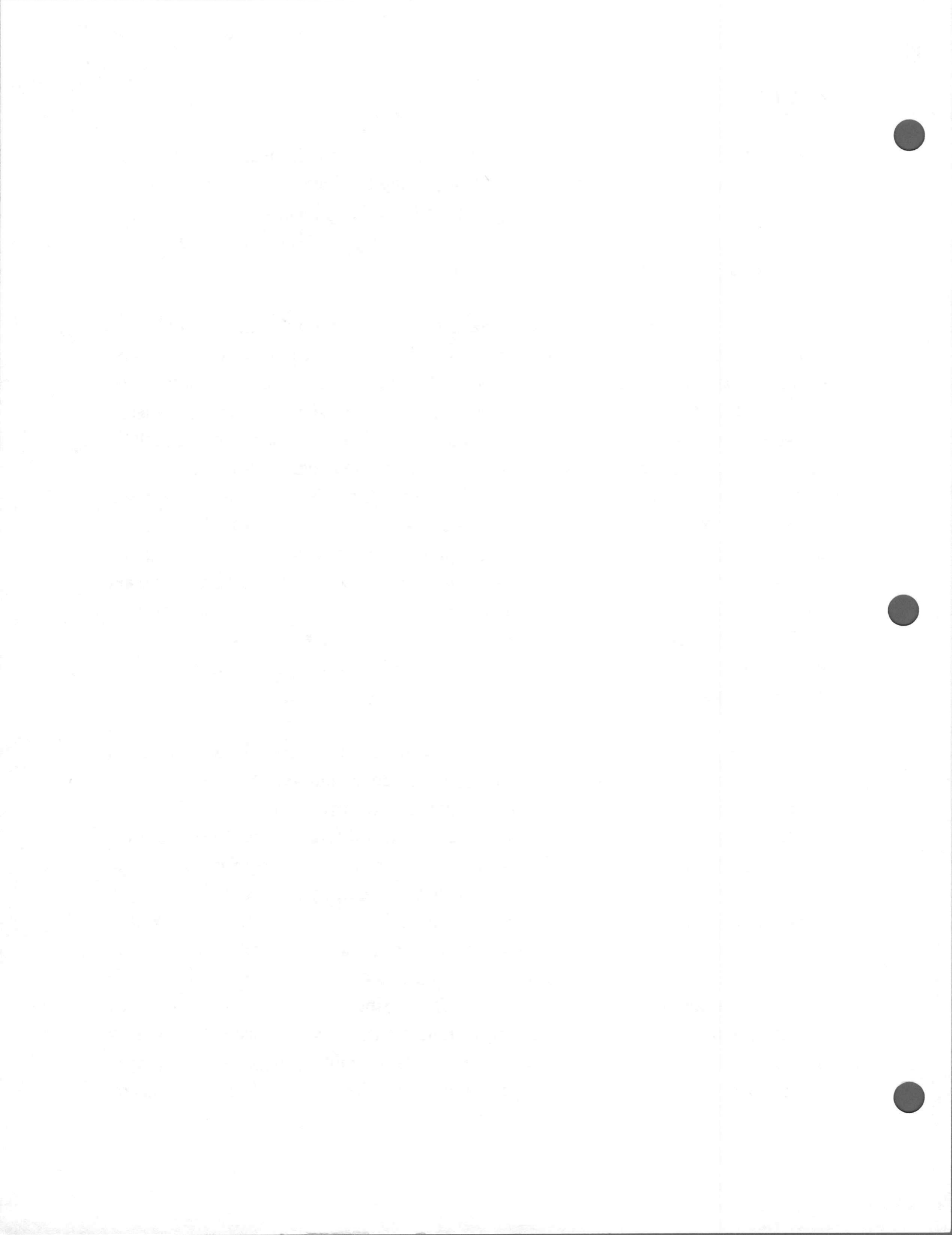
WORDS OF COMFORT

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The writer Haim Be'er has done well for himself. His duplex apartment in Ramat Gan is newly renovated, with lots of wood replacing the standard issue cement-and-tile. Best of all, his youngest son, Argentinian-born daughter-in-law, and delicious granddaughter occupy the downstairs apartment. The phone is ringing off the hook. You'd think he was running for the Knesset.

"A writer can only predict the past," says Haim, apropos my run-in with A. B. Yehoshua in the Haifa University elevator. "He can't predict the future." The Haim I'm babbling away with in Hebrew is older and wiser. Once upon a time, he helped to found the Movement for a Greater Israel, along with such luminaries as S. Y. Agnon, Natan Alterman, and Moshe Shamir, but for the past twenty years he's never voted to the right of Labor. Since the start of the latest intifada, he asks me, what difference is there between Left and Right? One fate unites all. At stake is our very existence. What's less certain is the status of Jews who live abroad, of those who are Jews by choice. Two of the phone calls, meanwhile, concern a panel discussion at Ben Gurion University that he and another academic type, someone whose name he won't tell me, were supposed to have with the Commander-in-Chief of the Southern Region, but the other panelist left word that he would not appear with a Fascist pig, and the military man just pulled out of his own accord, on account of the war.

Haim loves Yiddish. Since early childhood in Jerusalem he's been storing up Yiddish jokes, Arabic-Yiddish puns, and learned Jewish humor, some of which has made its way into his novels. What did Jerusalemites use to call the local whore? "Kohols tinterl." This hearkened back to a time in Eastern Europe when the only ink in town was in the office of the Kahal, the Jewish Community Council, so the men would all dunk their feather-pens into the communal inkwell. On his honeymoon, at a pension in Kiryat Tivon, Haim called up Yosl Birstein, whose first book of stories had just appeared in Hebrew translation. He remembers the title: Tsipiyah (Expectation), in the Tarmil paperback series. To his amazement, Yosl was the director of the local Bank Hapo'alim. Since then, they've become fast friends, so much so that Yosl once appropriated a story that happened to Haim on an army base during the Yom Kippur War. "How could you do such a thing?" Haim asked Yosl when the story appeared in print. "And if I was broke and needed

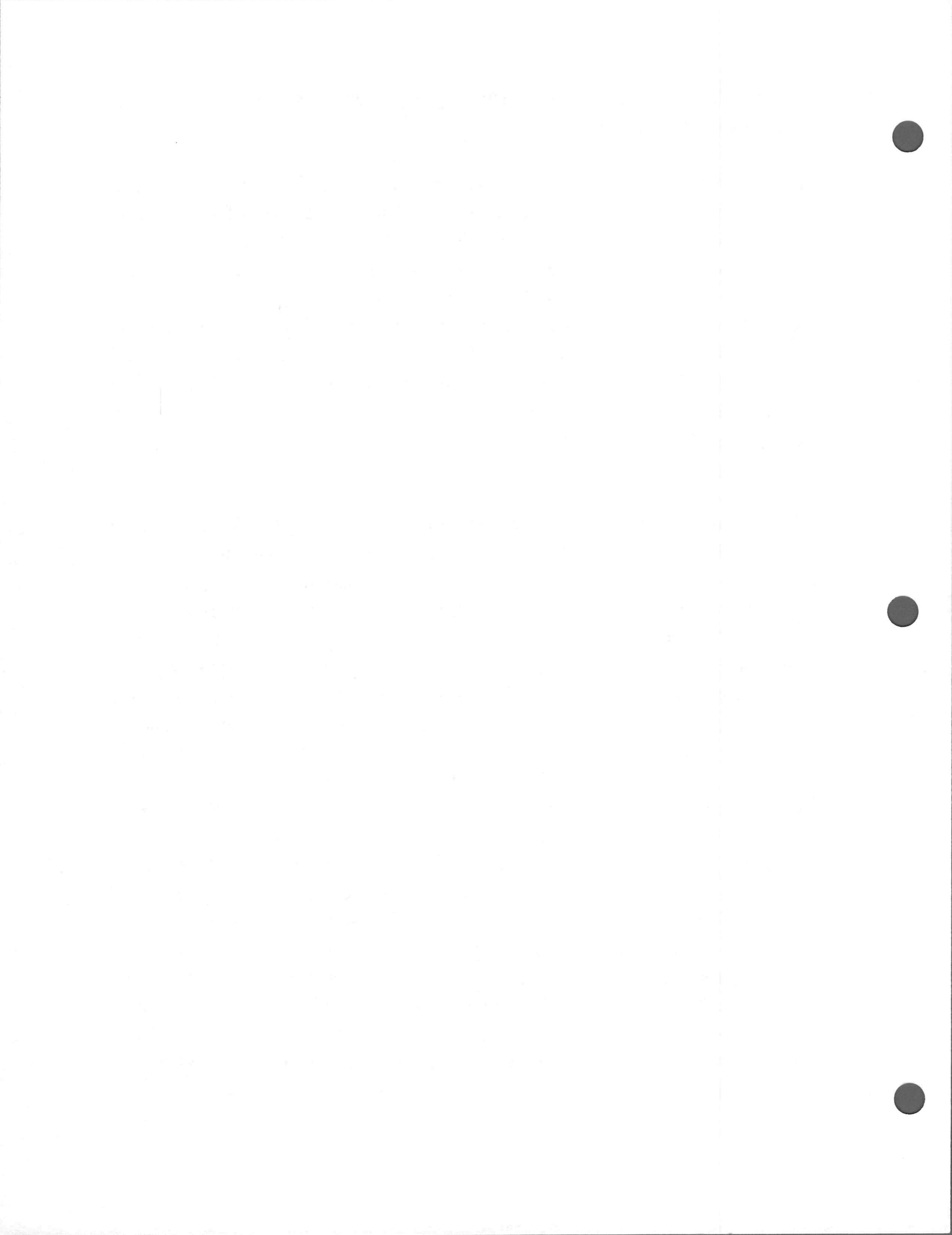




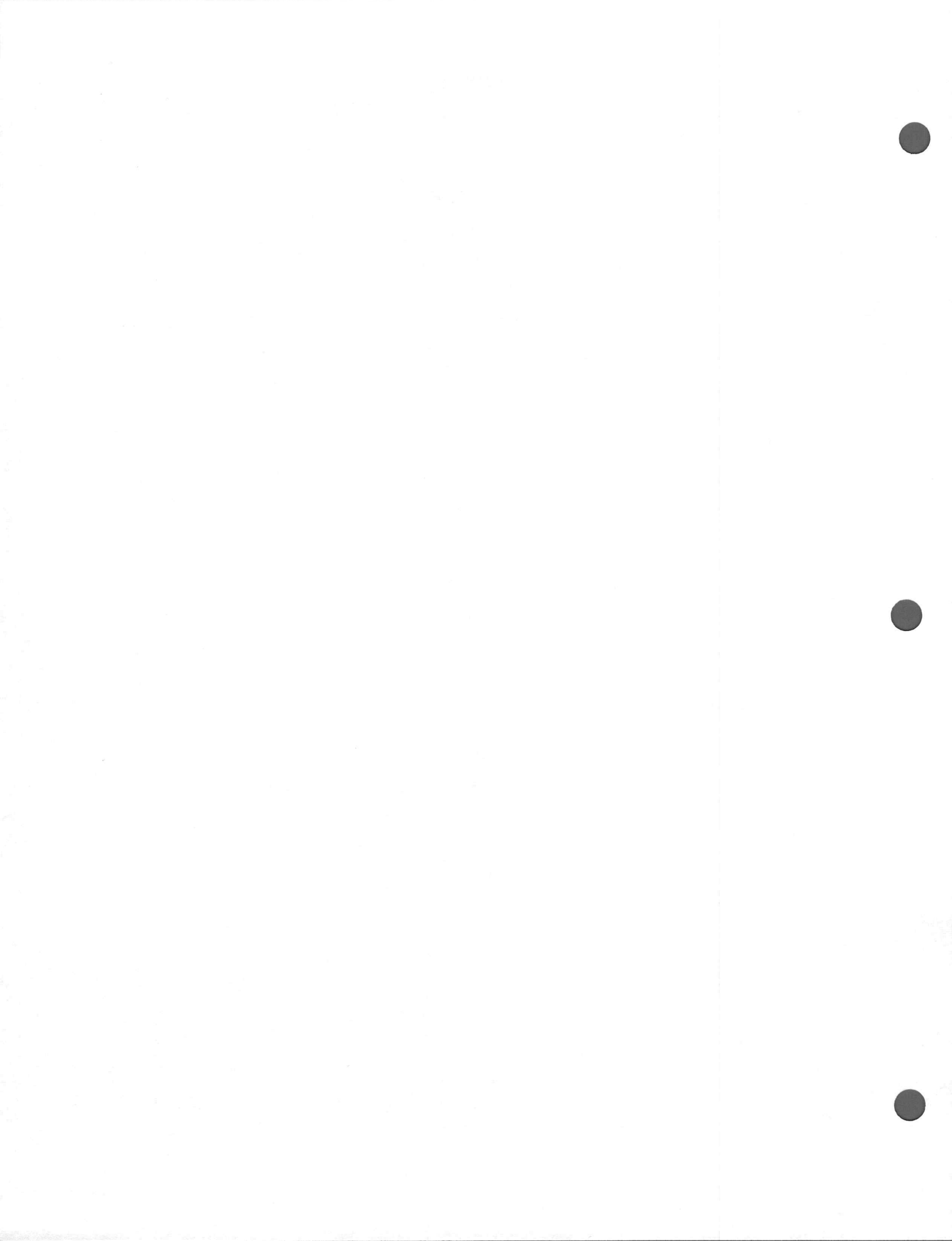
to borrow money,” replied Yosl, answering the question with another question, “wouldn’t you lend me some?”

Haim is understandably down on the younger generation. They have no cultural frames of reference, while nothing in the Hebrew language resonates for them. I’ve heard this litany before. Dan Miron calls it the Culture of Forgetting. “It’s all relative,” I say to Haim. “At least they HAVE a Jewish language.” And since phone call #17 is about a new printing of his book on the love-hate relationship of Israeli writers with Agnon, I point out that no such book could have been written in America, where Agnon’s role as bridge figure was played by I. B. Singer. Singer hogged all the glory by consistently denying that he and Yiddish literature had anything in common. That’s my job, to bring words of comfort. I have no social work skills, so I console as best I can. Besides, if Hebrew culture is in such dire straits, why won’t the phone stop ringing?

Batia, Haim’s wife, rushes out to buy me a huge Israeli flag (made in China) to hang from my balcony, which I do, added to all the other flags on Ben Labrat Street, and on Yom Hazikkaron, second thing in the morning (after jogging in the Valley of the Cross), I go to the local makolet to buy four different newspapers, two in English and two in Hebrew, and in the Hebrew Ha’aretz I find a stupendously interesting supplement on the current status of Hebrew, with 39 original essays, three of which sing the praises of Biblical Hebrew, plus up-to-date glossaries of Israeli slang, and after the 11:00 am siren, I stay glued to the radio, to the oldies but goodies playing on the classical music station, save for the 11:55 Poetry Spot when, instead of a living poet, I hear the voice of Yehuda Amichai reading his poem “What I Learned in the War,” and his voice is the voice of homespun truths, of a war-weary Israel, in a Hebrew so simple a high school kid could have written it, I hear him turning the page, stumbling over a certain alliteration, and for the second time in the past sixteen hours I forget to fight back the tears, then returning to Ha’aretz I find an article about the very songs I’ve been listening to all day, and that I will sing again at a kumzits late that night, with some forty middle-aged people like myself, mostly of Anglo-Saxon provenance, who badly need to sing these songs and sing them so badly, and from the article I learn that the name for our massive counterattack against the centers of Palestinian terror is borrowed from a Palmach-era song by Haim Hefer, the last line of which is “We are here, a defensive shield.” Homat Magen.



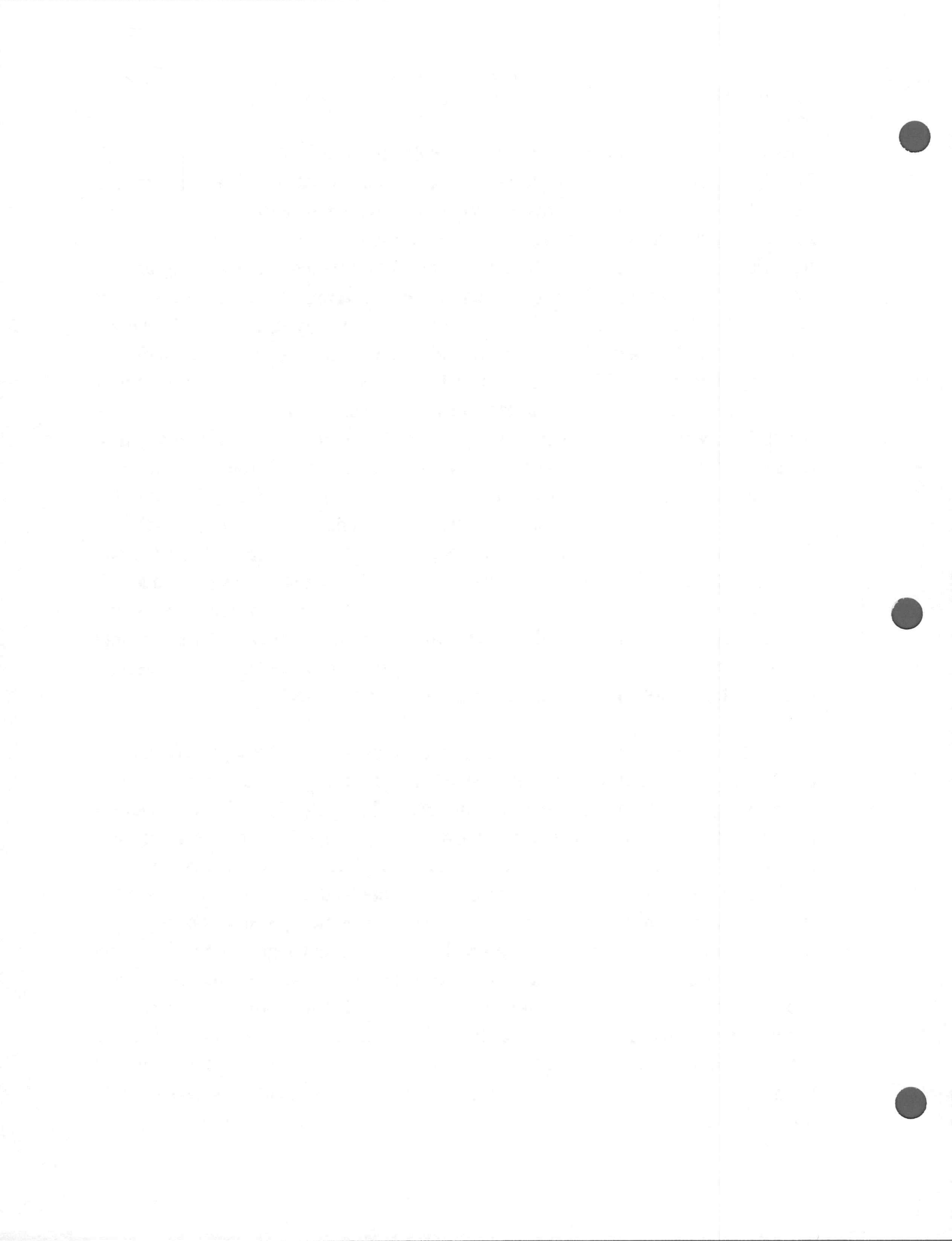
Jerusalem, April 20, 2002



PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

It was a Proustian moment. I'm at Hamutal Bar-Yosef's Arab house off Emek Refaim and am about to practice the Hebrew lecture I am to deliver on Monday night. Fortunately, I only do this to myself once every six years, because after she corrects all my errors of grammar and pronunciation, I will have to practice achieving fluency for the next three days, until those words come tripping off my tongue. First, she has something to show me--the xerox of a chapbook she just found at the National and University Library after a lengthy search. It's Brenner's translation into Yiddish of a story by Leonid Andreev, and the chapbook, one-of-a-kind, is stamped GINZEI YOSEF. Then it all comes back to me: the two years I spent at the National Library reading every single storybook published by Ayzik-Meyer Dik, when I wasn't daydreaming about Professor Urbach's daughter, who worked at the reference desk just two rows in front of me. These extremely rare books were all stamped GINZEI YOSEF, and only much later did I learn who this Yosef was and where his fabulous collection came from. Yosef Khazanovich was from my father's home town of Bialystok, which also produced a third utopian dreamer named Ludwig Zamenhoff, the inventor of Esperanto. This Khazanovich was a crazy Zionist, who spent every ruble he earned buying up rare Hebrew and Yiddish books for a National Library that would someday be built in Jerusalem and which he never lived to see. To the extent that we can piece together the Jewish past, it is due in large measure to this meshugener and people like him.

Hamutal was in high spirits. Her latest book of poems, loosely organized around the theme of food, had sold out, and she was negotiating (yes, there were profits to be made!) a second edition. I was not surprised. The night before I had attended a poetry reading at Beit Hakonstitutsia (now there's a good Hebrew word for you) featuring two youngish poets, Orit Meital and Yohai Oppenheimer, and one established poet, Uri Bernstein. Bernstein, who doubled as the host, informed the (tiny) audience that 400 books of original Hebrew verse appear in Israel yearly, roughly one a day, even though the glory days when poets congregated in cafés and issued manifestos were long since over and there wasn't even anyone left to rebel against. Pretty soon, I thought to myself as I listened to the moderator's deep and soothing voice, my favorite Jewish holiday was coming, Shavua Hasefer. For one delirious week, in each of Israel's major cities, the town plaza would be given over to the sale of Hebrew books at huge discounts. I should start making lists right now.



One book for sure I didn't need to buy, because on Monday morning, standing in front of the faculty xerox machine in the Rosenberg Building and cursing my luck because the machine was out of paper and what with the huge deficit, there wasn't going to be any until tomorrow, I noticed another person standing next to me, and when I saw who it was, my heart stopped. DOV ELBOIM! My hero. He teaches philosophy in the same building. Somehow, I managed to blurt out my name and serial number, and taking pity on me, after ascertaining that I could read as well as speak Hebrew, he opened his briefcase and gave me a copy of his latest book, My Life with the Patriarchs. There went my chance to be interviewed on his program, but it was worth it.

On the way home from Hamutal's, chastened by the stupid mistakes I still manage to make, and by how difficult it is to master this language, I remembered Yosef Khazanovich. One thought that immediately came to mind was: Where is his Saudi Arabian counterpart? But charity, I then remembered my father telling me, begins at home. What I have done lately for the Jewish National and University Library? And I resolved to make a CARE package of my publications, especially ephemera and stuff on tape, and donate them to the Library founded by my father's landsman, so that a century hence, people still interested in Jewish dreams and nightmares will know where to look.

Jerusalem, April 26, 2002

2



My friend Chana is still delivering eulogies. In years past, the official mourning ceremonies took place Between the Sirens, those eight days in Israel's civil religion when group memory is most powerfully activated, when the whole Jewish population, regardless of origin or date of arrival, stops dead in its tracks for a minute of silence, then another, and another. There's always the question of where to stand. If you're alone in your office, you step out to the corridor. If you're at home--onto the balcony. If you're watching the ceremony on television, you can stay put, pretending to be at Yad Vashem, or the Kotel, or Har Herzl. Or maybe you just want to be alone with your memories, so it's enough to pull over to the side of the road, get out of your car, just stand there, and try to remember. It tells you how small this country is. There's barely a stretch of desert or mountain range where the siren can't be heard. And so long as you have the radio on, your heartbeat registers the collective EKG.

It was the politics of mourning that thrust Chana Naveh into public life. She was at the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem, reading a paper on models of heroism in Israeli literature. The cream of the crop were present. The date was December 2, 1993. As she reached the end of the paper, she suddenly realized that her eldest son Ido was to be drafted on December 3, the very next day, and without thinking, she added a sentence about him. Thanks to the heroic rhetoric still in vogue, she said, Ido would be next in line, so that he too could die a hero's death and be memorialized by the State, whereupon the mothers in the audience burst into hysterical weeping. After the lecture, she received a telegram from Uzi Shavit, Editor-in-Chief of the Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, informing her that her book on the culture of mourning had just appeared. Several years pass and a case is brought before the Supreme Court by the parents of Eiran Vekselbaum, who was killed in that freak training accident in the Negev that Ehud Barak was implicated in. At issue was the inscription on Eiran's tombstone in the military cemetery. The parents wanted the names of his two surviving brothers to be included, but military protocol would allow for the names of the parents only. Chief Justice Barak instructed his clerks to comb through the literature for instruction, and one of the clerks found something on point in Chana's book. The fixed tombstone formula, she had written, presupposed an exclusive relationship between the deceased and his birth parents, as if he were still a child, and not, as

was increasingly the case, a husband and father. The State, she argued, was still locked into a War of Independence mode of heroics. Whole passages from Chana's book were cited in the Court's decision, which ruled in favor of the Vekselbaums.

So why, with all her other responsibilities, was Chana running off to deliver a eulogy a week after Yom Hazikkaron? Because, as Itamar Rabinovich said at the campus-wide commemoration ceremony, attended by well over a thousand students and faculty, the distinction between one hallowed date and another had broken down. It used to be crystal clear. Yom Hashoah was about "them" and Yom Hazikkaron was about "us." One happened "there" and the other happened "here." One remembered the passive martyrs and the other celebrated the active fighters. One (he implied) belonged to the sacred realm and the other--to the secular. Now for the first time since the founding of the State, another distinction had collapsed: between the war zone and the home front. And this is where Chana came in, for among the rites and ceremonies that faculty preside over is the handing out of scholarships named after the students who were killed in Israel's wars, and this ceremony takes place within each branch of the university, and in their presence of the bereaved parents. This year, the keynote speaker at the ceremony for the Faculty of the Humanities was our very own Eli Yassif, who taught the petihta to the Midrash on Lamentations where God calls upon the Patriarchs, Matriarchs, and Prophets to help Him weep for the Destruction. God is finally consoled by Mother Rachel, the prototype of all bereaved mothers. Why, then, another ceremony? Because two students in the Humanities had been killed in recent suicide bombings, and the parents wished to establish scholarships in their memory. True to her calling, and her scholarship, it was essential that she address personal words of comfort to the parents who (she shook her ~~self~~ as she said this) were even younger than she.

head

Jerusalem, April 27, 2002

15. *STUDYING THE FOLK*

The 21st Annual Inter-University Conference on the Study of Folklore in Israel has not even begun yet, and already I've learned something new. Did I know that life is like a cup of coffee, one of the participants asks me as I mix my own styrofoam cup of kafé botz? I shake my head. "O shahor. O botz. O hafukh. Ve'im lo ehad mehem, zeh pashut nes." Now try explaining that in an open letter! Literally it means: You can take your coffee black, Turkish, with milk, and if none of them is to your liking, choose Nescafé. But in Hebrew each of these yields a pun: "black" is black, Turkish coffee is called "botz," which means "mud," Capuccino is called "hafukh," or upside-down, and "Nes" means miracle. Yes, life here is an everyday miracle.

There were 25 speakers, not counting three welcoming speeches and a round table discussion with six participants and thanks to my new friend Limor and her fellow graduate student Tsafi, it ran like a military operation, not a random or invidious comparison, mind you, because both have done their army service and nothing fazes them, not even when all the pastries that were set out for the participants were eaten up by students who could not resist the sight of an unguarded table of goodies. The refreshments had to be set up outside, because the proceedings were held in the Cymbalist Center for the Jewish Heritage, a huge brick synagogue, unlike any other building on campus, which looks like a crematorium, and is the single most expensive building in Israel.

Folklore is another of my old flames. I got into it because of Yiddish, because in prewar Vilna, Yiddish scholarship became a means of achieving national self-emancipation. The Folk, in this scheme of things, was the backbone of the nation, the shtetl was its Heartland, and Yiddish folklore was the source of a new Oral Torah. If you think I'm kidding, read The Shtetl Book (Roskies & Roskies, 1975). Folklore in the early Seventies was a soft discipline badly in need of rigorous new methods. I quickly became a disciple of Vladmir Propp and Alan Dundes. Judging from the conference I would say that on the whole, it's still a soft discipline, a vehicle for identity politics, but that the Folk is alive and well, and speaking Hebrew.

Literally: speaking, because this year's theme was "Hakol--sippur," another pun. Spelled with a kuf it means: The voice-is-the story. Spelled with a khaf it means: The story's the thing. An early session, when I was still wide awake, was dedicated to women's voices, and each speaker, it turned out, had chosen her topic as a way of keeping faith with her parents and grandparents. Tova Gamliel was a knock-out, both stunningly beautiful, with a reddish-brown head of curly-coffered hair, and a stylish black leather jacket over a white blouse and white slacks, and stunningly brilliant. The voice she had chosen to bring to life was the voice of her Yemenite grandmother, the setting, content, melancholy, and deep structure of the kinah, the ancient lament of women mourners in the Judeo-Arabic vernacular. In my febrile imagination, I could see Tova as a three-year-old arriving from Yemen on Operation Magic Carpet, though chances are, she's a Sabra. During the numerous breaks I was too shy to go up and ask her

What else is the "folk" up to these days in Israel? Yuval Harrari, a young anthropologist sporting a pony-tail, presented his spectacular findings about Rabbi Nissim the Sorcerer from the development town of Yeruham and his divination plate, a variant of the plates used in ancient Mesopotamia. How's that for continuity? It even beats the shtetl. At the near end of the Israeli spectrum are the million new olim from the Former Soviet Union, and judging from the papers presented about them by two Russian-born scholars, they're speaking terrific Hebrew. (Remember that special issue of Ha'aretz I mentioned on the status of Hebrew in Israel? It has a long article explaining why Russian olim master Hebrew and Anglo-Saxon olim rarely do.) So Dr. Larrisa Fialkova, her head covered, spoke about the concept of space in Russian immigrant narratives, 1989-99 (Israel as a dreamscape and a danger zone; "A chicken is not a bird and Israel is not abroad"); while Dr. Helena Rimon presented her findings on Russian teenagers who arrived here as part of project Na'aleh. The character they most identify with, she concluded, was Pichorin, the "superfluous man" in Lermontov's A Hero for Our Time.

Mediated Voices in the Age of the Internet. Here we come to the best part of the conference. Here my new friend Limor gave a spirited presentation titled (in English) "Please Forward the Story" in which she argued that the most widespread species of urban folklore is The Virus Alert, the tale of a bogus virus that credulous urbanites (in Minyan M'at and elsewhere) forward to their friends, thus

spreading the tale, if not the virus. The virus alert, she claimed, taps into urbanites' deepest fear, of being invaded and polluted by some foreign agent. E-mail messages, she concluded, lend themselves to folklorization because they are usually short, they exhort people to action, and they are not overly stylized (unlike, say, these letters of mine). No wonder so much of my two-hour discussion with Limor was about e-mail. She was using me as an informant, just as I was using her. But Limor, for all her vigor and verve, was no match for the last speaker in the session, Dr. Hagar Solomon, who presented the results of six years of research on...Israeli bumper stickers (called "stikerim"). Through bumper stickers, she demonstrated, the "folk" voices its collective will, its deepest fears, and even the most direct and seemingly transparent exhortation, like HA-AM IM HA-GOLAN, when you interview the people who display them on their cars, you discover its multiple and contradictory meanings. ("If the Golan goes, the whole people goes with it," said one informant).

My own lecture, I am relieved to report, went exceptionally well, and this, for three reasons: (1) These days, for a foreigner to just show up to a conference is considered an heroic feat; (2) everyone thought I had done the translation into high-literary Hebrew myself ("Who speaks Hebrew like that anymore!") and (3) mine was the only talk about Yiddish. Yiddish was saved for last.

Jerusalem, May 2, 2002

16. *A SENSE OF PLACE*

What is it about this place that makes one so intensely aware of the place? Mordecai Beck is not your average Israeli, coming as he does from an Orthodox British background and committed to earning his living as an artist, but here he is, in middle age, looking much older than me with his scraggly white beard, using up his discretionary earnings to finish a three-year intensive course on Knowing the Land. One day he decided to learn more about the place. Little did he know how arduous it would be: traveling up and down and across; memorizing the flora and fauna; doing penance for not studying geology, biology and archaeology back in public school. I still wouldn't choose him to be my tour guide, but I sure admire his determination.

Then there's Aryeh Neshet, husband of Hana. Hana I've known for thirty years, and Aryeh, since they were married. Sunday was the first time I really understood where he was coming from, what made him run, and run and run. Aryeh was born out of the Mediterranean, just like the mythic Sabra. On Sunday he showed me the precise spot where his mother was smuggled ashore by the Palmach in 1948. The British radar station is still there, marking the spot, although the building is now used as a reformatory for juvenile delinquents. Having discovered the radar's blind spot, the Palmach used the beach area just below as a favored point of entry. Groups of picnickers would build bonfires on the beach while "fishing boats" would wander out to sea, where they met up with the famous Mapilim ships carrying illegal refugees from Europe. His mother was very pregnant with him when she fell into the water, and couldn't swim. Thanks to a brave Palmachnik, Aryeh is here to tell the tale. His parents settled there, in Herzlia, and every day on his way back from school, he would walk along the beach, sometimes go fishing next to the ruins of the Crusader castle destroyed by the Mamluks in 1265. The arches of the Byzantine port were still standing then. The outline of the Roman port is still discernible today. But the coastline was mostly off-limits on account of the huge munitions factory, started by the British and developed by the new State, a factory that employed half the population of Herzlia. Aryeh still remembers the endless convoys of trucks that carted munitions to the Sinai Campaign in 1956. And the factory would be doing business even now, were it not for the catastrophic explosion in 1992 that blew off the roofs of half of Herzlia and caused who-knows how many millions in damage. Naturally, there was a huge outcry, and the

government had no choice but to close it down and relocate the factory to the Negev. Only then was the true extent of the damage discovered: fifty years of toxic waste dumped straight into the ocean. Nitroglycerine, no less. No wonder he and his classmates would find schools of dead fish in the water. Meanwhile, developers had their eye out on the coastline, and six years ago, a huge marina was built off Herzelia Pituach, the wealthiest piece of real estate in Israel, and this marina began a process of erosion, so that a mere six years later, most of the beach has disappeared, forever.

All this I learned on Sunday towards sunset, as Aryeh took me to see his favorite spot in Israel turned, thanks to his efforts, into the Appolonia Coastal Restoration and Ecosystem Education Program. Used to be, that when Hana and he would come here, they would have the place all to themselves. Now, as of Pesach, the Greek, Roman, and Byzantine ruins have been partially excavated, and Appolonia has become an historic site. Aryeh showed me the arrow marks in the ancient masonry, heated arrows used by the Mamluks during their ferocious siege of the Crusader stronghold. The dry moat is most impressive.

What would it cost to finish the excavation? A mere five million. To clear up the toxic waste? Fifty million. Even in this economic climate Aryeh is undaunted. He rattles off a list of projects, culminating in an underwater seashore park and the development of international training courses for the preservation and conservation of the ecosystem, a veritable Light unto the Nations. As for his own benighted nation, the only way to stop developers from creating two artificial islands off the Herzelial coast, an apocalyptic scenario, is through the courts, to which end Aryeh has organized a legal clinic, and his team of aspiring lawyers and conservationists have already scored notable successes. I'm not supposed to mention them, for fear of an evil eye.

The Crusaders knew what they were doing when they built this castle. It stands at the highest point between Ashkelon and Haifa. From the center of the castle ruins you can see all the way, in both directions. Shirale has chosen this very spot to get married, some day, when she finds the right guy.

Jerusalem, May 6, 2002

17. *MY LUNCH WITH DOV ELBOIM*

It's rare for a great writer or artist to be a nice person. Since I've only begun reading Dov Elboim's autobiographical novel, My Life with the Patriarchs, I cannot vouch for how great a writer he is. But what a mentsh! He looks and acts exactly the same as on TV: closely cropped red hair, an open smile, and very warm eyes. On the way over to the Webb cafeteria (my latest hangout), I complimented him on his Monday night show, an interview with zoologist and animal lover, Nadav Levi. It started off kind of slow, I commented, but quickly picked up steam, as Dov drew him out about the latest findings on animal intelligence, creativity, and humor. What made the program so much fun was Levi's total lack of affect, while Dov, who usually keeps a straight face, could not stop laughing. "You mean this bird [the name of which I never heard before] can actually imitate the sound of other animals?" "You mean this monkey got over his depression by accessing other monkeys on the internet?" As we're standing on line (I ordered chicken shishlik with Israeli salad and tehinah and potatoes, all for 18.70 NIS), Dov tells me that the most remarkable aspect of Levi's life he decided not to touch upon. Levi fought in the Yom Kippur War, lost his whole battalion, was severely wounded himself, and had one leg amputated. With one-and-half legs, this man climbs trees, goes on safari, and follows his subjects wherever they take him.

Elboim too is on safari. He doesn't see himself as a secular writer, and has disparaging things to say about Yehoshua's campaign for "normalcy." When I told him about my ancient connection to the Havurah and Art Green, his face lit up. Then he described other experiments here in Israel to infuse Judaism with Buddhism, with Islam, with Kabbalah. Dov himself comes from elite rabbinic families, the Blaus and the Sonnenscheins, and what surprised me was his need to gain their legitimation, as if they would ever read his forthcoming novel, set in Orthodox Jerusalem. Had he ever been to New York? The past four summers he accompanied his wife who was doing a degree at Wurzweiler, but thank God, she finished her course work, because New York is an expensive town, and the book trade, controlled by deracinated Jews, hates his kind of writing.

Judd Ne`eman, who heads the Department of Film and Television, has had opposite luck. His films cannot be shown in Israel, his very name is anathema, but he's been invited to teach Israeli film at George Washington University and NYU.



He too comes from old Israeli stock, on his father's side, from the First Aliyah. I went to see Judd an hour before my lunch with Dov Elboim, to peruse his still photographs, one of which, I sincerely hope, will appear on the cover of the special issue of Prooftexts dedicated to the Cinema of the Jewish Experience. That's how I got to hear his whole life's story. In his prior life, Judd was a surgeon, and served as such in the military. Because of the Yom Kippur War, he blundered into film making, made Paratroopers, the first antiheroic Israeli war movie; began teaching film, and recently, while touring the south of Turkey with his wife, he got some kind of blood poisoning in the brain, and would be dead right now if his wife, also a doctor, hadn't phoned Israel for expert medical advice.

Fear is never far from the surface. Fear is the flip side of the frenetic energy of Israel. How do I know this? Because on Saturday night, at an informal literary evening at the home of my friend, Rivka Miriam, I spent two hours listening to stories by a twenty-something writer named Tami Vays (Wise), almost none of which I could understand, except for their having something to do with fear. Why should this young woman, from a good family in Ramat Gan, be writing stories suffused with fear? Elboim simply marvels at the ability of Israelis to get up every morning and go to work, when they know there are killers on the loose, a veritable alphabet soup of killer groups, with a million compelling reasons to kill and maim and terrorize. You can't even have lunch with your favorite TV celebrity without coming up against the ubiquitous fear.

Jerusalem, May 15, 2002

18. URBAN RENEWAL

Imagine! The Mougrabi Cinema burned down thirty years ago, and I never knew it. Even more amazing is that nothing but a cheap parking lot marks the spot, an emblem of loss in downtown Tel Aviv. Amiram Selah fills me in. The then-Mayor designated the Mougrabi a landmark and wanted it rebuilt. The wealthy Mougrabis had other plans. So each time they submitted a new plan to City Hall, it was shot down, and each successive Mayor has held firm. At this point, you'd think someone would have noticed how horribly run down this part of town has become, that from Mougrabi Square down to the beach is akin to 42nd Street, catering to foreign workers and other transients. Even the Promenade could do with some fixing. Saddest of all is seeing the ruins of the Dolphinarium, where just last week the families of the bereaved marked the first anniversary of the slaughter. One mother still cannot walk into her daughter's empty room. But even in a country addicted to memorials, the beach front in Tel Aviv is resilient to sadness. Life goes on. Nearby, the drummers congregate every night. At Banana Beach, where we sit and order lemonade, the plastic chairs begin filling up from 10:30 Pm. Boy, do I feel middle aged, surrounded by so many young lovers, some of them demonstratively gay. As for the Dopphinarium, the property, such as it is, was bought by the City and will be turned into a park.

Just about every building could do with a face-lift. Many of the tenants are old, on fixed incomes, and indifferent. I ask Michal about the cinder block wall blocking the entrance to some apartment buildings. They were hastily built in 1956, she tells me, on the eve of the Suez Crisis, when Tel Aviv geared itself up for aerial attacks. You never know, she says, when they could come in handy, though even she admits that painting them psychedelic colors might liven things up.

Tonight, in honor of my leave-taking, we eat out. Michal has found a New Age restaurant in her neighborhood called Stamm-tisch [pronounced the German way]. Stamm-tisch combines health food with frumkayt. It reminds me of the House of Love and Prayer, especially when a rabbi sporting tsitis and a guitar walks in. I know times have changed, though, when I note the pistol strapped to his belt. He is this evening's cultural program, to be held upstairs, an evening of Carelbach songs for secular Israelis. Meanwhile, there's something else going on, a reading by novelist Mira Magen, one of sixteen events being held this week in various

cafes of Tel Aviv in honor of my favorite Jewish holiday, Shavua Hasefer. Jerusalem, too, is hosting such readings of Israeli poetry and prose, and maybe other big cities as well. This is a good thing, because it encourages people to frequent cafes again. They don't need encouragement to buy Hebrew books, as my sister Ruth, my niece Jo-and I are pleased to discover at the opening of Shavua Hasefer in Jerusalem, which, for security reasons, is being held on the grounds of the Israel Museum. Wonderful to see the children, the young couples, the secularists and pietists, coveting the books. I imagine that in Tel Aviv, the religious publishing houses (like Harav Kook) are not so heavily frequented, though I could be wrong.

Yes, the Jews have been transplanted, normalized, rendered productive, yet some behavior patterns refuse to die. One of them is sitting in cafes, which Herzl, in his utopian novel Altneuland, considered decadent and consigned to the dustbin of Diaspora. And the other is the Jewish passion for books. How fitting, then, that as a going away present, the students in Hana Neshet's course on American-Jewish literature present me with a coffee table anthology of Hebrew poetry and prose about cafes, and Inna, recently from Russia, stands up to give a little speech, in which she thanks me for my "unforgettable" singing, for opening up the lost culture of Yiddish, and for coming to Israel during such difficult times.

Jerusalem, June 11, 2002

19. *CAFE MOMENT*

Sitting shivah is a great literary device. Seymour Simckes (*Seven Days of Morning*), Yaakov Shabtai (*Past Continuous*), Philip Roth (*The Counterlife*), among others, have exploited the shivah in order to bring together under a single roof the far flung mishpokhe, there to stage the unfinished business of the family in the Aristotelian way. Who needs novelistic devices, I ask you, who needs Aristotle, when life itself supplies the best-laid plot? Soon after my arrival here in Israel, Cafe Moment, symbol of the Good Life, was blown up by a suicide bomber, who scouted out the neighborhood for the busiest night spot, and here I am, on the eve of my departure, having dinner at Cafe Moment with my larger-than-life friend, Suzi. If that isn't enough, just as Suzi took me, three-and-a-half months ago, to a makeshift Evening of Russian Folklore, we now have tickets to the closing folk and rock concert of the Israel Festival, to be held in the Sultan's Pool.

Cafe Moment has never looked so good. Unlike other cafes. where the security gate casts a giant shadow, Cafe Moment's green steel gate blends in nicely with the decors. Every security guard now carries the same metal detector, but according to Suzi, this guy has "real" Secret Service training. How she knows this I don't know. The prices are about average; the portions--huge. I order cheese ravioli, because we have a long night ahead, and Suzi orders the Greek salad, because she's trying to lose weight. A stranger walking in would never guess what transpired here. It's still too early to know whether there will there be a line around the block. Probably not. That's where suicide bombers like to hide.

Security is tight around the entrances to Sultan's Pool. No one minds the double searches. There's a festive mood in the air. Real chairs have been set out in the orchestra this time, instead of benches, and in typical Israeli fashion, the seats start filling up only five minutes before the show, which starts promptly, because this evening's festivities are being broadcast live over Channel Three. The front section has been set aside for special needs people in wheelchairs. If they weren't deaf when they came, they may need hearing aids tomorrow. All around Suzi and me, people are using their cell phones to signal friends who are only now arriving, and normally, this would annoy me no-end, but this is no ordinary concert, and the moment it begins, I burst into tears. Have you ever cried for two hours and ten minutes straight, with music blasting in your ears? It isn't easy.

Honestly, I didn't come here to cry, and certainly no one else seems so inclined. Yet it's unavoidable. Seven thousand people have assembled under a single sky, and they know the lyrics to every song. Pretty soon, they'll be dancing in the aisles, combining swaying motions, as seen on MTV, with the old-fashioned hora, and sitting in what used to be No Man's Land a mere 35 years ago, you are living the miracle, the more so, because three-and-a-half months ago, no one, not even the greatest optimist, would have imagined such a turnout for an open-air concert in Jerusalem, and you are crying because these are new songs, which this youthful audience knows from listening to Galei Zahal, not to the classical music station, and because until half-time, none of the performers is over thirty, and what a distance this country has traveled in the course of your lifetime, what a quantum leap from the so-called Army Troupes, those kids performing Zionist songs in khaki uniforms, and this glitzy show, with strobe lights and other rock concert effects, and with everyone singing and clapping along, the performers can defer to the audience during some parts of the song, the songs that are but a build-up to the star appearance, by Miki Gavrilov, to whom this concert is a tribute, and boy, does he know how to work the crowd! A good thing the music is playing so loud and the lights are out when Miki starts singing "Hakhnisini tahat kenafeikh," Bialik's famous love poem, which you once had to memorize in the Ashkenazi pronunciation for Chaim Brandwein's course in modern Hebrew literature at Brandeis, but which everyone-everyone knows by heart by virtue of being Israeli, yet it's impossible to sing along if you're sobbing so hard, because if this isn't a miracle, then what is, seven thousand people singing a Hebrew love song written in the 1890s, when there weren't seven thousand people in the whole world who read modern Hebrew poetry, and who cares if it doesn't scan in Israeli Hebrew if the music is so haunting, and for your brother's sake you're crying, your brother who loved Israel and loved popular music, as everyone here has a brother who didn't make it, and how he would have laughed when Miki calls up the superannuated members of his original, Lahakat ha-Churchilim, which translates (I think) The Churchill Singers, who thirty years ago introduced American rock to Israel and who now perform ear-splitting renditions of their original, English-language, repertoire, and the concert reaches a resounding finale when all the performers come on stage and sing Miki's most famous song, "Ani ve-ata neshaneh et ha-olam," last heard at a Yom Hazikkaron ceremony on the Tel Aviv University campus, and everyone is standing now, singing this song, even though

there are not supposed to be any songs that all Israelis still sing, and you are crying because this is something worth living for, something worth dying for.

Jerusalem, June 13, 2002

## 20, I. F. STONE'S WEEKLY

It was the first left-wing publication I ever got my hands on and it felt like reading pornography. This muckraker, so grownup and in-your-face, kept arriving at 17 Pagnuelo, even though my brother Ben had long since moved out and had never renewed his subscription. Mother didn't care if I appropriated Ben's copies, and Ben surely had more important things on his mind. Besides, whenever he and my sister-and-law, Louise, came for dinner, and we argued politics at the table, Ben would needle my sister Ruth for being such a flaming liberal, and it was Father's job to mediate between them. I kept my mouth shut, and never mentioned my surreptitious reading. Just how hot an item it was came home to me after Kennedy was assassinated. Stone had the inside scoop on conspiracies that no one else reported, at least not in the two English-language and Yiddish-language dailies that arrived at our doorstep. Imagine, then, my shock upon reading his coverage of the Six-Day War. Stone, of course, took issue with TIME for lionizing Moshe Dayan, and was more concerned about Israeli than Arab aggression, but he began his editorial by recalling his own experiences gun-running for the Haganah (or was it some other branch of the Zionist underground?). In all the years I had been reading him in my basement hideout, cover-to-wicked-cover, I never once suspected that (1) I. F. Stone was Jewish and that (2) he had Zionist credentials.

I still imagine myself that innocent kid brother, who sits among the grownups harboring dirty secrets. That little boy eventually becomes the whimsical, middle-aged, self-absorbed, male narrator of these bulletins of mine from Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. What the boy and his descendant have in common is that both sustain their innocence and bemusement by trying very hard to suppress their anger. Amazing how it creeps in, though, as when I recently indulged in gratuitous griping about Haredi Yiddish (and was called for it by one of my male readers). How easy it is to succumb to self-blame! How effortlessly the aggression that we are subjected to daily is turned inward. This is the central lesson I have learned from my sister, Ruth. The Wisse Axiom, I call it.

Still, even while I romp around Israel inside the Green Line, attend conferences and concerts, meet fascinating women, and eat better than I do at home, I read what others read, watch and listen to the same news, and form my own opinion on the asymmetry of our "situation." I note that in Israel, the whole country is

mobilized to protect its children, always, and unconditionally, while the Palestinians have mobilized to sacrifice their children. I note that when an apocalyptic explosion in the gas works was just narrowly averted, a sophisticated piece of sabotage, the government decreed the immediate relocation of all natural gas depots situated near heavily populated areas. At the same time, Zahal uncovers, every other day, yet another munitions factory hidden in the basement of an apartment building in Ramallah or Jenin. Jews and Palestinians, I conclude, do not inhabit the same moral universe. I also note the growing asymmetry between Sharon and Arafat. Take away the kafiyyah, always neatly folded to define the boundaries of Greater, Judenrein, Palestine, and what do you get? An emperor, a petty despot, without clothes. So where is the little boy to call his bluff? Sharon may look silly with his pot belly and power tie. He may be a lousy public speaker (in Hebrew too). But he rules over an unruly democracy, and is a damned good politician. He just outfoxed Shas, and has managed to neutralize Bibi for the time being. Will he bring peace? Will suing for peace, I ask myself, bring peace? I meet all kinds of people who attended a talk at the Jerusalem Hilton given by my sister, Ruth, who warned of imminent disaster, eight months before the Intifada, just when the euphoria for peace was at its height. So the Right was right and the Left was wrong.

As for I. F. Stone, one fine day he closed up shop and sold his list of subscribers (living and lapsed) to the New York Review of Books. Their party line? To be very protective of dead Jews (the Holocaust) and to be merciless about the living (Israel). These New-York-based intellectuals do not come by their Jewish self-blame honestly; not like I. F. Stone, who--in my book, at least--did earn the right to excoriate Israel, just as the author of this biweekly bulletin, who is now posting its last issue before leaving Israel--yet again--has finally, and irrevocably, earned the right to love her.

Jerusalem, June 16, 2002



X SHOULD OLDE ACQUAINTANCE BE FORGOT

Rabbi Hartman walks with difficulty, after his multiple bypass operation, and his hair is completely white. But the bushy eyebrows are as black as ever and the fire, while muted, is still there. Shana and I went to see him erev Pesach at the institute named after his father, and it felt a bit like visiting one's rabbi erev yontef.

Both of us, as it happens, go back to his halcyon years in Montreal. Shana was his star student of Jewish philosophy at Herzelia High School, even though she never opened her mouth, and I was in a youth group called Shomrei Ha'umah that met every Wednesday evening in his basement. My intensity, he said, did not faze him. Maybe he meant by this my intense passion for Yiddish, for in Montreal he encountered the last generation of Yiddishists, who had fire in their bellies, he said, but refused to see the writing on the wall. From Shana's father (a staunch Hebraist) he learned about the sanctity of human life. As for the Roskies men, they seemed all of them to be under the thumb of their imperious wives. Listening to him talk, I was reminded of the Summer Institutes for Advanced Jewish Studies that Hartman would convene in the Laurentian Mountains and where he allowed a few of us teenagers to sit at the feet of Emil Fackenheim, Zalman Schechter, and Jacob Petuchowski--the utopian blueprint of the very place where we were now sitting and drinking kaffé botz.

Some things hadn't changed. He was still afraid of my sister Ruth (I have yet to meet a man in public life who isn't), despite his protestations to the contrary. And he was still espousing controversial positions, as in the article soon to appear in *Ha'aretz* on the need to recognize and encourage the work of Conservative and Reform rabbis in Israel. The religious establishment, said Hartman, with its mantra about mitzvot, was doing everything possible to drive secular Israelis away from yiddishkayt. What had changed was his attitude to women. When we were growing up, the only woman who rated in Hartman's book was Bobbie, his wife. Now he waxed eloquent about "Tova's Minyan" (namely, Tova Halbertal his daughter), about the religious passion and creativity of women rabbis like Laura Geller, and about the ordination of women in general. This last was a no-brainer, according to Hartman. Since women are "covenanted," they could be rabbis. No need to grant them special halachic status.

Rabbi Hartman also asked about the former members of Shomrei Ha'umah, and when Shana mentioned that Shelly (see letter #11) was now a millionaire and living in Israel, Hartman really perked up. Shana is very good at this kind of thing. No wonder she's co-chairing the Capital Campaign at Ansche Chesed.

Too bad, said Shana as we headed into town, that Hartman came so late to feminism. She would have loved to be a member of Shomrei Ha'umah (which admitted only one girl). Just think! We could have met way back in high school! Instead, it was Debbie Weissman who introduced us, and just like in an old-fashioned novel, as we were deciding to go no further than Nahalat Shivah, since the week before we came very close to being blown up on King George and Ben Yehudah, we see, tucked away in Gan Ha'atzma'ut, a beautiful old building that looks familiar. Isn't that Kerem, where Debbie works? We decide to peek inside, on the off chance that Debbie is free, and spend the next hour with her, being shepherded around and listening to her story, a story not too different from Hartman's, because it starts far away, in Buchenwald, where two inmates, Marcus Cohen and Jules Bronschweig, take a vow that should they survive the war, they will set up an institute for humanistic Jewish learning in Palestine. Kerem, like Hartman's, begins where the universities leave off, which is to say, its mandate is spiritual, holistic, and bold. Here too the subject of feminism looms large, because Israel's leading religious educators--Leah Shakdiel, Ruti Lahavi, Yehudit Shalvi, Shirah Breuer--are all products of Kerem's humanistic training program. Shana, who never misses a beat, then asks Debbie her opinion of Tova Halbertal. Turns out, Tova was an active member of Yedidya, the "women-friendly" Orthodox shul that Debbie helped to found, and instead of challenging Yedidya to involve women more directly, to push the halachic envelope, Tova established her own, rival, minyan, which is now getting a huge amount of press. Shana promptly changed the subject by drawing Debbie out about Kerem's finances. The contents of that conversation I am not at liberty to reveal.

How did Debbie succeed where Hartman failed? My connection to Debbie was through Yiddish and the study of the Holocaust. I think we first met at a lecture at the YIVO. Shana shared an apartment with her on Palmach in the early Seventies. So one fine shabbes in 1974, Debbie reached out to a strange couple who had recently made aliyah. They spoke Yiddish to each other and were very intimidating. One of her roommates, Miriam Mundstock, was very taken with

them, and monopolized the whole conversation. The other roommate, Shana Novick, was not, and didn't open her mouth. A rather inauspicious way for Shana and me to meet. Maybe it was Jerusalem that mysteriously worked its magic, over the course of the next few years.

On Saturday night, Shana and I, this time accompanied by Aryeh, visited Debbie in her (relatively) new apartment near Bakaa. It was Pesach and we ate her out of house and home. She too, we learned, had been interviewed by Dov Elboim (my new culture hero), in connection with Hanukkah, but the moment she turned on the tv to show us the video, we learned about the latest suicide bombing on Tel Aviv's Allenby Street. Then I saw how quickly my son has become socialized. As Debbie called her cousin in Tel Aviv, Aryeh whipped out his cell phone and called his counselor, Marshall, to find out how he was.

April 10, 2002

*TRANSPLANTED COMMUNITIES*

This goes back six weeks to Hol Hamoed Pesach. We are sitting in the combination Seminar Center and Synagogue belonging to Moshav Shorashim in the Galilee and Rabbi Marc Rosenstein, the Educational Director, is doing his spiel for the benefit of Aryeh's TRY group. He's telling the kids how Shorashim was founded by a "gar'in," a seed, planted in Berkeley in the early Eighties, just like Zionist settlements have been planted since the heroic days of the Second Aliyah. Bearded and earnest, Marc is the last of the true believers, for he ends his talk by lamenting the demise of the whole cooperative, the triumph of privatization, wondering out loud if capitalism will really solve the ills of society.

What remains of the old vision is now being channelled into Arab-Jewish reconciliation. A few years ago, he tells us, in way of illustration, when shabbes coincided with Lag b'Omer, someone looks out the window and sees a large group of Arabs approaching from the valley. They seem to be carrying things. A security guard rushes down to head them off, then runs back up to report that the whole neighboring village is bearing saplings that they want to plant in honor of Lag b'Omer. When the Arab neighbors make it up the steep hill, they are made to feel welcome, then the Jews explain that planting is forbidden on the Sabbath and a cooperative planting ceremony is hastily arranged. for later in the week It is good to hear such stories, because the Passover Massacre has just happened and even the Galilee is on high alert against suicide bombers. Too bad, though, that Marc failed to point out the landscaping. The founders of Shorashim had hired a landscape architect from back home to go with the flow of the land even as it is settled and built upon. Let California be a light unto the Semites in more ways than Disneyland and Hollywood.

Shorashim is by no means the only Conservative transplant in Israel. May 4, my one and only shabbes in Tel Aviv, Aryeh and I stayed with our secular Israeli friends, the Selahs, just off Dizengoff Center. The boys were sleeping in, and I was looking for a place to daven. Turns out that two blocks down, on Bograshov, is the oldest Conservative congregation in Israel (I think it's called Congregation Sinai). A motely crowd, beginning with the Rabbi, Alberto Arbiv. Because he is Italian, I surmise, we are using a Sephardi prayer book. There are a smattering of Russian Jews, a Filipino woman, a few Israelis, who seem to be there for the sake of their

pre-bar-mitzva-age children, and the rest--Americans. It doesn't have the feel of a real community, except that during a lull in the davening, I go to the back and see photographs of a monument laying ceremony somewhere in Poland. What connects these Conservative Jews to a town in Poland? During kiddush everything falls into place. The synagogue is just renting this space from an almost-defunct landsmanshaft, the Zychlin Society of Israel. Eventually, Sinai will have to move.

In a sense, every shul and settlement in Israel is transplanted from somewhere else: Bukhara, Yemen, Morocco, Frankfurt-am-Main, and sooner or later, the genealogies start cross-linking. This past Thursday night I attended a family simcha in Beit Shemesh, and on the way there, my nephew (by marriage) told me that Beit Shemesh is divided into three discrete communities: Beit Shemesh Proper (where we were going) is Teaneck. Ramat Beit Shemesh Aleph is Passaic NJ (i.e., much more right-wing), And Ramat Beit Shemesh Bet is dati le'umi, which means Israeli Orthodox who serve in the army. Indeed, I will hear only English, and were it not for the fact that it was Yom Yerushalayim, which meant that we recited Psalm 107 responsively before Maariv, I could have been celebrating this bar mitzva at an Orthodox shul in Teaneck. (Does every Teaneck family, I wonder, have five children?)

Many Jewish "seeds" are planted in the soil of Israel. Even from faraway Wyoming. That's where the Leader Family went, when Leader Senior needed to find a rabbinical posting, and where his sons were born before the family returned to Jerusalem. Originally, of course, they were Slonimer Hasidim, but something of Wyoming definitely rubbed off. And yesterday, when I not only got my long-awaited sixth aliyah, but was also called upon to announce the Molad in Yiddish--a hasidic-Wyoming tradition--I learned where the feminism came from. Abraham Leader was once married to an Israeli woman who studied in Drisha, and she came back to Israel demanding that the spiritual needs of women be addressed, so a separate minyan was organized, which no existing organization was willing to host, so they met in private homes and basements, then one day a woman showed up and announced that her twelve-tonal Torah cantillation went back to Sinai, and besides for her, only Zelig Leader has managed to learn it, and women are also called up to the Torah and help lead Psukei Dezimrah, and this place really feels like home to me, because it reminds me of Havurat Shalom, where I first learned the language of prayer, where time stands still, and individual words still carry numinous meanings,

and where everyone is a bit weird, and where sometimes the women are the first to start dancing, and where the legend persists that the truly great baal tefillah of the Leader Family is Dosly, who is off studying Hasidism with Art Green at Brandeis, and whoever hasn't head Dosly daven doesn't know what real davening can be. I hope he comes back to Jerusalem some day. As Jerusalem becomes more black-hat (10,000 secular Israelis move away each year, my taxi driver told me), the Holy City will need more cross pollination in order to stay fertile.

Jerusalem, May 12, 2002