

THE LAMP

The Lamp

*A (Not Quite)
Spiritual Biography*

by

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Introduction

Trivialities

IN THIS BOOK I am going to describe parts of my life, including the things with which I was, and mainly still am occupied. Not that I am a particularly interesting person or because my life is in some way important or instructive. Not at all. In fact, my later life is probably much less interesting or instructive than most lives, because of my obvious limitations. Having been blind for 25 years now, I cannot simply go on an excursion somewhere in the mountains for a day or two, like I used to do when I was young. Nor can I take my car and drive to the Dead Sea or to Lake Tiberias, enjoying the drive along empty roads and waiting for the lake to appear down in the valley, while most people are at their routine jobs, as I sometimes used to do. The list of things I cannot do now, things I used to do as a sighted person, is quite extensive: read printed books, draw or paint, search through a secondhand book store, study maps and guide books for an upcoming trip to a new country, learn about new discoveries in mathematics or physics, or decipher ancient texts – Jewish or others.

Still, as with everyone else, I have only my present life to deal with. Trying to recollect an idealized version of the past or dream up possible rosy futures will suit neither my almost venerable age nor my hard-won understanding. So for the moment I bring myself to examine the apparent trivialities that constitute my daily or weekly routines, trying to find what they can teach me about life, the world, and myself.

There is one strange thing that I almost never fail to do in the morning. Is it a meditative exercise to begin

the day? Or am I performing the “long form” of Tai Chi meditation in movement? Or at least walking for an hour on the treadmill, keeping myself fit? No, these I also do sometimes, even quite often, but not with the regularity of that special daily activity that I almost never fail to perform. Well, here is what I do: I check the closing price of a particular stock on the U.S. stock exchange. I bought it fifteen years ago, thanks to my son, who worked until recently in that particular company and still owns more stock in it than I do. Over the years the stock has lost most of its original value. Yet I have not sold it, due to a sense of having to share the burden of anxiety for that stock with my son, as well as the hope that its price will eventually go up, at the end of the day, the year, or the decade.

But why do I keep myself updated on the daily value of that particular stock? Am I so fond of money that I am waiting for a chance to sell at a profit? Or am I superstitious, fearing catastrophe to my savings? Neither. I enjoy the security of earning money, yet I do not grieve too much over its sudden or gradual loss.

There was a time when I became rich, as a result of a deal in stocks with an American company. Then that American stock lost much of its value, due to various unforeseeable events. When the time came for resale of my American stocks, I was no longer rich, but of very modest means. Personally, I was surprised to notice how little this financial saga affected me.

So why do I follow that stock with such regularity? Or why do I do a difficult crossword puzzle every week, even at the expense of more pressing tasks? They say that doing difficult crossword puzzles protects your mind from old age dementia. But there are lots of other recommended preventative measures that no one follows, probably just

because they are recommended. We tend to avoid most things deemed as “useful”.

We seem to have a deep need for rituals, public or private. We also seek regularity – brushing our teeth, sipping our morning coffee, eating our regular meals. We perform these rites, not just because they are necessary, but also because they provide structure and apparent meaning to the flow of time. Like the week of labor and the day of rest, like a prayer that begins your day, like a ritualistic meditation, like an offering at the altar.

One day you see it. You observe the way you go through the motions. Yes, it is not a true ritual. Not a real prayer. But then is a real ritual real? What kind of nostalgia lies behind an actual prayer? What are we really searching for in this life, in this world, in ourselves?

Not Knowing Who We Are

Once, in a series of group meetings, we, the group members, tried to tell our life stories. Only two or three stories could be included in a single meeting. We were aware of what Ouspensky says in *In Search of the Miraculous*, that when Gurdjieff gave this exercise to his disciples, everyone avoided or misrepresented vital details. In our example, though, the question of keeping to the facts did not play a central role. Rather, we saw friends with whom we were meeting in the group on a regular basis in quite a new light. We learned that some of them shouldered burdens of which no one was previously aware, such as supporting a wife who suffered recurring attacks of major depression or having a childhood that could only be described as delinquent and how it was subsequently transformed, almost transmuted. Some people related their experiences of survival during the Holocaust at a very young age.

Clearly such stories can grip our imagination and arouse our empathy. In a group meeting, however, another aspect also became prominent, though not equally in all stories: People failed to appreciate what was unique about them. Personally, I had already become aware of this phenomenon in another context. There were two people who played a central role in bringing about the establishment of the Gurdjieff inner work in Israel, Amnon and Yehuda. With time, Amnon took a confrontative position vis-à-vis our French guides in this work. He started his own groups without their authorization, although he did receive consistent support from other senior members of the work. Still, he continued his personal participation in the original group that was working with those French guides. He was a psychologist by profession and many people in the group turned to him for personal advice.

I remember a group meeting, without the presence of French guides, where questions of our integrity as a group came up, in view of the friction among the French guides, on one hand, and among us on the other. Amnon spoke in that meeting, in an unexpectedly conciliatory tone. He said he wished to relate a story. I do not know to this day if it was a traditional Jewish folktale or an impromptu invention. It went like this:

There was once a famous Christian monastery, which attracted many visitors and had a constant stream of would-be acolytes. With time, however, disputes broke out among the monks and the image of the monastery became tarnished. Fewer and fewer people came for visits, and instead of acquiring new recruits, the monastery lost veteran monks. The situation went from bad to worse, until only five monks remained and they could not agree on what to do next. One of them heard of a wise Jewish

rabbi living nearby and he suggested that they go to consult with him.

The rabbi listened to their stories about how life in the monastery had been in the past and what it had come to. He pondered for a long time, then said: “I don’t know what to say to you to help you solve your problem. The only thing I can tell you is that one of you is the savior, only one, and I don’t know which of you that is. The five monks returned to the monastery disappointed, because the rabbi could not tell them what to do. Still, since one of them was the savior and it could be any one of them, they began to respect each other. This created a change for the better in the atmosphere. Visitors began to return and their positive impressions encouraged more visitors to come. The monastery’s reputation began to improve and newcomers began to arrive as acolytes. Finally the monastery resumed its former glory.

Several months after that meeting, someone called to tell me that Amnon had passed away. I was dumbfounded. He had just turned 61. He had said he felt a little tired, had lain down on the sofa, and suddenly he was gone! He left a wife and two daughters and a host of younger people for whom he was a guide. I knew Amnon from a very early age. I still remember little things about him, his way of speaking with a smile, his eagerness to learn new things, new teachings, new professional ways of treating patients. Then a thought struck me, like a revelation: While I had just revived an impression of Amnon, of what was particular about him, what was unique, he could not have had a similar impression of himself, no matter how hard he tried. He, Amnon, did not know he was Amnon. He could not have known what being Amnon entailed. I too cannot know what others know about me – what it means to be Ilan.

We are born into the world as individuals, but not entirely separate individuals. We are part of something, an entire, grand unity. As such, we fail to have very distinct boundaries. Rather we penetrate each other spiritually and emotionally. Nevertheless, despite the practical and theoretical hurdles associated with our individuality, we are still born as individuals and die as such. What need, what absence do we fulfill by coming into the world? We cannot really know that. It seems, however, that each of us brings with him something unique, that has never been before and will never be again. It is a single note or perhaps a little tune that become part of the huge orchestra of life. Yet individually we do not know what this note or tune is. We cannot recognize this particular aspect of ourselves. Others can, but we can't.

One of the reasons to encourage people to narrate their life story may be to help them make an effort to identify their own voice, their specific contribution to existence. Can they? Probably not. The Mongols of Genghis Khan never washed. Their clothes, made of animal hide, absorbed body odors. Among the Mongolian nobility it was considered a compliment to let someone wear your coat, with your intense body odor. But could you identify your own body odor? Writing a biography seems, therefore, a hopeless attempt to recognize your personal odor, though such an endeavor is, in a way, the most appealing.

About This Book

This book proceeds more or less chronologically, starting with impressions of my early childhood and continuing to my early teachers and others who significantly influenced my early adult life. I then describe the garin (nucleus

group) Yuval, the attempt to realize our early ideals, and additional people who had a significant influence or introduced me to other masters and their teachings. Then I describe my short, though for me interesting, career as school teacher. My actual contact with the Gurdjieff groups occupies the next two chapters (7 and 8). Chapter 9 deals with the issue of blindness, while the next is again about inner work in the groups. The penultimate chapter brings my contemporary ideas and understanding with regard to groups, exercises, etc. Finally, the last chapter (12) addresses issues related to my outer, rather than inner work, concluding with a kind of summary.

This portrait of a “smooth”, focused, and orderly flow is a bit misleading, since there are numerous digressions to side issues, unrelated to the main subject of each chapter. I hope this adds interest and color to the book and helps the reader find that particular note or scent which, as I have already said, I may not be able to find myself.

I would like to thank several people for their contributions, help and encouragement with regard to this book. I am deeply indebted to my various teachers mentioned in the text, some of whom are still alive. My wife Ilana was involved in all stages of the writing and made significant contributions. Ava Carmel did a superb editorial job, in particular in view of the fact that I am not a native English speaker. The idea of writing a “spiritual” biography was first proposed by the publisher of this book, who continues to extend his support and encouragement. Prof. Eran Yashiv and Mr. Illy Ber read early versions of the manuscript and made useful remarks.

Chapter 1: I Went Out Alone

An Adult Conspiracy

I WENT OUT alone. The street was crowded. Busy-looking grownups were passing by without paying any attention to me. They wore long pants while I, a small boy, was wearing shorts. I wanted them to take notice of me, not to see me as just another silly little boy. I figured – I don't know why – that the best way to impress these people in the street was to pretend that I was speaking English. I didn't understand English then, but I had often heard British, Indian, and Australian soldiers speaking outside, under our window. I could distinguish between them by their different uniforms and I thought I could adopt their accents. It was a time of war. During the night Italian or other enemy bombers would fly by. The sirens would wake us up and we would hurry down to the little shelter in our basement, along with the other neighbors. The entrance to the building was fortified with sacks of sand and we, the children, would peep outside, to the dark skies crisscrossed with searchlights that were trying to locate enemy aircraft. It was both thrilling and frightening, listening to those nighttime alarms, with a particular smell of drowsy people and their blankets. After several hours the state of alarm ended.

So, walking in the street, I began talking to myself out loud, in my mock English. I wonder where I got the idea that talking to myself was a common practice. I discretely watched passers-by, to see what effect my English had on them, but I couldn't detect any particular results. Was it really possible that they were unimpressed, or did they realize that my English was not real? I concluded against the latter possibility, firstly, because I was convinced that

my babbling was somewhat like the real thing. Besides, they would have paid even more attention if they had discovered my ruse.

I can't remember exactly when, but a curious solution dawned upon me. Perhaps it was after several abortive attempts. Could it be that all of these people were unaware of my presence, even when I was making such a heroic effort to demonstrate my English fluency? No, that was quite implausible. Then how could it be explained? Evidently, these people actually knew me very well and were observing me in secret. They wanted to see how I behaved on my own, thinking that I was unobserved. They would then tell my parents what they saw. After some time all that would be cleared up. My parents would explain to me how I was being tested and I hoped that I would have stood the test very well. Yet that expected revelation never came. I gradually accustomed myself to the facts of life. Why, as a little boy, did I feel frustration at not being noticed by casual passers-by in the street? I don't remember myself as eager to attract attention (although I may have conveniently covered this up since then).

Early Fears

In another early memory I had just gone to bed and the light was switched off, when I experienced a peculiar sensation. The walls of my room were receding, accompanied by a sound or whistle, like the honking of an approaching car. The walls were pulsating and I experienced the sensation of falling into an endless abyss, although I was actually lying safely in bed. These sensations, both frightening and thrilling, were repeated every night.

Then a fear began to grip me while I was lying in bed. As far as I remember, it was not related to the sensation of the receding walls and falling, but it occurred during approximately the same period. It dawned on me that my parents, and in particular my mother, could suddenly die. My father was absorbed with his professional and community responsibilities. I liked to go for walks with him, but it was my mother upon whom I was dependent. Surely I could not manage one day without her. But what if she died? What would become of me? I became so depressed by this thought that once it gripped me I began to cry. My mother would come to console me and I would say to her, as I remember distinctly, "Mother, I don't want you to die." She would respond by promising that she was not going to die, not yet. I wanted to believe her. It was vital, but a little doubt persisted and the next night it could start all over again.

Since then many things have changed. In his old age, my father became almost totally deaf and could no longer communicate with people. My mother, who had been a very active person, suffered from Alzheimer's disease in her final years. My father died 25 years ago and my mother several years later. Each of them reached the venerable age of 92. Thus both of them died at more or less their proper time and that was how my elder sister and I accepted it. Where was the early fear of being left alone that lay so heavily on me as a child? My father lost his own father at an early age and, as a schoolboy, had to support his family. He once told me, "You do not become a true adult until your father has died." Today I tend to agree with him and I think that this is true of your mother as well.

I dealt with a different kind of fear several years later. My father's work during that period took him out of

town. He would sometimes return home on weekends, while other weekends we would go to visit him at his workplace. This meant that my mother and I were left alone during the week. My elder sister, twenty years my senior, was married and living far away. By then I was nine or ten years old. The former fear of being left alone due to my mother's death was gone, but another concern began to grip me. What if my mother suddenly dies in her sleep? How would I know? What would I do? Who would I call to confirm her death and what arrangements would be necessary? It seems to me now that my main concern during that period was the unavoidable need to keep touching my mother's body to see if she was alive.

My mother was a short, beautiful, and very feminine woman, who spoke several languages and recited classical poetry by heart. I was still attached to her and my revulsion at the thought of the corpse that would be left behind was not in any way a shrinking from her. Rather, it represented a young boy's fear of everything connected to death, fear of the untouchable. Why should a corpse, and in particular that of your mother, be untouchable? At that time it was not a conscious conclusion on my part, but an instinctive repulsion that I still experience today, though not in relation to those close to me, like my mother or wife.

How Piano Is Played

Mrs. Elstein, an elderly woman who lived in the adjacent apartment, was a piano teacher. During the era of silent movies she had played piano in the local cinemas. Now she taught young girls and one or two boys, who hesitantly repeated the same tunes, which I used to hear through the apartment wall. Only a few

of her students were older and produced what seemed to be more serious music.

For some reason my mother did not suggest that I too take piano lessons with Mrs. Elstein. Perhaps we could not afford it; perhaps she considered me too young.

We had what was then called a tea wagon. It was a little glass table with four small wheels, that stood by the armchair in our living room. I used to pretend it was a piano. I would tap on it with my fingers and imagine I heard a song I was fond of at the time, "The Perpetual Fund will help secure our land." Today this would be considered a jingle, but then we took it quite seriously. I was sure that this was how one plays the piano. You sing the song to yourself and tap the piano keys with your fingers, the way I did on the tea wagon.

I was in the first or second grade, when one day my schoolteacher asked who would volunteer to play the piano at a ceremony planned for upcoming festivities. Only two of us raised our hands – Shulamit and I. I was surprised, since I already knew that playing the piano was such an easy matter. Why didn't more pupils come forward? The teacher told us to stay after school, to demonstrate our piano playing ability. She led us to a room with a piano, where the school principal waited. Shulamit played first.

"Do you want to play from sheet music or by heart?" the teacher asked her. Shulamit chose to play from sheet music. Her playing was slow and hesitant, which I attributed to her choice of sheet music, rather than the song she heard in her heart. When my turn came, I chose to play by heart and I treated the piano as I had treated our tea wagon. I tapped with my finger, rather quickly, the rhythm of "The Perpetual Fund will help secure our land". To my great astonishment the music that came

out was very different from the song inside me. I could not understand it, but I dared not show my frustration outwardly.

Several days later my mother told me that she had met the school principal, who had congratulated her on my performance. She said she assured him that I had never taken piano lessons and I most certainly could not play piano. So Shulamit was the one who played at the ceremony. However, I did begin taking piano lessons with Mrs. Elstein.

A Bespectacled Boy

When I was seven years old, I was already somewhat different from the other schoolboys. I wore glasses, a rare thing for children at that time. I was a poor sportsman, due to a congenital eye disease, which restricted me from an early age. My father was a teacher and vice-principal in the school in which I studied for the next 12 years, though not at the same campus. While I was in elementary school, this pedigree was frowned upon. Teachers were considered to be the enemy and a teacher's son was a potential traitor. Nevertheless, when we, the boys, ambushed the girls after school, as we often did, it was I who had to explain to the school principal the next day that it was the girls, not us, who started it. At home I would wrack my brain for what seemed, at least to me, to be a convincing explanation. The next day the principal would listen to me very seriously. I would always believe that this time I had really impressed him. Yet it always ended up with some punishment or other imposed on all of us. Again I had failed in my special mission.

When we weren't ambushing the girls on our way home or stopping revolving water sprinklers on the grass,

thoroughly wetting ourselves in the process, or jumping from wall to wall, where once someone fell and broke his jaw, we would fight each other. These fights often turned into bullying sessions against one of the weaker, less popular boys, myself included.

It was wintertime and my mother had just bought me a new coat, which I really liked. I can still remember the new smell of that coat. I wore it to school for the first time, with obvious satisfaction. But that same day on my way home, I became the target of the bullies. I ended up being thrown down on the muddy ground. The other boys ran away and I stood up, feeling deeply sorry that my new coat was filthy.

I took the incident as an affront to my parents, who had worked so hard to earn the money for my coat. When the other boys threw me down on the ground, they hadn't taken this into account. When I came home I burst into tears and told my mother what had happened and how I felt about it. To my surprise she didn't take the incident so seriously. She assured me that she could easily launder the coat and it would look like new again. But I did not give up my wounded feelings so easily and I continued to ponder the incident in the same way I had tried to dream up explanations of why we had ambushed the girls after school.

Shifting my Viewpoint

I have a strong recollection about that afternoon, although nothing particularly significant actually happened. At times when I found myself thinking about our above-mentioned explanations for ambushing the girls, I found it helpful to detach myself from our cause and look at things objectively. This time, when I thought

about the unfairness of my classmates, it occurred to me to try to look at the incident more objectively. But how? I again imagined the details of the incident. Here I was and here were the others. I tried to see things from their perspective, instead of mine. I found that it was much less malicious than I had supposed. In fact, the others did not harbor any particular bad feelings or hatred towards me or my parents. Indeed, they weren't even aware of the fact that I was wearing a new coat. If they had been, perhaps they would have been more cautious. Anyway, I was sure they had already forgotten the incident. If I still recalled it, it was because I was still angry at them.

What was the lesson of this shift in viewpoint? I asked myself. I re-examined the incident. Here I was, lying on the ground in my new coat. And here were the other boys, getting ready to go home. I found I could choose with whom to identify. It was natural to identify with myself, lying there on the ground. But why should I identify with myself? It was certainly not the best position in this particular case. But then, with whom else should I identify? Yes, I could choose someone else, but in the long run that would not necessarily prove to be better than identifying with myself. Why couldn't I just refrain from identification and always look at things objectively, as I am doing at this moment?

I can't recall what happened later, but I subsequently adopted that objective outlook. It was not the result of a conscious choice. I was still too young for that. Apparently I had initially been inclined to adopt an objective outlook and that incident helped awaken it in me. Is everybody similarly inclined? I do not know. Some people give a contrary impression. In my own children, now already grown up, I find a similar inclination, to a greater or lesser degree. One thing it entails is that you do not expect

your life to be an ongoing celebration and you do not feel cheated when it isn't so.

The Pecking Order

When I was a child, my parents used to restrict my social activities, fearing a recurrence of the eye condition that led to the operations I underwent as a baby. Needless to say, I had no recollection of these operations and I believed that my parents used them as convenient excuses for making me stay home. There was already an established pecking order among the children living on the same street and attending the same school. The highest in the pecking order were those who, for some reason or other, were not restricted or disciplined by their parents. They could go out whenever they liked and stay out as late as they pleased. The more restrictions any of us experienced at home, the further down the social ladder he found himself.

Naturally, at that time I was not familiar with the concept of a pecking order. I think it was only introduced after World War II, while the events I am describing here took place during the war. Nevertheless, I understood what a negative effect these restrictions had on my social standing.

In the hope of redressing this situation I decided to write a book. I had just started reading the daily newspaper and I was very impressed by ads that read "Sir (Madam), you (masculine) / you (feminine) are hereby invited to visit ...". The idea of killing two birds with one stone seemed to me a symbol of linguist efficiency and I decided to adopt it in the book I was about to write. I think I used a little clothbound notebook, which I probably received on my seventh birthday. The book began: "Every boy (girl) needs

his (her) social environ-ment”. In Hebrew, the language in which I wrote the book, there are different suffixes for verb forms according to gender, which I indicate in English by (he, she). The book proceeded to describe the unfortunate influence on a boy’s (girl’s) acceptance in society of restrictions imposed on him (her) by his (her) parents. I remember my mother showing the book to her friends, with obvious satisfaction. But it did not have a positive effect on the restrictions I suffered.

A Secret Society

Some years later several of my friends established a secret society with the acronym EDWED – “Eat, drink, for we die tomorrow”. Strict tests were imposed on those who wished to join. They had to prove their resourcefulness by acquiring a substantial stock of sweets, preferably by breaking the law. I myself was not admitted to EDWED, but I was familiar with its activities, through a friend who was a founding member. At the time some new boys had come to live in our neighborhood. Most were of German descent. Their parents had fled Nazi Germany and settled in Palestine. These boys could easily be distinguished by their foreign accents, their European clothes, unsuited to the local climate, and their refined manners, which we veterans loved to mock. Their arrival extended our pecking order, so that I was no longer in the lowest ranks.

One of these boys of German descent was Daniel. I was taken aback by a rumor that Daniel had been admitted to EDWED. Initially I did not believe it, but my above-mentioned friend agreed to tell me the story, on condition that I didn’t tell anyone else. (I hope this commitment is no longer in force.) Daniel’s parents, said my friend, wrote

a letter to the heads of EDWED. They explained that Daniel, being a new immigrant, had difficulty integrating into the local peer society. They begged EDWED to accept him as a member and to help with his integration. In addition they offered any necessary support. There was a general discussion of the entire EDWED membership. It was decided to admit Daniel, on the condition that he supply the necessary provisions for the get-togethers, which his parents readily did.

I continued to be on friendly terms with Daniel for many years. He ultimately became a professor of electrical engineering in the USA, wrote several professional books, married, and had children and grandchildren. Recently I discovered a recorded message from him on my telephone, saying he was in Israel for a visit and suggesting that we meet. Unfortunately I discovered the message too late, for when I called I was told that he had already left the country.

Weeping in the Mountains

As with Daniel, another meeting with my mother, now long deceased, is no longer possible, though the reasons are obviously different. In her later years, my mother was living in a twilight world of her own. I sometimes wrote down things she said, since her monologues became poetic during those years.

To weep, I say, we can only in the mountains. In the plains there is so much to worry about: The rivers, the foam on the water, the green leaves falling to the ground. This stem should not be so close to that stone. It is necessary to arrange things, to put them in place: the chair by the table, the window near the door, the sheet, the pillow, the children by their mother, the oars in the boat, clouds in the sky. No time for weeping. In the mountains

it is different, another kind of air. You can breathe. Rocks are everywhere.

I saw a bird in the mountains, big, very black. I don't know her name. You can find them only in places where the rocks bend into crevices in the trees. They live there, these birds. They are very religious. I saw them once on the roof of a theological seminary. Two of them looked at each other and laughed. These birds are always laughing. Only we weep in the mountains.

The water now is not the same. When I was a little girl the water was quite different. People did not think that you could put it just like that in taps. They appreciated water. Today people do not appreciate it any more. They open the tap and let the water run, as if it didn't matter.

I remember the water in those days. It was very clear. You could look and see yourself. I liked to look, and others also liked to look at me. Today, who wants to look at an old woman?

Yesterday I wondered if the water remembered me. I asked, but the water didn't know. It was ashamed. It had nothing to tell me. So I stopped the tap. Much like God stops someone. Suddenly he stops and the person is stopped. As for me, He doesn't want to stop me, He wants me to stay. So be it. I stay and say thank you to God. And if He will stop later, thank you as well.

Did I tell you about the black bird? She had chicks in the nest and the cats wanted to eat them. I could not prevent it, but I gave them a lot to eat. If they get a lot of food they will leave the chicks alone. I don't know what happened. There are only a few feathers in the empty nest. Perhaps they flew away, perhaps not. Perhaps the cats devoured them. Very difficult to tell. I go on giving them food, so they are not disappointed.

The pipe outside, it does not get tired. It stands there and does its job. Very few people can be like that: Standing, doing their

jobs, saying nothing. When water needs to pass, to let it pass. When the water stops, not to complain. Not to be bored. Not to say "Why isn't any water arriving today?" This is very friendly, very brotherly. Like the friend I once had. I liked her. Now she is gone.

In spring roses bloom. I don't know if this is a poem, or the roses really bloom in spring. They have very red flowers. My mother used to make an essence out of them. I always dreamt I had a rosebush in the garden, climbing around my window, with flowers dropping to the ground. Not dropping, bending down. But I was living on higher floors. I had many plants in pots, but it is not the same thing. A rose must grow from below, from the ground. It is a different rose. Not a potted plant.

I see many books in this room. Whoever lived here was very knowledgeable. He had good taste. He hung the pictures right. I like those pictures. You see a garden and someone lying on the ground, face down. The caption reads: "All my roses died." He weeps. I once had a picture like that and it hung exactly in the same spot. I think I also had similar books, but I can't say where that was. I wish I could get to know whoever lived here and arranged those books. Now he is gone. A pity.

This woman in the large picture I seem to know. I always look at her and cannot say where I know her from. My daughter says that it is me. I laugh: Can it be me? This is a young woman. She wears a hat, smiles and looks indirectly at you, as if she were bashful. I would not be bashful if they would draw my picture. I would look directly in your eyes, perhaps a little bit aside.

My daughter says things I do not understand. She thinks I do not remember. I ask you: Is it possible not to remember such things?

Chapter 2: Schaechter

Alleged Proof of the Non-existence of God

AT THE AGE of 11 or 12, the problem of whether or not God exists began to trouble me. It was several years since I had begun to read in school the biblical stories of creation, the Garden of Eden, the sin of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from paradise. There were the myths of the flood and the Tower of Babel. In most of these and other tales, God had a plan for the universe, for humanity and for the Israelites, but this plan was thwarted, again and again, by the disobedience of humanity in general or of particular human beings. Naturally I sided with God and felt thankful to him for sparing Adam and Eve, even after they had sinned, for rescuing Noah from the flood with his ark and subsequently striking a covenant with the descendants of Noah that never again would humanity be destroyed. The question of what the existence of God entailed for me as a person came up only when I was about 11 years old.

I remember walking with a classmate and discussing the existence of God with him. My father was a mathematician and I too had an inclination to mathematical thinking, even at an early age. This was equally true of my classmate. The following argument occurred to me during this discussion: Space, geometric space (the space envisaged by the axioms and theorems of geometry) is unlimited, i.e., it is infinite. If God exists, He must consequently be somewhere in this space, since there cannot be anything outside or beyond infinity. But geometric space is homogenous. Each point is like any other. Thus the points where God exists cannot be special in any way. They must be like all others. But

this contradicts the special nature of God, His absolute uniqueness. Hence God cannot exist.

My friend could not think up a counter-argument, so both of us accepted my reasoning as conclusive. If ever God had existed, He ceased to exist from then on, for a considerable length of time, at least as far as my friend and I were concerned. As a result of this apparent demise of God, I seem to have lost all firm grounding for moral principles during that period.

Early Delinquency

I became a member of a gang, much like EDWED and became completely involved in the activities of this gang. I can now see that what we were doing was to test the borders between acceptable and unacceptable behavior, by engaging in forbidden activities, mainly shoplifting.

We would individually go into a department store, take a toy revolver that pleased us, and put it in a pocket. The next time we would take ammunition for the toy gun, ammunition that would make a lot of noise without causing any harm. Or we would go by ourselves to a shop that sold cheap ornaments, ask to see a few, then hide one in a pocket. I remember once having stolen a thin chain for a pendant in this manner. One of my friends told me it was made of gold and that I must return it. I don't know if he could really tell what it was made of, but I immediately accepted his judgment. Returning it aroused the suspicion of the owner and it was more difficult than stealing it.

One of the German boys had an extensive stamp collection. Some of us used to go to his house to look at his collection, and we always managed to take some of his stamps, without his noticing. Our most frequent activity of this kind, however, was to steal bottles of juice from a

small store near our school, where the shopkeeper used to store his bottles behind the store. The shopkeeper became aware of what we were doing and he would chase us to the back gate of the school, which was always closed. We could crawl under the closed gate and disappear and he couldn't follow us.

However, one day he gave a detailed description of us to the school principal and we were summoned to his office. It was a different principal from the one we had had in the lower grades. He did not discipline us with punishment, but held a kind of a moral debate with us. I don't remember exactly what he said, but it left a deep impression on me. From that day on, I left the gang and its activities, as if I had finally found and internalized the borders of legitimacy. Other boys continued unperturbed and some ended up as outright criminals.

First Love

Girls interested me from an early age, in particular the good-looking, radiant ones. I was, however, extremely bashful in my relations with them. I could not believe they would ever be interested in me, since I was such a poor sportsman. Besides, my mother and sister kept telling me that I looked like a little monkey. They probably meant it as a joke, but I took it quite seriously and concluded that, not only did I wear glasses, but I was also not worth looking at.

My self-assurance grew a little stronger as I got older, since I was considered by the others, and partly also by myself, to be intelligent and "wise". At the age of 13 or 14 I liked to read romances and biographies of real or fictitious characters who displayed a certain excellence that compensated for their deficient looks.

There was one girl, Aviva, whom I particularly liked during that period. She was a classmate who lived in my neighborhood. We used to visit each other, do our homework together and talk. She was good-looking and there was a serene atmosphere about her that appealed to me very much. One day Aviva came to my house. We sat in my room and talked. I steered the conversation towards her and her preferences regarding boys. She participated without reservation, which encouraged me a lot. I asked her if she would mind if a boy touched her. She said it depended.

“Upon what does it depend?” I asked.

“It depends on who it is.”

“And if it were someone you liked?”

“If it were someone I liked, then perhaps.”

Inwardly I was excited, but I tried not to show it.

“And if it were someone you liked in particular?” I asked.

“Someone I liked in particular ... probably yes.” she said.

I stood up and began pacing the floor.

“Would you say you liked me in particular?” I asked her.

There was a moment of silence. Then she said yes.

I went out to the little balcony, with its potted plants tended by my mother. I thought the syllogism was clear: She would not mind if someone she liked in particular touched her. I was someone she liked in particular. Conclusion: She would not mind if I touched her. I returned to the room. She was sitting on a chair. I stood behind her and took her face in my hands. I probably expected her to get up and embrace me or to give me some other positive signal. She did not move. Apparently she did not expect me to act right away or she was simply taken aback by my sudden boldness.

I lost heart. I felt the ground give way beneath my feet, at least metaphorically. What should I do now? I felt intensely ashamed and I wanted her to go, so I would not become even more embarrassed. I took out one of the books I was reading, which described an outstanding person and his love. I gave it to her and said “Read it and you will understand me better.” With that we parted and never again met in private. For years I could not forget the incident. It gave me an impression of myself as someone disconnected from the intuitions and emotions that regulate our interpersonal relations, someone trying to rely on reasoning and words alone.

In later years my attitude towards the incident changed. The sense of shame and ridicule weakened. Instead, I noted that I could remember not only the details of what had happened, what was said and experienced, but also the entire setting: the furniture in the room, the little balcony and its plants, a bookcase and the books it contained, Aviva’s hair and its style, perhaps even what she was wearing. How did that come about, when other, more satisfying events I could remember only as headlines, recalling that such and such took place, without recollection of any particular detail?

Early Encounters with Ideology

The town of Haifa, where I lived during those years, extended from the port uphill to the summit of a partly forested, moderately sized hill – Mount Carmel. In general, the better neighborhoods were the upper ones. I lived about halfway up the slope. A friend of mine lived two streets below. His father had a shop for the sale and repair of leather bags of all kinds, including schoolbags. I often went to see him at home or at his father’s shop,

which were located in the same building. His father dressed and behaved, not as a shop owner, but as a craftsman, somewhat like a shoemaker. The family took pains to create the impression of belonging to the working class, which was more acceptable in those days, at least in some circles, than belonging to the middle class, like my parents.

One day my friend asked me if I had read *The Selected Writings* of Marx and Engels. I was a voracious reader, at a time when television and computers were still unknown. At 13 or 14 I used to read books intended for older boys. However, I hadn't considered such a book as suitable for someone my age. My friend gave me the book and I devoured it, finishing it that same day. What struck me was the way the book suddenly made sense of the mysterious world of grown-ups, how most people, i.e., the working class, make a living from their work, but do not own the necessary machinery. The few who own the machinery, the capitalists, make a profit by selling the products of the labor of those workers for much higher prices than the workers are paid. The capitalists have the right to that added value, thanks to their ownership of the means of production, i.e., the machines. The workers, who since the industrial revolution have not had means of production of their own, have no choice but to sell their physical or mental work to the capitalists, for the minimum wages, in order to survive. This injustice cannot continue for long. The workers will acquire those means of production during a revolution that will do away with the capitalists and bring about a dictatorship of the proletariat.

And what about the middle class, like my father and mother? This class cannot hold out for long, I explained to my father. It is bound to join the ranks of either the

workers or the capitalists. My parents, who had already heard of this socialist ideology, tried to raise doubts about its rationality and validity. However, they could not propose any alternative explanation of the contemporary social world that could rival, in breadth and totality, what I had read. I concluded that this was the only comprehensive philosophy available and decided to delve deeper into its details, such as so-called “historical materialism”, the theory that professes to explain the course of history by means of technological and economic developments.

It was a time of political rift in the country, a rift between the more extreme political parties with communist tendencies and the less extreme Social Democrats. The rift was so intense that kibbutzim (plural of kibbutz), or communal settlements, broke apart, with one faction remaining and the other settling in a new kibbutz nearby. Families separated along political lines and emotions ran very high. The pioneering spirit was still strong and the youth movements encouraged us, the youngsters, to settle in new kibbutzim or to integrate into existing ones. Consequently the political rift extended, overtly or not, to the youth movements. My father was chief of the Boy Scouts in the country and I was a Boy Scout myself. Our Boy Scout movement was quite different from the British or American ones, in that it included youngsters of 17 and 18 as regular members, not just group leaders of younger groups. The idea was that these youngsters (i.e. ourselves) would go to a kibbutz right after they finished their secondary education. And so this movement also suffered the above-mentioned political rift.

My father was naturally inclined towards the Social Democrats while I, as is common among the youth, was

ideologically, a sworn extremist. I soon found out that more senior members also held similar views, so my friend, the son of the leather bag dealer, and I volunteered to join them. It was a clandestine affair and I was not immediately trusted, because my father was in the opposite camp. After a while, though, I was welcomed. I met regularly with my new friends and learned of the many secret and less secret activities they were involved in. The underground atmosphere was very thrilling, in particular since I felt that we were bringing the workers' revolution nearer to realization. My father did not intervene, either because he did not know, or because he thought I should be free to decide for myself.

A year passed, with my links to my new friends becoming ever stronger, as is often the case in a clandestine endeavor. However, my ideological convictions grew weaker. I listened to political discussions and heard arguments that had not occurred to me previously. I came upon other philosophical books that contradicted the ideas of Marx and Engels. Moreover, the secrecy of our activities began to trouble me, as if it signaled a lack of honesty, although I did not quite understand the nature of that lack.

Lectures by Leibovitch and Schaechter

I was already in the fifth or sixth grade. In school, from time to time we would be invited to lectures by university professors, one of whom was the late Yeshaya Leibovitch, a renowned orator, who was both an orthodox Jew and a well-known researcher in biology and philosophy. I recall a brilliant lecture by Leibovitch on his theme Idealism and Materialism. I am not sure that I understood everything,

but for the first time I heard a strong, rational argument against materialism. I saw that Leibovitch held a world view, an ideology that was not less comprehensive than that of Marx, and probably closer to contemporary science.

Now I faced a dilemma. I was personally attached to my friends in the clandestine organization, but I no longer shared their political views. I put some questions to them and saw they had trouble answering. They, in turn, said they felt that my allegiance to my father was influencing me and suggested that we part company. I was disappointed but relieved.

Dr. Joseph Schaechter was a teacher in the upper grades of our school, then considered as one of the best schools in the country. Many Jewish scientists, philosophers and men of letters fled to Palestine from Nazi Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia before World War II broke out, due to consistent persecution by the Fascist authorities. The Hebrew University in Jerusalem, then the only university in the country, could not employ all, or even most of them. Some, like Dr. Schaechter, became secondary school teachers. Others had to take up incongruous occupations like taxi drivers. For many years there was a well-known taxi station in Haifa that was staffed exclusively by ex-university professors from Europe. Moreover, the husband of a well-known school principal from another city, Tel-Aviv, also an ex-university professor from Germany, worked as a street cleaner. He maintained his job until pension and proudly displayed his broom and scoop in his apartment.

Our school and other schools benefited considerably from these unfortunate circumstances. However we, as youngsters, did not yet understand nor appreciate this. In sixth grade, the students barely listened to Dr.

Schaechter, who taught unpopular subjects such as Bible and Jewish philosophy, despite his efforts to quiet us down. But when I reached seventh grade, my attitude towards him changed. During the Ten Days of Repentance (the period between the Jewish New Year and Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement) he was invited to lecture to the upper grade students in the school auditorium, on the subject of repentance. Something in the way he spoke and the things he said captured my attention.

He began by describing what he called “Iron Curtains” that separate us from a divine radiation that comes from the cosmos. These Iron Curtains, he said, are our beliefs, views, and ideologies, which deny the existence of this radiation, by materialistic or other arguments. In his view, the Ten Days of Repentance did not consist mainly of repenting for specific deeds. That we could do whenever the occasion arose. Repentance during the ten days, he said, consisted primarily in giving up those views and ideologies and opening up to the divine radiation that reaches us from the cosmos.

While listening I reflected on my juvenile “proof” of the non-existence of God. Was that an Iron Curtain? And what about my views during my association with Historical Materialism? There was something in the way he spoke about the divine cosmic radiation, a deep humility, an honesty that I immediately appreciated. For the first time I felt the presence of a higher world and the need to drop whatever arguments and views negated that presence.

Schaechter’s Disciple

I began to watch Dr. Schaechter at school. I saw a group of eighth graders, who accompanied him in the breaks

between lectures. They walked slowly alongside him until he would suddenly make an about turn. The pupils would continue by inertia, realize he had turned and hasten back to catch up with him. It was a somewhat comical affair. Still, I joined them during the next break. Schaechter would invite pupils to his apartment, to read philosophical texts together: Martin Buber, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and a philosopher I had not heard of – Soren Kierkegaard. I attended those meetings regularly and soon found myself to be his most constant adherent. I began to visit him every afternoon. We would read philosophical texts and the articles he wrote, from time to time. Or we would go for a walk together and I would ask questions and he would answer them. I introduced some of my close friends to him and they would often join us.

To this day I regard Schaechter as my first and most important spiritual teacher. My association with him occurred at the right age, I had a desire to learn and found in him a fountain of scholarship and inner understanding. Since he had studied mainly in Vienna, his main sources were in German. I spoke a little German already and, in order to read his sources, I quickly mastered enough of the language to read books fluently. Together with another senior student of his we undertook the publication of a Kierkegaard anthology in Hebrew. We could not read the Danish original, but chose passages and translated from a combination of English and German translations. The anthology was printed by a serious publisher while I was in eighth grade.

My strongest impression from that period is the recollection of a lucidity that descended on me after exchanges with Schaechter, in which I asked a question that really disturbed me and he answered it. By that time a certain rapport had been established between us.

I seem to have divined, thanks to his presence, the right questions, and he would zoom in on the appropriate answer, once more partly thanks to my questioning. He had a wife and a son who was about ten years old then, but in some sense I was his spiritual son during that period.

I sometimes wondered how my parents accepted my intensive association with Schaechter. They certainly preferred it to my former relations with the clandestine Socialist political circle. Perhaps they also appreciated the breadth of learning I acquired, directly or indirectly, through him – international and Jewish literature, philosophy, and history of science, as well as the various Jewish scriptures. Schaechter was formerly a member of the Vienna Circle – a leading Neo-Positivist academic philosophical center – where he wrote his doctoral thesis under Moritz Schlick. But at the same time he was also a rabbi and a graduate of the Jewish rabbinical seminary in Vienna.

Yet my mother, who was also acquainted with European literature and knowledgeable about it, was most certainly upset, deep inside, by my preference for someone else. My father, I think, was more liberal in these matters. Yet he too was certainly unhappy about my voluntary choice of Schaechter as a spiritual father.

During that period I discovered a new world of letters – poetry, prose, and contemplation. I read literature in the original languages and was fascinated by Goethe, Hoeldrlin, Emily Dickinson, and the lesser-known Austrian poet, Georg Trakl. I read everything by Hermann Hesse and in particular his *Magister Ludi* (*The Glass Bead Game*), which I greatly admired. I also read Franz Kafka, Heinrich Von Kleist, the Swiss author Gottfried Keller, and the Austrian Adalbert Stifter, in the original German. I was deeply impressed by the

major works of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, although I had to read them in translation. I read (though I now believe I did not really understand some of these authors at the time) Plato, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, as I have already mentioned, Heidegger, Sartre and – then still in English – Camus' *Myth of Sisyphus*. I read and greatly admired the last part of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. In addition, under Schaechter's tutorship, I read many traditional Jewish thinkers, as well as the original Jewish scriptures. This legacy still plays a central, though perhaps not a unique, role in my spiritual world, and I shall return to the ideas of some of these authors in later chapters.

What were the central ideas that I, as well as others, learned from Schaechter? His chief concern was for what he called "meaning". Contemporary culture is preoccupied with science, technology, and the material world, but does not care about meaning, the meaning of our individual and collective lives. For him meaning was somehow related to the presence of a higher world in our experience of ourselves and of others. That was the original significance of religion. He was a traditionalist in religious matters, that is, he followed the precepts of orthodoxy, coming as he did from an orthodox home in Galicia. However, he was opposed to contemporary orthodoxy, for its failure to make religion relevant to everyday modern life, insisting instead on dated customs and concerns. In many of these aspects he was far ahead of his times.

Under Schaechter's influence we ultimately set up a *garin* (nucleus group) of a future settlement that wandered for several years to various *kibbutzim*, until it finally settled in Yodfat. Schaechter remained in touch with the members of Yodfat after I had left for other endeavors. He used to come there during the major

Jewish festivals and, from time to time, would speak to the members of the younger generation. In Yodfat a little apartment was set aside for him and his wife and they were treated with love and respect. Schaechter passed away in his early seventies and was buried in Yodfat's cemetery. I attended the funeral. The cemetery was in a sheltered spot among the pine trees. A cool breeze was blowing in the trees and there was silence during the proceedings. I remember thinking that if it mattered where you were buried, then this was certainly the place.

Chapter 3: Alona

A Garin is Formed

TWO OR THREE years after the establishment of the State of Israel, the pioneering spirit was still prevailing. The most acclaimed path for a young graduate of high school was to join a garin (literally a nucleus), a group of young people who did their compulsory army service together and then joined an existing kibbutz or, with the blessing of the authorities, established a new kibbutz. However, it became clear to me and some of my friends that this situation could not persist for long. The newly created state had many other needs, besides agricultural communal settlements – army, industry, education, and government. The pioneering spirit, we argued, would have to give way to other, broader motivations. Besides, the waves of newly arrived immigrants from Muslim countries, as well as Holocaust survivors, were not moved by the pioneering spirit, and most of them would not find their way to a kibbutz.

The important question for some of us who graduated from the youth movement during that period was whether communal settlements like the kibbutz had become a thing of the past or whether they could be resurrected under a different ideology and motivation. More concretely, could the ideas we learned from Dr. Schaechter become the basis for a new interpretation of the communal settlement and a new motivation for joining it?

I tried to put this question to Schaechter, but he was not familiar enough with the kibbutz ideology, since he was not himself a pioneer. Also, he was mainly interested in education, seeing himself as too old to start on a new

path, as a teacher in a kibbutz. Thus it was necessary for us to explore the entire question on our own. I was less than 18 years old, but I was quite certain that I possessed the necessary qualifications for such an endeavor. This was, in part, the familiar boldness of an overly self-assured youth. But it had also something to do with Schaechter himself.

Schaechter had a persistent tendency to criticize other intellectuals, in particular popular Jewish and revered celebrities. For instance, whenever Einstein was mentioned, Schaechter would say, Einstein is a great physicist, but when he starts talking about other topics, such as religion or philosophy, you suddenly see that Einstein is an idiot! Schaechter would repeat this a number of times, with evident relish. That was also his view of other celebrities, such as Sigmund Freud. Of course we, his young followers, were unable to judge for ourselves his sharp criticisms and denunciations. However, we were happy to join in and applaud him. For if we shared his view that Einstein was an idiot, how much more sophisticated and wise we ourselves must be. We developed a similar derogatory attitude towards many of our companions in the youth movement, who did not share our enthusiasm for Schaechter and his ideas.

Schaechter came from a small town in Galicia, where he was considered a brilliant religious scholar. In search of broader education he moved to Vienna, where he had to carve out a place for himself with meager financial and social means. Following the rise of Fascism in Austria, he was forced to leave once more and go to Palestine, where again he was at a disadvantage. Some brilliant immigrant scholars were offered academic positions, while he, like many of the others, had to make a living with difficulty, as a high school teacher. He felt that he had a spiritual

message, but was rejected by many of his contemporaries, in particular by the intellectual elite. By way of reaction he developed that sharp, derogatory attitude towards those who, in his judgment, enjoyed undeserved recognition and acceptance. I was unaware of all this at the time and developed, for my own part, a self-important attitude similar to that of Schaechter. I imitated him in various ways, even adopting his style of handwriting.

I served in the youth movement, as a group leader to youngsters two years my junior. Naturally I found them to be more receptive to my new ideas than those in my peer group. Still, adherents of Schaechterism, also known as Schaechterists, constituted a minority, even among those youngsters, while in my peer group there were only three or four of us Schaechterists. Initially, we were not very sure what we actually wanted. However, it became clearer during our discussions among ourselves, with our followers, and with Schaechter.

Alona and her Influence

As I have already indicated, the town of Haifa lies on the slope of a hill called Mount Carmel. It is believed to be the same Mount Carmel mentioned in the bible, where Elijah had his contest with the prophets of Baal. The top of the hill is called the Carmel proper, while the slope is mainly another quarter, Hadar Ha-Carmel, or just Hadar for short. The Boy Scout movement, like our Reali High School, had different branches, one in Hadar and another on the Carmel proper. I lived in Hadar and was a group leader there. My closest friend Yossi, also a Schaechterist, lived and was a group leader on the Carmel. He also had followers among the youngsters he led, one of whom was Alona.

Alona came from a famous and revered family from Kibbutz Kfar Giladi, the Shohats, who were among the founders of the organization called Ha-Shomer, "The Watchman", young men who volunteered to defend the earliest Jewish settlements in Palestine, mostly on horseback. Her grandmother, Maniah Shohat-Wilbuschevitch, was renowned in Palestine of that period for her revolutionary role in Tsarist Russia. At a certain point she had been in prison there, tried and sentenced to death, but pardoned, on condition that she leave Russia. That was when she emigrated to Palestine.

Ha-Shomer was later superseded by the Haganah, "The Jewish self-defense", forerunner of the Israeli Defense Forces, the IDF. Alona's father was a high-ranking officer in the IDF's newly established air force, and he committed suicide, apparently on romantic grounds.

At 16, Alona was an exceptional girl, not just for her striking good looks and intelligence, but because of her mysterious link with nature. When she walked in the pine groves that covered parts of Mount Carmel, small animals, and sometimes larger ones would come to her. There was a deep quiet about her, as if she exuded calm, even when she laughed. Yossi and I admired her without actually falling in love with her. She was somehow beyond the reach of our love. Her romantic affairs later took her far away from us. She always predicted her own future: When I am grown up, I shall not be as I am now, I shall not be good. We believed her, although we did not understand.

I remember coming to her home once. There were three of us – Yossi, Yehuda, who was another boy her age, and myself. We often went to her place to discuss things with her. Her position was somehow unique, not unlike that of Schaechter. We accepted whatever she said as final, as

if she had some mysterious relation with higher sources. She used to speak sparingly during such meetings, but this time she was silent. Often, when several people meet, silence is awkward. But this time, in her presence, there was nothing of that. No one felt an urge to break the silence. We sat comfortably, not saying a word. This lasted for a rather long time, about an hour or an hour and a half. Then it was time to go. We rose and left, smiling at her, still without saying a word. It took us some time after we left to begin speaking again.

From Schaechter we learned about a higher world and its presence in our lives. He also extended to us his exceptional clarity of thinking. From Alona we received the direct experience of nature and the ability to listen to our intuitions and feelings. Consequently, our ideological perceptions consisted of three existential dimensions: The divine or I vis-a-vis God; nature, or I vis-a-vis the world; and the community or I vis-a-vis the other. The goal of our envisaged kibbutz, our communal settlement, would be to facilitate the development and extension of these three dimensions by living together in a natural environment and cultivating the soil. We did not consider ourselves as responding to any particular requirement or demand of the state or the Zionist movement, except as an experiment that could perhaps be extended in future to other communities and regions.

The question arose of where to settle down and realize our ideas. Usually the authorities, the Jewish agency, would decide if and where to send a new garin. We doubted that the authorities would recognize a different kind of community such as ours as a legitimate candidate for a new settlement. Then Alona intervened. She said that near Kfar Giladi, the kibbutz in the north where she was born, there was an ancient archeological site called

Abel. It is surrounded by a grove, where a spring wells up each winter, creating a tiny brook. It is called the "Opening Spring". The site was uninhabited and the members of Kibbutz Kfar Giladi would, according to Alona, certainly welcome us to settle there.

Kfar Giladi and Naama

Since Alona had said it, we did not doubt that we would indeed settle in Abel. We made several trips to the place and found it to be very pleasant. During that period we separated from our original group in the Boy Scouts, and established our own garin, which we named Yuval. There were about twenty of us, most of whom were still in school. Others served in the army. I was exempt from army service, due to my eye problems, so I decided to go to Kfar Giladi, to establish relations with our future neighbors. I was 19, with only a high school education. But there was such a shortage of teachers in that initial period of statehood, that, based on the quality of the school from which I had graduated and my personal academic achievements, I was offered a temporary license to teach. For similar reasons an external school was set up in Kfar Giladi, for students from new settlements who wished to graduate from high school. I applied for a teaching position there and was accepted. I was also offered a group leadership position with the local kibbutz youngsters, who went to a different school from the one in which I was to teach.

I received a tiny room. The door was more reminiscent of a cupboard door than a door leading into a room. The room was not much wider than a bed and just long enough for a little table at the end of the bed. But I was quite satisfied with the arrangement. I took my meals in

the common dining hall, together with the other kibbutz members, and soon became acquainted with several of them.

One man I came to admire was Haim. He was an elderly high school teacher, whom I consulted about the material I was going to teach and the sources I should use. I was astounded by his breadth and depth of knowledge, which I did not expect from someone in a remote, northern kibbutz, far from academic libraries. It turned out that Haim possessed an enormous private library, mostly in Yiddish! Until I met him, I was unaware of the extent of the erudition contained in the contemplative Yiddish literature that had been written in the period between the two world wars, and which was now becoming extinct, due to rivalry on the part of English and Hebrew. I don't know how Haim acquired this library. It must have been brought from some Jewish institute in Poland during the war, but he made good use of it.

Alona told me that in Kfar Giladi there was a girl close to my age who, in her view, was really worth meeting. Having arrived, I immediately looked for her. Naama was still in the upper grade of high school and we immediately became a couple. I cannot even say if I actually loved her, because the recommendation of Alona was so decisive for me that I did not bother to stop and consider. Naama had a large family in Kfar Giladi – her parents, three younger sisters, and two married aunts. I was warmly received by the family and the solitude and desolation of my frugal living quarters were alleviated somewhat.

I began teaching students who were about two years my junior. I was also acting as a group leader for Naama and her classmates, who were almost my age. Since then I have held several high school and academic teaching positions, but the brightest and most profound student

I ever had was Amos, who is still my friend today, many, many years later. I tried to teach in the spirit of the ideas I learned from Schaechter, as well as their application to the new kind of kibbutz we were contemplating. As was the case in the former groups of the Boy Scout Movement, several of my students and some of those whom I was supposed to guide became enthusiastic adherents of these ideas, including Naama and Amos. Others were neutral or became outright critics.

Accusations and Verdict

I wrote to my friends, Yossi, who was in the army at the time, and Yehuda, still an eighth grader at the Reali High School in Haifa, about the situation in Kfar Giladi, and how many of my new young associates could be counted on for our future communal settlement, Garin Yuval. For some reason I did not like the tone of my letter. Perhaps I found it too conspiring, so I threw it in the waste basket and wrote another. I did not know that I had already aroused the suspicion of some members of the kibbutz, and that my waste basket was being searched. I noticed that some of the little kibbutz children would run after me on my way to the dining hall shouting “the Indian garin, the Indian garin”. I later learned that they were told that my associates and I were planning a new kind of communal settlement that would function as an “ideal garin”. They did not catch the exact wording and replaced it with “the Indian garin”.

In those days the Socialist and Zionist doctrines of the kibbutz were still widely adhered to by the membership, and, as is common in small communities, there was a certain fundamentalist strictness about them. Any unauthorized digressions were considered heresy. So

my associates and I were summoned before the young generation of kibbutz members in a kind of court proceedings. I was seated alone on what was to signify the defendant's chair. Opposite me, about 40 or 50 young kibbutz members, all my seniors, were seated in rows. My associates, who were not accused directly, occupied the wings. To my surprise, a renowned teacher from an adjacent kibbutz, whom I greatly admired, played the role of prosecutor. I seriously tried to convince him that the accusations were without foundation, since I had not mailed the famous letter, but had thrown it in the wastebasket. This was actually a weak counter argument. The unanimous decision was to stop my work as a teacher and expel me from the kibbutz.

Beginning Communal Life Together

I continued to visit Naama, trying to remain as inconspicuous as possible, except to her family. When the school year ended and compulsory army service was to begin, we formally created Garin Yuval and obtained authorization for its inclusion in the framework of NAHAL, an army brigade that alternated between regular army service and agricultural work, in a kibbutz on the country's border. We were directed to Kibbutz Tel Yitzhak, where we began our communal life. Alona was not among us. In fact she never joined Garin Yuval. She went to America, married, divorced, and remarried. She had one daughter. I met Alona a few times after that, and she always spoke and acted as if we had last seen each other yesterday. She was deeply involved in the affairs of the Sixties – the Flower Children, music, spirituality, drugs, and free love. Finally she divorced a second time and turned to religious orthodoxy. A woman who

had known Alona since her youth left her a substantial inheritance. She used the money to secretly help people in need. She died of cancer in her sixties.

So we were living and working in Tel Yitzhak. In the evenings, after supper in the dining hall, we would gather on the grass outside, beneath the tall trees. In Kfar Giladi there was a well developed classical musical culture. Naama and her friends brought this culture with them and shared it with all of us. We would sing melodies by Bach, Mozart, and Mendelssohn, often in harmony. When we had exhausted these, we would turn to Jewish traditional songs and the more serious modern ones. This would go on for hours every evening, until at last we would disperse and go to bed.

Something disturbed me about these evenings together. They always began well, with energy and attention spent on the choice of melodies and on their performance. As the evening progressed, however, the atmosphere became less focused. People would begin to talk among themselves, the songs were of a markedly lesser and lesser quality, and the evening continued to spiral downward, until the get-together disintegrated.

Today I would accept such a situation as natural, finding nothing wrong with it. At the time, as a consequence of my youth and inexperience, I consistently strived for perfection, and this progressive disintegration impressed me as being less than perfect. I pointed out my observations to my friends, who had to admit their veracity. I argued that the problem was a result of the lack of a clearly defined time frame. The period after supper was constrained only by the need to go to sleep and could drag on almost indefinitely. I therefore suggested that we get together, not after supper, but before it, to sing a few selected songs together. Then we would go to the dining

hall with the kibbutz members, but sit separately at two or three of our own tables. To further avoid progressive disintegration, we would keep silent during these meals.

When I pondered these plans it occurred to me that they were not unlike a kind of religious ceremony, an evening prayer. Orthodox prayers, as far as I could remember, were lengthy affairs, loaded with barely comprehensible medieval texts that took hours to go through. But that was certainly not the original form of an evening or any other collective prayer. I went to see Schaechter. He maintained that the original form of a Jewish religious service, as portrayed in the bible, did not include a spoken prayer at all. It was a carefully orchestrated priestly service, consisting mainly of sacrifices, performed without public presence. Only during the Second Temple period, after the exile of several generations in Babylon, the synagogue was instituted. Consequently, public presence in the Second Temple became sanctioned and music, song, and liturgical prayers were introduced.

It occurred to me that the roots of Jewish religious service could be found in the Israelites' forty years of wandering in the Sinai desert, after leaving Egypt and receiving the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. The Temple during that period consisted of the Sacred Tent, which could be dismantled and carried from camp to camp. There was no public presence inside the Sacred Tent either, but the people could witness the descent of the Cloud of Reverence on that Sacred Tent.

According to the Book of Numbers, the Sacred Tent contained a table, on which two loaves of bread were kept. A lamp with seven candles would be lit by the priest every evening, illuminating the table. I saw in this a possible beginning. Today we light with electricity. Candles

are an anachronism. Also, we are not going to keep the community out of the place of service. Everyone should be present. Instead of many songs we shall sing but one. Similarly, instead of saying many prayers we shall recite a single liturgical text.

Chapter 4: Garin Yuval

The Evening Prayer

OUR NEW IDEAS were not realized in Tel Yitzhak, but in another kibbutz to which we were directed – Ramat Rachel, actually a semi-agricultural suburb of Jerusalem. There our conditions improved somewhat, in comparison to Tel Yitzhak. We received a small house to serve as our clubhouse. Also, we were given permission to eat supper at separate tables in the communal dining hall. Several days after arriving in Ramat Rachel, we tried out our ceremony of a common evening prayer. We decided to assemble outside of the clubhouse, to go in together and stand facing one wall, where we had already placed a lamp that shone on a table covered with a white cloth. On the table was a basket with two ordinary loaves of bread. We were to sing a single song set to a melody by Bach, the words being “Let us sing Hallelujah...” Then we were to read the 23rd Psalm, “The Lord is my Shepherd...”

I distinctly remember the first evening we tried this out. We assembled outside the clubhouse. The atmosphere was tense, with a mixture of fear and expectation. Upon entering the room with the table and the lamp, two of the girls burst into an uncontrollable and interminable fit of laughter, which finally led them to run away. After they left I remember joining in the Bach melody with a strongly beating heart. Then all of us recited the 23rd Psalm together. After several moments of silence we turned and left for the dining hall. There we sat together for a silent meal, interrupted from time to time by requests for more tea, the bread basket, etc. Otherwise there was silence.

What we used to call “The Evening Prayer” soon

became routine. The anxiety was gone and there were no further fits of laughter. Instead, the evening prayer and the silent meal following it became the focal point of our entire day, so much so that those who returned to their parents' homes for a few days, or left for other outside activities, felt they were missing something. We started to plan further individual and communal events with similar aims, a process that extended beyond Ramat Rachel to other places to which we were later sent. One was a morning prayer, to be recited by each of us out loud and out of doors. It consisted of the first verses of Genesis I, "In the beginning the Lord created heaven and earth..." We did not expect it to be observed as strictly as the evening prayer, since it was to be an individual affair. Nevertheless, it also became an integral part of many of our days together. Another more complex issue was conduct on the Sabbath. On the eve of the Sabbath we replaced the two loaves of bread in the prayer hall with new ones. By that time they were green with mold. We felt badly about the mold, since it made our ceremony look a bit ridiculous, but found no better solution, since changing the loaves daily would be a waste of food. Anyway, the question of our conduct on the Sabbath itself still remained open.

The Sabbath

The Sabbath of the Israelites in the desert, to which we looked for guidance, consisted simply of what we would today call calm, rest, and meditation. "Sit each of you where he is. Let no one leave his place on the Sabbath". Later these injunctions were interpreted somewhat differently, since their original meaning must have been too difficult to put into practice, particularly as it was

necessary to go to synagogue, so that leaving one's place was unavoidable. In our search for perfection during that period, we nevertheless decided to try spending the Sabbath in calm, rest, and meditation. But we soon encountered problems. We wanted to read the weekend newspaper, since we didn't have any other opportunities for receiving information about the outside world. But reading the newspaper meant going into other, far and very different worlds, and certainly not "staying where we are".

Even reading a good novel, such as *Jerusalem*, by Selma Lagerloef, a book we greatly admired in those days, could not be taken as realizing the injunction to stay put. In fact, reading was a sure way of leaving your place in favor of somewhere else, such as the Sweden of Ingmar Ingmarson, the central character in *Jerusalem*. Perhaps it would be better to go for walks in the area, instead of remaining shut up in our rooms and reading whatever we could lay our hands on. But this would already constitute a compromise, something we wished so much to avoid.

The Vineyard

Our work in Ramat Rachel was mainly in the fields, orchards, and vineyards. These were all irrigated with sprinklers using treated Jerusalem sewage. When working in the vineyards you could not avoid being soaked by this sewage water. The younger kibbutz members did not like this work, so we had to do it, together with one or two of the kibbutz elders. I worked for a long time with one of them, Reuben, a very coarse type from the Ukraine, who told me his version of the facts of life. He did not look like a Jew and had probably spent the Second World War with the Russian partisans, who did not care much

for Jews. Reuben told me repeatedly what a good wife he had, but that she should never hear how good she was. He described rural life in the Ukraine, how the young gentile Masha, “the shikse”, would enter the cow shed to milk the cows, upon which the young Ivan, who was chopping wood, would put down his axe, follow her into the cow shed and emerge after a few minutes, closing his trousers.

Despite his coarseness there was something honest about Reuben and I came to like him. After a few months of working together in the vineyard, he left for another job in the kibbutz and I was placed in charge of the entire vineyard. It was a large plot with dark, late-ripening grapes that were sent to market after most of the other varieties. We had to spray the ripening grapes with chemicals against fruit flies or else the grapes would be greatly damaged. At that time the chemicals in use were very toxic and once again the younger kibbutz members refused to do the spraying, so we had to do it, wearing masks and protective coats. Once I became so angry when I learned that we had to do the spraying alone, that I burst into tears. I remember Reuben, when he heard about it, telling me that women cry to make peace while men cry from anger.

The grapes had a rich, spicy taste, perhaps due to the fact that they were irrigated with sewage water. When it was almost time for the pick, the government imposed a control on food prices, including grapes, to avoid a further rise in the cost of living index. The controlled price meant a heavy loss for the vineyard, if we proceeded with the pick. But if we waited too long the grapes would be overripe and almost worthless. I decided to wait. Every day I would check the sugar content of the ripening grapes, to see if we could wait any longer. One day, while the price control was still in force, I felt the grapes

becoming soft. I checked more vines. All the grapes were softening. What a pity! They could not be saved.

More Books and People

Shachter gave me a strange book, *Spring and Autumn*, by the ancient Chinese statesman Lu Bu-Wei, translated into German by the well-known Chinese scholar of German origin, Richard Wilhelm. The book went through the four seasons, each divided into three months. For each season and each month it defined the dominant color, the dominant musical note, whether the sky and earth were benevolent or cross, what foods should be eaten, which clothes to wear, what activities should be undertaken and which should be avoided. This book had an aura of deep harmony with nature about it, which greatly appealed to us. Although the book was of non-Jewish origin, we tried to find ways to fit the ideas into our local conditions, but we could not come up with a workable result. In Israel there are only two major seasons, winter and summer, with very short intermediate periods of spring and fall. The impact of the seasons on what people wear, eat, or do can be felt, but modern life makes it possible to import food and wear clothes that do not necessarily follow the rhythm of the seasons. Moreover, we have lost the natural instinct for what should be encouraged or avoided in different seasons, such as going on a distant voyage, holding a large gathering of people, undertaking new construction, etc., as mentioned in Lu Bu Wei's book.

I recently tried to locate the book, but was unsuccessful. I did learn some interesting details in the process. The name Spring and Autumn is traditionally associated with the period of feudalism in China, between the 8th and 5th centuries BC. It was a period when the king relegated

most of his authority to feudal lords, and political power in matters relating to the whole of China were taken care of collectively. It ended when the period of the “Warring States” began.

The *Spring and Autumn* annals of Lu Bu Wei is a collection of writings by the guests of Lu Bu Wei, the Prime Minister of the state of Qin, edited by Lu Bu Wei himself during the late Warring States period. This collection is divided into three parts, “The Twelve Records”, “The Eight Views”, and “The Six Discussions” and it consists of one hundred and sixty articles.

It seems that Richard Wilhelm singled out one item of this collection that dealt with government and the rhythm of the seasons, and translated it under the name of the entire collection. The name was appropriate because it fit the central idea of the influence of the seasons.

The adventures of Lu Bu Wei, recorded more than 2000 years ago, are typical of the pursuit of riches and political power throughout the ages. Lu Bu Wei began as a traveling merchant, an occupation that was despised by the aristocracy of the period. He seems to have been very successful commercially, accumulating a great quantity of gold. Subsequently he learned that, as was customary in those days, one of the lesser sons of the king of Qin was sent to live in Jiao, the capital of the neighboring kingdom, to serve as a kind of hostage. He also learned that the chief wife of the king of Qin was childless. (His children, including the one sent as hostage, were from lesser wives.) This gave Lu Bu Wei an idea. As legend tells us:

On returning home, he said to his father, “What is the profit on investment that one can expect from ploughing fields?”

“Ten times the investment,” replied his father.

“And the return on investment in pearls and jades is how much?”

“A hundredfold.”

“And the return on investment from establishing a ruler and securing the state would be how much?”

“It would be incalculable.”

“Now if I devoted my energies to laboring in the fields, I would hardly get enough to clothe and feed myself; yet if I secure a state and establish its lord, the benefits can be passed on to future generations. I propose to go serve Prince Yiren of Qin, who is hostage in Zhao and resides in the city of Jiao.”

Bu Wei managed, by bribery and persuasion, to get the release of Yiren, the prince of Qin from being hostage in Jiao. He also persuaded the childless wife of the king of Qin to adopt Yiren as her son, which made him prince regent of Qin. In the meantime, Yiren discovered a beautiful and enticing girl among the servants of Bu Wei and asked for her, making her his wife. She bore him a son (rumors had it that he was actually the son of Bu Wei), destined to become the first emperor of China.

When the king of Qin died (or was poisoned by Yiren), his son Yiren became king of Qin (under a different name) and made Bu Wei prime minister and chancellor of the kingdom. Bu Wei was very successful in this position, enlarged the area of Qin and assembled, as was already said, many leading scholars of the day in his court.

When Yiren died, his young son Zheng, then 13, inherited the kingdom (again adopting a different name) and confirmed Bu Wei in his office as prime minister. However, his mother was getting involved in sexual scandals and Bu Wei feared that this was menacing the well-being and integrity of the kingdom. He devised a complex scheme of associating her with a fake eunuch

who could satisfy her desires. His plan succeeded, and the queen dowager bore the fake eunuch two sons and installed him in a position of power in the kingdom. However, he became progressively bold and seems to have challenged the authority of the king. In response, the king overpowered him and had him, his two sons, and all his relatives executed. Bu Wei was spared, but exiled. Still, fearing subsequent execution, he committed suicide.

So even people in a so-called position of power who are endowed with keen foresight, prove to be helpless against the forces that shape human history in general and their personal destiny in particular. It seems to me that this applies to our times, as well as to those of the “Warring States” period of ancient China. We shall return to this topic in the last chapter of the book.

Other People, Other Groups

There were several other groups in Israel at the time whose activities were somewhat like our own, and who tried to establish contact with us. One was an enlarged family of Hungarian origin named Vactor. They were extreme vegans, who ate only grains and seeds. For example, they didn't eat juicy green peppers, but only the pale seeds inside. They did not drink orange juice, but only ate the seeds of the orange. They drank water only from springs, of which there were only a few that flowed naturally, or rainwater, which they collected in underground cisterns or wells. They slept only outdoors, winter and summer, with just a thin woolen blanket. To make a living they ran

a laundry in Haifa and took in and educated young boys who had trouble adjusting in their families. When they visited us in Ramat Rachel, they tried to make us accept their lifestyle. It was, I recall, a cold winter evening, yet they insisted on sleeping outdoors, like they were used to. I can still see their thin bodies and hear their Hungarian accents.

One day a letter arrived from a clandestine religious organization called “The Flame of God”. The letter suggested we meet, if we were prepared to follow their instructions about a meeting place. A few of us went. They arrived at a place deep inside an ultra-orthodox quarter of Jerusalem. After several roundabouts calculated to make you lose directions, they entered a small room. On the table was a well-known book, *The Tanya*, by one of the leaders of the Hassidic movement. There they encountered two young men, roughly our age, who described themselves as students at the Hebrew University who had chosen to become ultra-orthodox, according to the precepts of that same Hassidic rabbi. There was a short exchange, in which our people described our search and our mode of life. It was decided to arrange a meeting between one of them, Adin, who was their leader, and me, in Haifa.

I remember that meeting well. It was during the period in which I was deeply convinced that our path was the best option for integrating the best of the pioneering spirit and the mainly Jewish religious ideas of Schaechter. We were walking down the streets of Hadar in Haifa. Adin told me that he was a student of physics at the Hebrew University. I liked him and the way he spoke. I briefly described what we had learned from Schaechter and how we were trying to find the right approach in our daily life in the kibbutz. He listened silently, without interrupting me.

Then he began to speak. He said that what we were doing was a grave mistake. Religious precepts, ceremonies, and prayers were not something for people to invent, according to their current understanding. They were sacred procedures that possessed not only human, but cosmic repercussions. By failing to follow the traditional Jewish procedures to the letter, we were causing more cosmic harm than that done by outright atheists.

What he said was the opposite of everything Schaechter stood for. It meant that we, in Israel, should adopt the detailed religious practices of generations of Diaspora Jews, without attempting to make them meaningful to contemporary life. Besides, at that time I had little knowledge of the Lurianic Kabbalah, which formed the theoretical basis for his accusations. I was thus inclined to reject his view altogether. Nevertheless, his argument against the ease with which I, in particular, sought to introduce elements of religious ceremony into our communal life struck home, and I have never forgotten it.

Neveh Ilan

In the meantime we moved from Ramat Rachel to Neveh Ilan, a kibbutz that was practically deserted. Most of the families had left, some for a nearby moshav, and some for the city. They were mainly of French origin, people who had participated in the French underground resistance during World War II. Two people from adjacent kibbutzim were appointed as caretakers of the equipment and grounds and we were to provide the necessary manpower for continued maintenance of the kibbutz. We were almost alone in Neveh Ilan, with a few remaining families of the original settlers. The kibbutz was on the slope of a hill, on the top of which was an old building,

known as the “khan”, or ancient caravanserai. We turned it into our clubhouse, continuing the way of life we had begun at Ramat Rachel.

It was a happy period. We had to run the kibbutz, mainly on our own. We drove tractors, cars, and trucks, operated agricultural machinery, learned to take clutches, axles, and motors apart and fix them, prepared food for the dining hall, etc. Many of us acquired new technical skills that would come in handy in later stages of our lives. We continued pursuing our special customs and ceremonies and found the old khan up the hill to be especially suited for these undertakings. New members joined us during that period, although our number always remained small, about 30.

The Scapegoat

Every Saturday afternoon, we would assemble in the khan for a meeting. Often we would read an interesting spiritual text, Jewish or other, or something written by one of us for the specific occasion. One impression that remains with me from these meetings, however, is not related to the readings, but to what might be called “the scapegoat phenomenon”. The bible describes a ceremony carried out by the High Priest on the eve of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. He would place his hands on the heads of two goats and confess the sins of the people. One of the goats would then be sent away, accompanied by a special envoy. When they arrived at a desolate place in the desert called Azazel, the envoy would push the goat down into an abyss. This magical procedure was supposed to purge the people of their collective sins.

A scapegoat phenomenon occurred in Garin Yuval, and has probably occurred in many other small communities of people whose lives are closely knit. One of the members would suddenly appear to the others to have a harmful impact on the entire group. If only he or she could be made to leave, things would immediately change for the better. However, once the person in question actually left, the role of communal scapegoat would pass to someone else.

I have already mentioned the elderly teacher Haim, from Kfar Giladi, who possessed an extensive library of historical, literary, and philosophical works in Yiddish. His eldest daughter, Dalia, was a classmate of Naama, who also joined our group. Dalia was a girl of outstanding beauty, but there was something odd about her, as if she was never really present, then and there. One day my friend Yehuda told me that Dalia was not suitable for our group and that she would have to go. I was astonished by his decisiveness. After all, it was not an easy thing for a daughter of Kfar Giladi to join us in those days, when we were ostracized by the kibbutz members. Telling her to go would make it even harder. But Yehuda would not budge. The garin, he said, was more important than any individual. Dalia left and she was not the last among us to become a communal scapegoat.

One of the kibbutz members still living in Neveh Ilan was Jacques. He was about 50, with a record of past activities in the French resistance and a central position in a French garin that had settled several years previously in Neveh Ilan. He was a serious, self-sufficient person, whom I immediately respected. I thought he might be persuaded to stay and join Garin Yuval, despite the age difference between him and us. One day I went to see him in his house. I asked him about the French garin and why it had disintegrated. Then I described our garin, our

ideas, what we had learned from Schaechter and how we conducted our daily lives. Jacques listened attentively. Then he said, "Let's meet in twenty years and then see." This rebuttal was a hard blow, because there was nothing I could say. Whatever I said would be beside the point. Nevertheless that conversation is still on my mind. Yes, Jacques. Many more years than twenty have passed and now I understand better what you meant.

Environmental Awareness

In those days there was an ideological wave akin to our contemporary environmental awareness. It was led by landscape architects, such as Louis Mumford, involved in the Regional Planning Movement, especially as practiced in the Netherlands, with reference to the newly reclaimed polders there. It also comprised the forerunners of organic farming and other environmentally inclined ideologies. We studied these developments as intensively as we could and integrated them in our overall perception of the three dimensions: man and God, man and nature, man and his peers. Environmental consciousness related to the second dimension, man and nature. However, it soon reflected on a concrete decision we had to make.

The authorities offered to let us remain in Neveh Ilan, as our permanent place of communal settlement. We were to receive the built-up area of the kibbutz, as well as a hotel that belonged to the kibbutz and was currently operated by an outside contractor. The adjacent arable lands that had formerly belonged to Neveh Ilan were to be transferred to neighboring kibbutzim, who were already farming them. We would receive other arable land in exchange, situated about an hour and a half's drive from the kibbutz, to the south.

We knew very well by then that we would not be able to settle in Abel, near Kfar Giladi, as Alona had envisioned long ago. We could also not be certain that the authorities would let us settle on our own anywhere else, due to our small numbers. Consequently, the offer of Neveh Ilan, despite its shortcomings, represented a significant opportunity for us. Nevertheless we rejected it. The chief reason, as far as I remember, was the proposed separation of the living quarters, in the hills of Neveh Ilan near Jerusalem, from the agricultural fields in the prairies to the south. We felt that the integration of people with their environment, which we had already unsuccessfully embarked upon according to Li Bu-Wei's book, could not be undertaken seriously with fields such a long distance from our living quarters.

Our negative decision meant that Neveh Ilan would be handed over to another group, while we had to go elsewhere. First we went to a neighboring kibbutz, Kiryat Anavim, and then to a new project, Doshen, a farm in the valley of Beit She'an, where we would have to find work and support ourselves on our own. We would be there alone, without an existing kibbutz to support us, but there would be minimal housing facilities, mainly wooden barracks.

Chapter 5: Meeting Remarkable People

A Very Hot Place

THE FARM AT Doshen was a very hot place. In the summer the thermometers in our cupboards would always show 42 degrees centigrade whenever we took them out, since this was the daily maximum temperature in the shade. During that period home air conditioners were still unknown, and to cool down our rooms we would often wash the floor or hang up wet sheets. Before sunrise was the coolest and most pleasant time of day. Looking out towards the mountains to the west we would see gazelles coming out of their hiding places, their silhouettes discernible against the early morning shadows.

Most of us found work as day laborers in the neighboring cotton fields. But the hourly wages were poor. I decided to benefit from my experience in the vineyards of Ramat Rachel and obtained a “professional” job in the vineyards of Kibbutz Gesher, about half an hour’s bicycle ride from Doshen. My hourly wage was 50% higher than that of my friends in the cotton fields. However I had never learned to ride a bicycle, since my native town of Haifa was built on a slope and was not suitable for bicycle riding. I decided, nevertheless to risk “learning by doing”, as the economists call it, and I took a bicycle I found on the farm to learn on. In those days traffic on the main road through the valley of Beit She’an to the Jordan valley wasn’t very heavy. I made my way on the bicycle along the empty road, more or less maintaining my balance, until I heard an occasional car approaching, when, out of fear, I would stop by the side of the road until the danger had passed.

In Doshen my friend Rani and I shared a room in one

of the barracks. I don't remember whether the white German shepherd puppy we called Fanga, after Jack London's "White Fang", was Rani's or mine, but we loved her equally. She was a cheerful, thin puppy, distinguished by her rare snow-white fur. Whenever I returned from work, she would wait for me at the gate to the farm and jump with joy and excitement. She would follow me to my room, licking my hands and reaching up to my face whenever possible. Her greeting was not unpleasant and I became accustomed to her being the first to take notice of my arrival from work and to welcome me. One day, when I was almost back at Doshen I heard a bus coming from behind. I stopped by the side of the road, as was my habit. It was just after a bend in the road and the bus driver must have noticed me only at the last moment. He swerved to the opposite side of the road. Fanga was already there, expecting me, and the bus ran her over and continued, without the bus driver noticing. There was no sound from her. She just lay there dead. I called Rani and we dug a grave under a tree and buried her. I was deeply sorry, as if a dear friend of mine had died. This was indeed what had happened – my first encounter with death.

Marriage and First Academic Studies

Naama and I continued as a couple throughout our years in Tel Yitzhak, Ramat Rachel and Neveh Ilan. Now, in Doshen, we decided to get married. My mother did not approve of the match, which I ascribed to her bourgeois ideals, since Naama came from a kibbutz and didn't have any financial means. During that period kibbutz members were not allowed to possess capital of their own, thus they couldn't give their grown children a financial start. Even if a parent or grandparent of a kibbutz member in

the city died, and willed his apartment to his son, the son could only use it temporarily. In theory, at least, such an apartment had to be handed over to the kibbutz.

Although we were living on the farm at Doshen, the wedding took place in Kfar Giladi, where opposition to our garin had already subsided. Later, when Naama became pregnant, we doubted that we would be able to continue living at Doshen, due to the excessive heat and other conditions unsuitable for a newborn baby.

During that period, the members of our garin felt a need to attract new members. Schaechter was appointed as director of the Seminary for Teachers in Haifa, and a high school was to be built next to it. Like the school I had taught at in Kfar Giladi, this new school was intended mainly for the children of new immigrants living in the newly built suburbs in the area. A veteran teacher, himself an immigrant from Russia, was appointed as principal. Yehuda and I were given teaching positions in that school. This enabled Naama and me to leave Doshen and move temporarily to Haifa, where my eldest daughter, Yael, was born.

In parallel to my teaching duties in Haifa, I began academic studies. My natural inclination was to mathematics, like my father, but I gave the humanities a try, since a meaningful spiritual interaction with young boys and girls, I thought, was centered there, not in the natural sciences. So I took up history and sociology in what later became the University of Haifa. I was quite successful academically, but after my first year I became frustrated at not having encountered any teacher of spiritual stature comparable to Schaechter or Leibovitch. I concluded that in the humanities much depended on the inner quality of the teacher, while in the natural sciences, I hoped, more objective knowledge could be gained, even from mediocre

teachers. I left the university and switched to mathematics at a somewhat later date.

Feldenkrais

At this junction in my life I encountered new influences. One was Moshe Feldenkrais, a truly remarkable man. By profession he was a physicist, who had written his doctoral thesis in France, during the late 1930s, under Joliot-Curie. In parallel he had become interested in the Japanese martial arts and practiced Jujitsu. He attained high ranks and wrote a booklet in Hebrew, describing the principles of the art of self-defense. His personal work on issues of movement and the human body drove him to broader research on physical dysfunctions and their healing, an area in which he proved to be a creative genius. His first book, *The Body and Mature Behavior*, established his reputation as an original thinker in this field. His most impressive contributions, however, were his individual treatments, on one hand, and his group exercises and instructions on the other. I joined one of his classes and also established personal contact with him. He told me about Mathias Alexander, the stage performer who had lost his voice, worked on himself in front of a mirror, and developed his own method of bodily “directions”. Alexander became a legendary bodily healer and instructor, developing what is known today as the Alexander Method.

Feldenkrais also gave me two books in French, *Fragments d'un Enseignement Inconnu*, by P.D. Ouspensky and *Les Récits de Beelzébut*, by G.I. Gurdjieff. Feldenkrais said that, while studying in France, he had not been a disciple of Gurdjieff, but he had often met the man and his disciples and was both impressed and repulsed by him.

I did not yet know French, but what I heard from Feldenkrais encouraged me to try to read Ouspensky's book, with the help of a dictionary and a book of French grammar. I had managed a few pages when I learned that English versions of these books were available, and that the French versions were themselves translations. While sick in bed with jaundice for three weeks, I read both books more than once. I also wrote a summary of the central ideas in Hebrew, which I gave to Schaechter, who was not very fluent in English. That summary later appeared as a chapter in a subsequent book by Schaechter.

I must say that the originality and vitality of Schaechter's writing suffered during that period, in part due to his association with us. He felt that we were realizing ideas of which he had but a theoretical understanding. In consequence he did not allow himself to continue his spiritual work as before, but dwelt mostly on subjects that interested us, including texts we had written, such as the above-mentioned chapter on Gurdjieff and Ouspensky. He also summarized ideas of other thinkers or spiritual teachers that he thought were relevant for our experiment. I was already aware of the problem that arose for him under these circumstances, but could not do much to solve it. The impact of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky, which I will elaborate on later, affected him as well, at least for an initial period.

An Exchange on Silence

Some years later I received an invitation to a private meeting with Feldenkrais, upon his return from a visit to Japan. The impression of what Feldenkrais told us in this meeting has remained with me.

Feldenkrais went to Japan to meet with an elderly master of Kyogen, a traditional theatrical art. In the past Kyogen performances had served as light intermissions between the more solemn No pieces, but later they became stylized and artistic, in their own right, much like No itself. The Japanese, according to Feldenkrais, know the entire repertoire of No and Kyogen performances by heart. They come to a performance to see how a famous actor performs this or that gesture, not to follow the stories or the entire sequence of plays scheduled for that evening. They may enter in the middle of one play, watch another and then leave in the middle of a third. This is considered normal and acceptable behavior in Japan. While they are watching, they also eat food and sip drinks they have brought with them. They do not subscribe to the Western buttoned-up style of watching theater performances.

The master whom Feldenkrais came to observe had been declared a “national treasure” by the Japanese government. This status is accorded to persons considered vital for the preservation of traditional Japanese culture. He was in his 80’s, but every day he gave lessons to both amateurs and professionals, starting very early in the morning and continuing until late in the evening. Feldenkrais worked with this master in his (Feldenkrais’s) method of bodily awareness, in exchange for observing the Japanese master’s work with his Japanese students.

The master worked by example and repetition. He would take a traditional Kyogen piece, perform one gesture, along with the accompanying text, spoken in an artificial, drawn out manner characteristic of the No and Kyogen arts. Then each student in the class would repeat the gesture and the text. He would then go on to the next gesture and text, and the next, until the end of the lesson.

Feldenkrais asked the master if this method did not lead to a somewhat mechanical style of performance. The master told him that he personally started his Kyogen studies under his father at a very early age. Only at the age of fifty did he begin to feel that his performance ceased to be studied and became an integral part of him. This realization had caused him great satisfaction, he said, because his father had told him that he too had had the same experience at that age.

One of the amateur students of that master was a famous Japanese television star. Once, at the end of a lesson, she approached the master with a question. Everyone in the room came closer to listen. Feldenkrais asked someone to translate what was said, but was signaled to be quiet. Later they explained to him that in Japan there is a traditional art known as Ma . It consists of adjusting and listening closely to the silent intervals between spoken words. The television actress and the Kyogen master were the greatest living artists of Ma in Japan. Consequently everyone was listening, not to what they were saying, but to the silences between their words.

Gurdjieff and Ouspensky

After my initial reading of the books by Gurdjieff and Ouspensky that I received from Feldenkrais, as well as their English translations, I became profoundly impressed with their ideas. It was as if a secret treasury of knowledge had been revealed, knowledge that superseded whatever I had pretended to know so far.

Man, according to Gurdjieff, was actually a machine, moved by external and internal impulses. That applied to me personally and to all of us. What meaning could then be ascribed to our idea of a collective evening prayer or