IN THE SERVICE OF ISRAEL

Yitzhack (Ijo) Rager



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Translated from Hebrew by Judith Appleton

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Although it is several years since Yitzhack "Ijo" Rager served as President of Israel Bonds, he is remembered vividly and with much affection by the lay leaders and staff who were privileged to work with him. Ijo's warmth, humor, fine intelligence and passionate commitment to every worthwhile task he undertook endeared him to many, both in his public life and among his wide circle of friends and associates. His career was varied – journalism, public service, Jewish activism and high political office. In each area he made his mark and distinctive contribution. He left a record of achievement to be emulated. Ijo's story is the State of Israel's story, for his life and work mirrored the tumultuous, sometimes painful and tragic, sometimes jubilant and ecstatic, events and developments that have led to the emergence of a strong, vibrant and thriving nation. He wrote this book during his final illness. Through the prism of his extraordinary career, the reader will learn a great deal about such subjects as Israel's political life, the great Soviet-Jewish Aliyah and the ascendance of Beersheba as the center of the Negev and the development of this vast desert. These pages comprise a testament to a life of action and fulfillment, a life that benefited and inspired thousands of people. We are privileged to present this English translation of Ijo's work as a tribute to his memory. Our gratitude to Dr. Bracha Rager for graciously granting us publication rights for this edition. I am sure you will find it engaging and edifying.

Gideon Patt,
President & CEO
State of Israel Bonds

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"Ijo, you have never refused any mission on behalf of our nation."

Yitzhak Shamir

Preface

Elie Wiesel

Ijo the soldier, Ijo the diplomat, the correspondent, the journalist. Traveler, husband, father. Ijo the politician, president of the Israel Bonds Development Corporation, Mayor of Beersheba. Despite his many roles, Ijo remained the same. Neither time nor events affected his outlook on people or on the world. Ijo, the indefatigable activist. Man of a thousand projects. Eternal optimist. He was part and parcel of Israel's political and cultural landscape which was orphaned by his untimely death. I think of him – and I see his smile, the smile that was on his face at our first meeting and at our last: it was the same smile. Was it this warm and open smile that enabled him to approach a stranger and leave him as a friend – and above all a friend of Israel? No one could resist him. And so with this very smile Ijo tells his tale in these pages full of charm and humor, describing the highlights of his life, and we read them with a smile. His trip to Yugoslavia with Emperor Haile Selassie, his visit to de Gaulle, his numerous missions both official and unofficial – his talent as a storyteller is apparent. I remember our first conversation. He describes it here. I was in Paris to celebrate the publication of one of my novels, and Ijo interviewed me for Israeli Radio. He asked his questions with professional curiosity only – with neither arrogance nor hatred. He set no verbal traps to trip me up the way the average correspondent would have done to obtain a scoop. Ijo had a genuine and sincere interest in what I was doing and what I hoped to do in my writing. Naturally, I found him likeable. He accompanied me in a taxi when I left, and I must admit that his courtesy surprised me. It was only after a short while that I realized all this was second nature to him: his bearing was that of a born aristocrat.

For him, it was an honor to be a Jew. Our ties were strengthened by our joint activities on behalf of Russian Jews. Together with Meir Rosenne and Ephraim Tary, who like him belonged to the same team in the Prime Minister's office, we were animated by the same passion, united in a fruitful partnership, immersed in this adventure of Jewish destiny. Our meetings became more and more frequent. Ijo always had new ideas: to alert some editorial writer, to lobby some senator, to get a certain movie star to work for us – nothing seemed impossible to him. Often we were disappointed but Ijo never lost his optimism. If he failed in one place, he would try his best elsewhere. Using different means. Later on, one had to hear Ijo speak about "his" town, Beersheba. He was intoxicated by it. Intoxicated by love and purposeful action. In order to advance its development, he was ready to do anything, to accept any sacrifice. There again, setbacks never frightened nor discouraged him. I don't remember Ijo in anything but a good mood, projecting faith and full of hope. Didn't he ever suffer a crisis? Moments of depression? If so – and I believe that he must have – he preferred not to speak of them. If he referred to them, which he did rarely, it was so as to draw lessons from them, and reasons to hope. Even on his hospital bed in Manhattan, it is without any trace of sadness that he spoke of his terrible, mysterious illness, which he battled valiantly and proudly. And he smiled.

Chapter One:

Paris: The Lion of Judah

For the past eight years I have been mayor of Beersheba, president of the Israel Bonds Organization for four years, and have served in various other jobs and positions – yet I always fill in landing forms as "Profession: Journalist." As a journalist, I have been editor of *Bemahane Gadna* (IDF publication for youth), a radio news editor, Knesset correspondent, Kol Israel radio correspondent in Paris and chief European correspondent, editor of the daily *Hayom*. I have also been managing editor of *Ha'aretz* Daily Newspaper (yes, for four whole days!), and even an editor for *Hadshot Ha'Erev* (evening news) – a paper which was planned but never appeared (more about that later).

When the subject of journalism comes up, I can't help thinking about an incident involving His Excellency Haile Selassie, Emperor of Ethiopia, or more precisely, Khile Selassie – meaning the "power of the trinity" – with the threefold title, "King of Kings, Lion of Judah, the Lord's Chosen."

The year was 1963. After years of violent struggle between Morocco and Algeria, a peace conference was organized in Bamako, the capital of Mali, headed by the Ethiopian ruler, who succeeded in making peace between the combatants. In Europe as well as in the Middle East, and of course, here in Israel, this was a hot news item, and I felt that it was very important to cover it from Paris. This was not only because it was important in and of itself, but also since the peace conference was held in a French speaking African country (Mali had formerly been French Sudan), it received wide coverage by the French media.

Some time before this, at one of the cocktail parties in Paris that correspondents find themselves at, I had made the acquaintance of Dr. Menseh Lemmah, Ambassador of Ethiopia to France and Switzerland. It occurred to me to telephone him and ask if he would be so kind as to

fill in several details in this story, since as an Israeli news correspondent I had special interest in peacemaking between countries, especially when Arab states are involved. "The Emperor is about to make a stopover in Paris. I am about to leave for the airport to greet him, and he'll be here for a short time" I was told by the Ambassador. When I asked if there was a chance that the Emperor would agree to be interviewed, his answer was, "Why not?" When I asked "So what do we do?" he replied: "Come to Orly at 3 o'clock. The Emperor will be there until his connecting flight. I'll arrange it for you."

In those days, people didn't just pick up the telephone, dial The Voice of Israel and broadcast, as is done now. In order to send a story, I had to order a broadcast line by telegram hours in advance. This was very expensive, and those who worked on the news of the day, who had to make payments within the budget set by Jerusalem, would always demand to know in advance what you were going to broadcast about. I knew that at this point it would be better not to say that I had an interview with the Emperor of Ethiopia. I sent the telegram in the usual manner and asked for an open line to be reserved for me for a few hours. This involved a risk, but I went happily to Orly Airport.

There was heavy security at Orly. France has several police forces, the most serious being the CRS special forces, of which I noticed many at the airport. When I reached the terminal that Ambassador Lemmah invited me to and got out of the car I heard a band playing, and had just enough time to go in and see the Emperor delicately stepping back onto the plane from which he had just disembarked! There went my interview. I was in deep distress and real shock. All of a sudden, out of the corner of my eye, I saw my acquaintance, Ambassador Lemmah, in the back of the Emperor's party, heading for the plane as well. I pushed my way in back of the special forces, shouting out, "Dr. Lemmah, what is happening?" He shrugged his shoulders, clearly in distress, and yelled out the name of a hotel in Geneva, shouting out to me, "Give me a ring."

Depressed and mortified, I returned to Paris. How was I going to explain the open line that I had ordered? Whatever had I ordered it for? But I got very lucky, as all of a sudden there was a big news event in Paris, which I was able to cover with a story broadcast over that very same open line. It seems that Jerusalem had the impression that I had

foreseen the important news almost prophetically, or through a tip of some kind, that De Gaulle had been going to say some very important things at a press conference. It was a wonder that they did not realize from my voice that I was in shock and distracted.

About an hour and a half later I rang up the hotel in Geneva and, indeed, Dr. Lemmah picked up. "Look," he answered to my amazement, "the weatherman told us that if the Emperor didn't take off immediately, he might not be able to take off that day, and the next morning he had to fly from Geneva for an official state visit to Yugoslavia." "That's all very well and good," I replied, "but you ruined my career." "What's the big problem," he said, "you're not far from me. Just slip over here and I'll arrange the interview in Geneva."

I had to decide fast. Even if weather permitted flying, there was no reason to phone Jerusalem for permission to fly to Geneva. If I didn't come out with something concrete, I would be a laughing stock to my colleagues. I especially did not want to disappoint my boss and mentor, Hanoch Gibton, whom I knew liked me and appreciated my work – he would not be too happy with me if I failed here. I'm going, I said to myself, even if I have to pay for the trip myself. I phoned up all the airlines – only to be told that there were no more flights this evening. I could drive all night, or leave the Gare du Nord on the 11 p.m. train, reaching Geneva at dawn. It was already late, and I was in my office on the Rue de Richelieu on the Grands Boulevards: I had no time to go to my apartment on the Porte Saint Cloud in the XVI Arrondissement. I phoned home and told my (first) wife Tikva and my son Eviatar that I had to go, and "just as I am," without even a toothbrush, I drove to the Gare du Nord with just enough time to catch the train.

So there I was, travelling to Geneva, because the Ethiopian Ambassador told me to present myself at 8:00 a.m. in the hotel, and that I would have an interview with the Emperor. And so, there I was: I reached Geneva at dawn, at 6:50 a.m., grabbed a taxi, reached the hotel, rushed to the concierge to request a razor, burst into the public washroom of the hotel, shaved with a piece of a regular bar of soap I found there, and straightened my tie. At 8 a.m. sharp I was there with my tape recorder in the reception hall of the Emperor's royal suite, and was welcomed by Dr. Lemmah.

And I saw – that I was close enough to interview the Emperor. I

heard a phone ring. Dr. Lemmah came over to me, and said, "Sorry, but the fighting has erupted again between Algeria and Morocco, and the Emperor is now speaking with Ahmed Ben Bella, the President of Algeria." I turned on the tape recorder. The commotion in the room was a story in and of itself. I was three paces away from the Emperor, who was mediating in the conflict, and I saw him making telephone calls in his role as peacemaker. I had a "heavy" story.

There is no need to say how full of excitement I was, sitting there completely tense. What does a person say to an Emperor? How do you speak to an emperor in general and to the Emperor of Ethiopia in particular? As a young boy growing up in Jerusalem, I used to go on walks with my older sister Sonia, on the Neviim Street (Street of the Prophets) and Abyssinians Street (which is what Ethiopia Street used to be called then) and she would show me the "Palace of the Abyssinians". That was what they called the beautiful, large building that they said was where the Emperor lived in Jerusalem now that he was in exile. This was after the British saved him in 1936 when the Italians invaded Ethiopia, or Abyssinia, as it was called then. My sister would say to me: "The Abyssinian king lives here, and they say that he strolls around the garden." That was what the children of Jerusalem thought; but the truth was, that he had lived in another location in Jerusalem. I already knew what Abyssinians were, because two dark-skinned men in red turbans used to stand on Zion Square in downtown Jerusalem, and sell chestnuts from tiny burning braziers with little chimneys.

The conversation with Ben Bella ended, with the Emperor persuading him to call for a cease-fire. Dr. Menseh Lemmah said to me quite casually, "Please go in, I'll translate." I entered the room. The Emperor greeted me, standing, and I bowed my head and said, "Your Majesty, I remember you from when I was a boy in Jerusalem."

The Emperor said something in Amharic, then turned and left the room.

"What's going on?" I asked Dr. Lemmah, "What did I do?"

Dr. Lemmah smiled. "The Emperor is inviting you along in his airplane on his official visit to Yugoslavia."

So there I was in Geneva, without even a change of underwear. My office didn't know where I was. The "Voice of Israel" Broadcasting probably called my home in the morning and Tikva told them I was in

Geneva. I could just see them winking at each other, thinking that was some story he told his wife, because they surely didn't send him to Geneva. "When?" I asked Dr. Lemmah, and he replied: "Now." " I don't have a visa for Yugoslavia," I said to him, only to hear the reply: "It shouldn't matter to you. You just get into the royal airplane and go."

I dashed downstairs. Lucky for me, the hotel shops were already open for business, and I was able to buy what I could, several pairs of underwear, socks, a shaving kit, and a Swissair bag. So we were all ready: the bag, me, and my Uher tape recorder. I still don't have my interview, I said to myself, but another trifle is being added onto my story: I'm flying in the royal plane as the Emperor's guest. I decided to cable Kol Israel from the hotel with the news that the Emperor of Ethiopia had succeeded in obtaining a cease-fire. Even though the news agencies had already probably spread the news, I let Jerusalem know that I had been in the same room when the Emperor was talking with Ben Bella and that I would send them the tape at the first possible opportunity. There wasn't much more than this that I could do. Let's remember that this was 1963: it wasn't possible to phone anywhere by just going to a phone with a credit card, and call, let's say, Timbuktu, let alone Kol Israel in Jerusalem. I ran into the room and said to Dr. Lemmah, "From now on, I'm sticking with you – whither thou goest, I go." He laughed, maybe because it reminded him of something – his first name, Menseh, was the Amharic version of the biblical Hebrew name Menashe.

Within a few minutes, I found myself speeding along in a Mercedes following another Mercedes through the streets of Geneva, going through a side gate of the airport, and reaching the airplane. The Emperor got on, followed by everyone, including yours truly, and there I was, sitting down inside the plane. Half of the aircraft was taken up by the Emperor's living space, including a living room and bedroom. I was seated in the other half with Dr. Lemmah and several of the retinue. I could hardly believe that this was happening to me. Actually – and now I just began to remember – Yugoslavia was a Communist country. I was an Israeli, without a visa... As a radio correspondent for the official broadcasting station, the Voice of Israel, I was traveling on a blue Israeli service passport, and not on a black diplomatic passport. I

immediately decided that I wasn't going to worry about a thing – I was an Israeli journalist, doing his job as he understood it, following a once-in-a lifetime story.

All of a sudden during the flight I had the thought that maybe in Yugoslavia the Emperor would have to deal with all sorts of protocol and ceremonial visits, and that maybe there would be no chance for me to get my interview there either! I got up from my seat and went over to Dr. Lemmah. "What do you think of the idea of interviewing the Emperor on the plane?" "Good idea." was the answer.

He approached the Emperor with the idea and returned to me saying, "Yes, please go into the Emperor's living room." I went in, bowed my head, and thanked the Emperor for granting me an interview. With trembling hands, I operated the tape. During the next forty minutes, I interviewed the Emperor of Ethiopia. Among the questions, I asked him if now that he succeeded in his mediation and there would be peace between Morocco and Algeria, perhaps he would try the same with us and our neighbors. The Emperor replied: "I would be very happy to do so." One scoop after another. At the close of the interview, he said to me: "I want you to know that we are very pleased about the cooperation with the Israelis. We are very satisfied with what you are doing in Ethiopia."

Let us recall that our ties and relations with Ethiopia at that time were very close, but totally secret. We operated undercover, not necessarily out of our choice. We were training Haile Selassie's army, and it was not known in the Middle East. I only knew that this was classified as top secret information. An interview for the Voice of Israel would therefore have first class political importance just by having taken place; however, such an open statement by the Emperor about how pleased he was by what Israel was doing in his country would be enormously important. What more could a journalist ask for?

I thanked the Emperor, left him and made my way to the rear of the plane. Once again I put my shaking hands on the tape to turn on "play." I didn't hear a thing. I rewound the tape and tried again – nothing! No interview!

Meanwhile, Dr. Lemmah left the Emperor as well, and asked me to let him hear the tape. I tried to tell him that the airplane made it hard to hear. I succeeded in putting him off for a while, but I was sick,

totally heartsick. Total embarrassment in front of the Emperor. Plus missing the scoop of my life. How was this possible when the Uher was considered top of the line. The flight was turning into a nightmare. Near the end of the flight, I rewound the tape once again in a desperate last effort, and without hope, I pressed "play" and heard some strange noises. Then I finally realized that, in my excitement, I had taped the Emperor at the slowest speed of tape – and not at the speed of a normal broadcast, but at the speed in which you could tape for hours. The entire interview was contained on 10 centimeters of tape, and it was at the very beginning. That was why I couldn't even hear the strange noises, since I figured out that I hadn't replayed it from the very beginning. Now I played the tape at slow speed, and it was all there – loud and clear. Now I had an interview with the Emperor of Ethiopia. No wonder I broke into a sweat and shook with emotion. It was very near landing time.

The royal airplane landed in Belgrade. Getting off were the Emperor of Ethiopia and his daughter, who traveled everywhere with him and on whom he leaned, Ambassador Menseh Lemmah, Mr. Menseh Haile, the Emperor's personal secretary, and our Paris Correspondent, Mr. Yitzhack "Ijo" Rager. And down below, near the ramp, stood Marshal Tito, Yugoslavia's ruler, shaking the Emperor's hand, his daughter's hand, and so on and so forth, until he shook yours truly's hand. Thank heavens that I was blessed with the stature and looks of an official person, especially in my fine clothing. While the Emperor walked slowly, with his imperial steps, towards the honor guard of Yugoslav soldiers wearing swords over long blue coats with gold buttons, I managed to slip away from the official party but kept eye contact with them. I managed to walk slowly but surely in back of the honor guard, trying to look like a VIP who knows his duty, when I saw that we were getting closer to the row of diplomats standing there to welcome the official guest of the State. All of a sudden, whom did I see in the middle of the line, but Avraham Kidron, the amiable redhead who was Israel's chargé d'affaires in Yugoslavia, with the rank of minister.

I stood there looking straight at him from a distance. He saw me and finally shook his head as if to say to himself, no, it couldn't be the same Ijo Rager. He took off his glasses, cleaned them, and replaced

them. I gave him my widest smile. The man was astounded, but I could see that he was very happy to see me. The Israelis were so isolated in Yugoslavia – who would travel there in those days? Haile Selassie was ending the round of handshakes. I took advantage of the moment of disorder and ran to Kidron. He asked me what I was doing there, and I replied that it was a long story, but I could go with him in his car – rather than with the Ethiopians – and tell him on the way. We got into the car. The Yugoslavians had already taken care to have schoolchildren line the runway and wave flags. Tito wanted very much to make a place for himself as a leader of the Third World, and the Emperor was a key figure in this matter. I was in the middle of telling Kidron the story, and all of a sudden this redhead's face went totally white: "Ijo Rager, are you trying to tell me that the way things have turned out it's as if I am the one who got you into Yugoslavia without a visa?" I answered, "I'm a guest of the Emperor of Ethiopia and I'm here on official business." "If that's the case," he answered, "we're not going to the hotel. We're going straight to the legation." Right then and there in the legation he immediately wrote a diplomatic letter to the Yugoslav Foreign Ministry explaining that the Government of Israel respectfully requests that it grant a visa to Mr. Yitzhack Rager, who entered Yugoslavia "under extraordinary circumstances," before he could obtain a visa. And so my passport received the stamp of the Yugoslav visa; only after this was completed did Kidron take me to the hotel.

However, just before, when I was at the legation, I telephoned Radio Belgrade and asked them to open up some broadcasting lines to Israel in the afternoon. I explained my technical difficulties regarding the tape that was recorded at slow speed, and that that was what must be transmitted. They were extremely cooperative and generous with their help, allowing me to "doctor" the write-up in their studio, to edit it and separate the "scoops" in the Emperor's words, and the next day, on the weekend news special, I "exploded" one of the biggest scoops of my life.

Chapter Two:

Jerusalem: The Voice of Israel Broadcasting – Kol Israel

I had a very good reason for beginning this book with my interview with the Emperor of Ethiopia, since this book is about the high points of my life, in the service of Israel, as I look back as I write this in 1997. I am dictating to my daughter Avishag from my sickbed in Beersheba's Soroka hospital. Why my sickbed, when I was healthy for my entire life? Last summer, I went through a series of tests to see why I was having pains in my stomach, and the doctors diagnosed "diverticulitis" of the large intestine. In late 1996, the pains were accompanied by swelling; tests showed the fluid drained from the stomach contained cancerous cells. No one knew what the source was, and we were all at a loss for ideas. What was the best treatment? Where was the growth? We couldn't locate it. My wife Bracha and I then decided to fly to the USA and consult with a doctor recommended by her "cronies" – she is a physician in cancer research. This was Dr. David Kelsen, a Jewish doctor at Memorial Hospital in New York City. I landed at 6 a.m. and by 10 a.m. I was being examined. Dr. Kelsen immediately diagnosed cancer of the appendix and suggested that we meet with Dr. Daniel Koit, the top surgeon in the hospital. Dr. Koit examined me and decided to operate. (Let me just mention here that the cost of my hospital stay and operation was $32,000, and that no one operates without prepayment. After telephoning three friends and Bracha's daughter Gali, the money was raised within four hours. Within two days I was on the operating table.) We hoped that the appendix could be removed together with the growth and whatever was necessary. Several hours after the operation, Dr. Koit came into my room, gave me a hug, and confessed that he did not take out the tumor. "It's such

an advanced condition," he explained, "that I was afraid to cause irreparable damage to your future quality of life. It's possible that I could have succeeded in removing the tumorous sections, but it would have damaged your digestive system so severly that it would be impossible to live with." So, there I was in New York after a difficult abdominal operation, still with a tumor. No, it certainly was not pleasant. When a person is sick and weak, he experiences the isolation that comes with such a distressing situation. Feeling like this, I had to summon up all the help and mental strength in order to deal with the effects of this fatal disease. That is why I am so grateful to all those who are helping me and supporting me during these difficult days. It would have been extremely difficult for me to go through these hardships without the wonderful support of my family: my wife Bracha, my son Eviatar, and my daughter Avishag. When my beloved son Eviatar was told that I was going to have an operation, he immediately closed his office and flew to New York, to sit by me and hold my hand during the difficult postoperative hours. Gali left her young daughter in California and flew to New York to be near me, too. I have had the privilege of having a wonderful family from whom I am drawing strength right now. I wish them a long and blessedly good life. I have no words to express how thankful I am and full of praise for the medical teams that took care of me in Israel and abroad.

Now that the future is unclear, it's understandable that I feel the need to set down certain things about myself, and to describe significant incidents in my life. I had been toying with the idea for a long time, that when I had the free time I would sit down to write a comprehensive and detailed book about all these events. But fate intervened, and instead of having free time the way I had wanted, there were different circumstances. Maybe it would be more fitting to write a short story that would skip about and be superficial rather than comprehensive. But perhaps it's also for the best. I would like to mention how thankful I am to my beloved daughter Avishag. She has been sitting at my bedside at the Soroka Medical Hospital in Beersheba, where I was hospitalized after my difficult flight from New York. When I feel strong enough between treatments, she tapes me and takes dictation. Amatziah Porat, my close childhood friend who saw us sitting there, immediately volunteered to edit and prepare the

manuscript for publication. Shlomo "Yosh" Gafni, an old and devoted friend, took on the job of helping to publish the book. Blessings upon them all! Under these circumstances, with my being unable to go back and check every detail, please forgive me for any error or slight distortion that may have crept into the book, due to a slight blurring of memory, or imagination, or wishful thinking.

I had very good reasons for opening these memoirs with the story of my interview of the Emperor of Ethiopia. Perhaps this incident symbolized for me not only the very quintessential journalistic experience, but also, especially under the present circumstances, this describes things that I did and certain activities when I was at the height of my powers and during my best years.

How did I become Kol Israel's radio correspondent in Paris and Europe? I had always loved journalism. As a child, I was entranced by the *Haverenu* ("Our Friends") magazine that published pieces by the elementary school children of the Tachkemoni School in Jerusalem where I was a student. When I was in the Officers' Course during my obligatory army service, together with my dear departed friend Eliahu Shahaf we edited a monthly magazine that we titled "One out of Eight," which referred to the eight months that our course lasted (this was the long course that we would joking call "the admiral's course", after the exercise of sea landing in the incredibly cold water). When I was demobilized from the IDF, I received an offer to run the student house of the Friends of the Hebrew University, a very ideal job offer for a young student, but I was still attracted to journalism, and had also completed some projects in that field.

So there I was, one day in the second half of the 1950s, innocently walking along the street, when I met Arinka Arad, a fellow who was with me in basic training. (Today he is better known as the father of judo champion Yael Arad). I asked him what he was doing, and he replied that he was a radio news editor. I exclaimed "Wow! What fun!" He then asked me, "Do you want to be a radio editor?" In short, the fellow took me to see Zvi Moshe Kenner, and said to him: "Tzemek (ZeMeK, his nickname from his initials), this is my friend Ijo Rager, who has already done some editing, such as for *Bemahane Gadna* – let's try him out." Kenner, who was a very likeable man, asked me a few questions, then said to me: "Go to the next room, take the morning

papers, read the editorials, and give me a survey of the press." I did so, and brought it back to Kenner. Then he said, "Give this to the typist, then to Yitzhak Golan, the news editor." Yitzhak Golan sat there, and read it while I stood there. Then he raised his eyes from the page and asked me: "Who wrote this?" When I replied that I did, he said: "It's going on the air exactly as is. I have no corrections. It's perfect." So that's how I became a radio news editor overnight.

Maybe in the meanwhile, the quick-witted reader is already rightly suspicious that we are talking about a person whose ambition and drive are spurring him forward mercilessly. I had just been appointed news editor, but I was already dreaming of a new position: the Kol Israel radio reporter stationed at the UN Headquarters in New York. We must remember that I am talking about the late 1950s and the early 60s. There was no television yet in Israel. Radio was the primary source of news information, and the UN correspondent was the very cornerstone of truth. As I already spoke English fluently, and I felt that this was the proper job for me, I said as well to Hanoch Gibton, my boss, the energetic and wise director of the radio station. Hanoch would never give an immediate and clear answer. He furrowed his thick brows, nodded his head, and said, "I heard you." I continued with my job as news editor, and when they offered me to edit the weekly Knesset program, I agreed. This was a rather amusing job, and I got to know the Knesset very well, through and through. I remember once when Shmuel Dayan (Moshe Dayan's father) came over to me, and asked me if I had heard his important speech. I said "Of course, and I even edited out your coughing," holding out the piece of tape to him, with the cough on it. I had many great and rewarding days working for the Voice of Israel broadcasting.

I must tell the story of at least one episode that shook the nation, with myself in the eye of the storm. It was not my fault, but I nevertheless enjoyed it. On March 31, 1959, Tikva was in the maternity ward ready to give birth to our firstborn son, Eviatar, while I went to work as usual. Of course, I asked the hospital to keep me posted on any "developments." All of a sudden, out of the clear blue sky, I received a phone call from the IDF spokesman, ordering us to operate the general call-up tape. I telephoned them back to make sure that this was true, and then I broke open the security cabinet from

which we took out the tape that was supposed to announce the mobilization of the reserves and the call-up in seventeen languages. Of all the code words that that we broadcast, the only one that I still remember is "water ducks." The entire nation was in shock. In the Knesset, they were having the final discussion of the budget, since it was March 31st. Menahem Begin, head of the opposition, stood on the podium, attacking the government with vigor, when someone handed him a slip of paper with the news of the mobilization. He immediately stood still in front of everyone and said, "At such a time, when the IDF is called up, we won't vote against the budget. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman." The senior government official in the hall was then Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett, who had no idea whatsoever what was going on. They tried to find Prime Minister Ben-Gurion, but they were informed that he was attending a concert in Tel Aviv. Moshe Sharett telephoned the Mann Auditorium, and said, "This is Moshe Sharett speaking. Please get me David Ben-Gurion." The telephone operator said, "Yes, and I'm Golda Meir, and I can't get him for you, sir." O telephone operator of little belief! There was great consternation, until after several hours it turned out that the IDF Spokesman just wanted to drill the radio – that was all. It turned out that I myself rose to this occasion splendidly, of course, and received only praise. Within one minute of receiving the operating code, I had stopped the radio broadcasting and played the tape on all the networks. However, two generals of the IDF were quickly removed from their positions. When we finally received word that this was not war, a phone call from the hospital notified me of the birth of my son. I had already had decided that I would name him Eviatar.

But, getting back to my journalistic ambitions, one day I was innocently sitting in the radio snackbar, when in came Shmuel Almog, who said to me: "You know what, I am going to NY to be the UN correspondent." I was in shock. My face drained of blood. I immediately went straight into Hanoch Gibton's office and said to him: "I have been dreaming of this job for sixteen months, and I let myself believe that you practically promised it to me, even if I had nothing official to back me up. I had the impression that we had an understanding." Hanoch curled up in his chair and said something about the need to decide whom he wanted as his news coordinator at

the editorial table, and therefore, etc., etc. so I said to him: "If the prize for good and devoted work is punishment, then I resign." Hanoch looked at me with his beautiful blue eyes and realized that I was absolutely serious. He said to me with his fox-like smile: "But Ijo, you speak French, don't you? In another two and a half months the job of Paris correspondent, chief European correspondent, will be vacant, and then you can travel there and be even more senior than the New York job." I almost said to him, what are you talking about, you know I don't speak French, what is all this? But I held my tongue just in time. If Hanoch said that I speak French, well then, I said to myself, I speak French. I rushed home and went over to my neighbors, Jacqueline and Hanan Raphael, and asked Jacqueline if she would teach me French in an accelerated, twenty-four hour a day course. She couldn't, but she had a cousin Berthe, who was an ace at teaching French. So I rushed over to Berthe, who was also married to a Raphael, and explained to her that I had exactly two and a half months to learn enough French to understand the radio and to express myself. Berthe: "It's impossible." Ijo: "With me, everything is possible." I don't care if I won't be able to write, or that I won't be able to read well at first, but I absolutely have to be able to speak." From then on, I used every available hour, every single day, with mulish obstinacy I studied French. I said to myself with a smile that if my ignorance was found out I didn't lose a thing; it was not me who said to Hanoch that I spoke French, but he was the one who said it to me.

At that time, I didn't know that just the way that I felt that I had an unspoken understanding that I was going to be the UN correspondent, there was also an understanding with Yirmiyahu Yovel (later Professor of Philosophy) that he was going to be appointed the Paris correspondent. And Yirmiyahu spoke very good French. And, there were several good souls who made it their business to ask Hanoch how was it that he was sending someone to Paris who didn't even speak French. One day, right in the middle of the news, Hanoch phoned me up and said, Ijo, check out what the French news said about Eichmann. Immediately I felt deep down that this unusual interest must mean that it was a test. I ran to the French desk, where Shlomo Gitai, the husband of Aviva Gitai who was the Officer in Charge of Presidential Pardons, and I said to him: "Shlomo, run over this press

release with me now, please. I'll read it out and you correct it." Lucky for me that I was gifted with good ear for languages, and within a few minutes I learned by heart a one-minute bulletin about Eichmann in a nearly perfect French accent. I went back to my desk, and called up Hanoch; in a pleasant and relaxed tone, very casually, I said to him: "Hanoch, this looks entirely OK to me. If you want, I'll read it to you." And I "gave it to him" in fluent French, thus shutting up all the complaints.

Chapter Three:

Paris

"Paris, I love you," goes the old French chanson. Even if the authors deny it, I insist that this song was composed with me in mind. How I do love Paris! It would take more than an entire book to describe all my experiences in this great metropolis, including my life as a radio correspondent and journalist, my spiritual and artistic life, and the great times that I had taking part in all its entertainment, both light and serious. For example, connoisseur that I am, I could devote a thick chapter of such a book on Paris to the restaurants of the City of Lights, to French food and cuisine. I am an amateur cook who knows a thing or two about cooking. The time I spent on one of my favorite pastimes in Israel did not go to waste – I had been a restaurant critic for newspapers, which gave me a chance to be the connoisseur who sampled food for a column. I had acquired the basic knowledge of this field at the feet of my mother Mina.

As a child, my mother had immigrated to Palestine from Russia in 1908. Her father, Rabbi Yisroel Yitzhak Karpachevsky was an adherent of the Habad hassidic movement, and was the head of a yeshiva in the Old City of Jerusalem, which was then under Turkish rule. Mother married David (Tadeusz) Rager, my father, in Palestine, and after several years, they left for Paris with my sister Sonia so that my father could study medicine there. As fate had it, the family was delayed for several years in Egypt, and in the cosmopolitan setting of the large city where they lived, Mother learned many culinary secrets from immigrants from the Mediterranean regions. She was already a fabulous cook in the Eastern European traditional Jewish style. And she accomplished one more thing in Egypt – she gave birth to me. When the family returned to Palestine, I was four months old, and after rolling from Tel Aviv to Bat Yam to Raanana, Afula, and Haifa, they

settled in Jerusalem when I was six years old. First we lived on the Neviim (Prophets) Street and later, for a longer time, in the Shaarei Yerushalayim neighborhood, a down to earth neighborhood that was a veritable ingathering of the ethnic groups, and all the ethnic cuisines. Mother polished and varied her culinary talents further, so it is no wonder that she raised such a "gourmet" eater as myself. Perhaps I should mention here that my father David ended up studying engineering, and he was to become the first City Engineer of Beersheba in the future. The fact that my identity card named "Egypt" as my place of birth did not cause me any damage at all later, neither among the soldiers in my regiments, nor in politics. Let's say that I did nothing to deny anyone's suspicion of my being of Mizrahi origin – a Jew with ethnic origins in Arab countries – and since I am being honest about all my shortcomings now, I suspect that I sometimes encouraged such a belief.

However, my mother didn't just raise a good eater. Mina Rager also knew just how to pamper me and make me feel loved, and it was as clear as day that there was no son better than her Ijo, her Itzik. It's no wonder that my mother raised me to be a man so confident of his own powers, that he had the colossal nerve to travel to Paris as the Voice of Israel Broadcasting correspondent without knowing French. I already told you how I hurried to learn a bit of French before going – but did this little bit of French suffice for getting along there? And so, I went to Paris alone even before bringing my family over, and I signed up for another intensive language course in the Chateau de Vieux Moulin ("the palace of the old flour mill") and this is where I truly learned French. Day and night. I was twenty-nine years old, not particularly bad looking, and in a charming palace, not far from Rambouillet, the summer residence of the French presidents. You can imagine that there might have been quite a few impediments to studying in the presence of the lovely female students from all over the world, especially the Scandinavians. One day I went over to the teacher, and said to her: "Look, I am really hard pressed for time. In six weeks, I have to begin a very intense job that requires a good knowledge of the language. This course is very fast, but maybe you could advise me how to speed up my learning?" The teacher gave me her best advice in English: "Get yourself a sleeping teacher." So you can see how she suggested that I

learn French the hard way. At any rate, my situation improved quite a bit after that course. I don't know how things are today, but then, the French were very chauvinist and impatient, even rude, to anyone who did not know their language.

From time to time, when I needed precise vital information, I would use a special technique. I would phone up, and deliberately, in halting French, I would say: "Monsieur (or Mademoiselle), I am a stranger here. Could I please speak to you in English?" The answer would be, of course, "Non, monsieur." "German?" "Non, monsieur." "Italian?" "Non, monsieur." "Spanish?" "Non, monsieur." From one language to another the response of "no, sir" was weaker, and when ego of monsieur or mademoiselle was ground sufficiently low, I would then say, "OK, then I'll speak French, but please be patient." It did not take a long time for me to speak quite fluent French, and at the end of my four years' working I Paris, I spoke French almost as well as a native-born Parisian.

So many interesting things happened to me in those four years that an entire book would not be sufficient to describe them all. I already told the story of my interview with the Emperor of Ethiopia in full. Here I can only offer up the choicest tidbits of the most important political stories, and the most piquant ones. In order to allow me to sum up with important matters, let me start with some light ones.

One day, the phone rang, with the caller identifying himself and saying, "I have just been appointed as the manager of Agrexco in Paris, and I would like to speak with you." Begging his pardon for my ignorance, I asked the caller what was Agrexco. It turned out to be the company established by the Israeli Government to market Israel's agricultural produce abroad, and, since the best crop besides citrus fruits was the avocado, the gentleman wanted to consult with me how one markets avocados to the French. If truth be told, I needed this like a hole in the head. Later I'll describe how all sorts of Israelis and members of the Israeli community in France descended upon me and got on my nerves, and this time was no exception. I had my own work to do in Paris. I was the only Israel radio correspondent in Europe. Each and every night at midnight I had to go to the "Drugstore" on the Champs Elysees to get the first papers – *Le Figaro* and *The New York Herald Tribune* – and to see if there was any piece of exciting news

from their correspondents in the Arab countries so that I could have enough time to include it in my 6 a.m. broadcast to Israel. I remember one midnight standing near the lamppost, totally concentrated in my reading the paper, when one of the beauties of the night came up to me and said, "Allo, dear. Let's go and have a good time, eh?" I replied, "Sorry, darling, but I have to work." She then said, "What, you work nights?" My answer was, "Yes, my dear, in your profession and mine we work nights." I was so angry about our dear Agrexco friend, that I shot from the hip, giving him two pieces of advice then and there: "Look," I said to him, "you have to get into the hearts and minds of the French that the avocado is some sort of potent aphrodisiac. And secondly, try to convince a famous chef to present avocado recipes on television." He asked me how does one go about accomplishing all that, and I said that I would think about it.

The next day I suggested a plan to him. There were seven popular nightclubs in Paris, and each evening's program in each nightclub featured someone who would tell dirty jokes. "It seems to me," I said to him, " that all of these comedians are Jewish. Go and meet with them, and ask them for a small favor. Every time that someone in the joke gets a phone call from a lady, and he is about to call a cab and go over to her place, he should add, 'So he ate an avocado, called a cab, ' etc. This subconscious propaganda worked wonders. Within six months, we managed to associate the avocado with male vigor. The French still believe today, for example, that eating oysters is good for sexual performance, and since no one has proven otherwise, the oyster sellers continue to make money hand over fist.

The second idea was a bit more difficult to accomplish. In the meantime, I found myself looking over the material and getting interested in it despite myself – after all, we were involved in matters of food and cooking! The greatest chef in France at that time was Raymond Olivier. I telephoned him and explained that I wanted to interview him for a broadcast on the Israeli radio station. He was quite pleased with the idea. When I interviewed him about his unique approach to the profession and asked my questions, the distinguished chef exclaimed to me: "I see that you know a bit about cooking yourself!" I answered that I did, that my mother taught me and that since then I have been pursuing further studies in cooking for my own

pleasure and am developing my culinary skills. He murmured, "Very interesting, very interesting." Then I asked him, "Tell me, please, how is it that you have no avocado recipes?" He answered that he had had no time to deal with it. I said to him: "Look, it seems to me that the Israeli company, Agrexco, wants to publicize and promote the avocado, and maybe they would be interested in having you prepare a booklet of recipes. Would you agree?" He answered "absolutely yes, it would be a challenge." And so I referred Agrexco to Raymond Olivier.

But even before I finished my interview with the great chef, I heard him say to me, "Young fellow, I am prepared to teach you how to cook." I was astonished, and liked the idea a lot. Of course, I was forced to explain how busy I was, and that every afternoon was completely taken up with preparations for the next broadcast. So he said that I should come to the morning classes. The afternoons are for the patisserie lessons. And so, the end of the matter saw yours truly learning to cook at the feet of France's master chef, and even being rewarded the Cordon Bleu degree. However, officially I have no certificate, although everyone who ate a meal prepared by me could tell that I knew a thing or two about cooking. In the future, I would attain the same degree of expertise in the restaurants and cuisine of London and New York. But, as the British say, "The proof of the pudding is in the eating." There were days that all the diplomats' wives in London would phone me up to ask what and how to serve their guests.

Let us continue onto another matter: one day, I was notified that a delegation from Metropolitan Holon, a growing suburb of Tel Aviv, had arrived in France on a friendship mission to Sirène, a suburb of Paris. I was asked most emphatically to cover the important event. When I arrived, I saw the honorable group of provincial city council members headed by the provincial mayor arriving in strange suits and unsuitable ties to a festive dinner that the Municipality had arranged for them. I could see that the burghers of Sirène had seen fit to order the very best food that their city could offer, and the very choicest Rothschild wines form the cellars. We sat at the long, tastefully set table, and the host Mayor began his greetings. Our mayor, who spoke only Hebrew and Yiddish, said a few words in Hebrew, and the representative from the Embassy translated them, editing them masterfully – he edited out about half. As the festive meal began, the

wine waiter began pouring the wine for the guests, but the mayor of Holon covered his wineglass with his hand and said, "No, no, tea." In other words, he wanted to drink tea with the meal, while the French were offering Rothschild wines. Several faces paled in the hall, and the Embassy representative managed to whisper to the mayor that he was insulting the hosts, and that it would be proper to accept at least one glass of wine. "Okay, okay," the Israeli mayor responded, but afterwards, he turned to his wife, who was seated on the other side of the table, and said to her in Yiddish, "I'm telling you, is this *dreck*." It seems that our mayor did not remember that during the several years of German occupation the French had managed to learn a bit of German, and certainly they knew what *Dreck* meant. I certainly wished that the earth could open up its mouth and swallow me up from shame.

I'd like to put in a few words here about the average Israeli. Paris was at the time a city extremely friendly to Israel. The diplomatic ties that had been created during the cooperation over the Suez affair became closer and closer. There were times during which the French Ambassador to Israel, Pierre Gilbert, was almost like a member of the Government, and it was no wonder that a square was named after him in Shikun Lamed in Tel Aviv. Paris was a pilgrimage site for every Israeli tourist, as well. Israel of the 1960s was threatened by enemies from without, and by severe economic conditions and rules from within. This seems to be why every Israeli who had managed to save a few pounds would try and get a breather outside of Israel for a little bit. It's a little like today, actually, but at that time, Israelis had still not learned any tact or ways of the world, and provinciality was the rule of the day. Not that there isn't any room for improvement today. But, at any rate, where would the Israeli who wanted to go abroad travel to? To Paris and London, of course. And if you go to Paris, why waste money on a hotel? Better to find someone you know who lives in Paris to be a houseguest. And so, as someone who was living in Paris, we were "privileged" with non-stop visits. Half of Israel showed up as our houseguests, and as for the other half (there is a limit, after all), we found lovely and inexpensive hotels. Israelis living in Paris were therefore, both travel agents and hoteliers. And where did the guests want to go? To Place Pigalle, center of the display of pure morals. And

if the guests wanted to see all sorts of cabarets, well of course, I would take them there.

One day I decided that this mass descent by tourists on the Israeli residents of Paris must be dealt with. For several weeks I collected reactions of Israelis resident in Paris, representatives of the Mossad, Israel Aircraft Industries, Embassy personnel and others, and stories of their experiences with their fellow countrymen who "landed" on them. I invited them to the studio, telling them that I wanted to tape a broadcast about life in Paris. And I played a trick on them. I asked the technician to tape everything that was said in the room, and then I said we were waiting for two more people, but that meanwhile I wanted to read them a letter I had received. I read a letter that I made up, but each person in the room was convinced that every single word was true, based on their own personal experiences. "Mr. Rager," the letter read, "since you are the only Israeli that I know from the radio, and that finally, after thirty years in Israel, I am managing to leave the country as a tourist, I am sure that you will agree to put me up, and that you haven't turned into a snob like the others." Yes, that was the text. Don't ask. The guys were outdoing each other in pouring out all they had to say about the Israelis who would invite themselves to stay at their home or ask for tourist information and guidance. For the entire time, they did not realize that this indeed was the program, and they very bluntly expressed all their bitterness without any holding back. This was just one of my sensational programs broadcast on the Voice of Israel.

In order that I, too, would enjoy the visits by such guests, at the end of a round of cabarets I would take them to a "*chansonnière*" – a French song club where people come to hear singers while sipping wine, and singing. This tradition of song clubs has died down today, and I think that Paris of late is becoming more and more of an international metropolis, to the distress of the chauvinistic French. I was especially fond of two of these clubs: "Le Lapin Agile" (the agile hare) and "Le Caveau des Oubliettes" (pit of the forgotten). This was named for the structure rented above the labyrinthine caves used for prisoners in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Whoever was sentenced to the pit was as good as dead and forgotten. Now it was a business. Whoever entered saw bones and skulls on the walls. There was a room with torture

implements from the days of the Inquisition, after which you came into the hall for the sing-along. The wine flowed like water in this cave of the forgotten. There would be a "conferencier" or emcee, who would recite to the American tourists, "Drink up, drink cola – this is a special cola vintage 1780 from our cellars." I really loved sitting there. They wouldn't only sing serious songs. One of the favorite songs was "We were eighty hunters on the marquise's bed." I remember Irène Fabrice very well, a simple folksinger whom no one wrote about. I would sit there and listen to her sing, with pure pleasure. I can still hear her voice singing "Plaisir d'Amour": "The joys of love, are but a moment long/ The pains of love, last a lifetime long"

One day, we received word from the office of the official government spokesman of France that General Moshe Dayan was to receive the award of a Knight of the Legion d'Honneur of France. I waited for Dayan at the airport, and when he arrived I asked for a radio interview in honor of the event. He invited me to come to the hotel, while he changed clothes, and then we proceeded to the radio studio. I asked him: "Do a voice test, please," so he said: "Cantor Moshe Dayan speaking." I didn't know that at that moment the direct broadcasting line was open to the taping in the Jerusalem studio, and twenty years later that clip was broadcast on a program of curious bits of Kol Israel. At that meeting, I met Dayan without his guise of officer and without his job, I may say, as the man only, and I liked him a lot. He was kind enough to fulfill my request for his book with a handwritten dedication.

It was an open secret that journalists and diplomats were often just a cover for the intelligence operatives, or at least, to aid the Intelligence services. While I was in Paris, the USA's Central Intelligence Agency – CIA – had great success in Africa. In twelve African countries that were under the Soviet sphere of influence meaning the Communist bloc, there were coups by officers, with the gracious aid of the CIA, bringing these countries to the American sphere of influence, that is, the West. Into this seething cauldron of known rules of the game, the Russians chose me to be a sort of antenna, in a kind of remote sensing operation. One day, Vassily Bessakov, spokesman for the Embassy of the USSR, a handsome, friendly man, invited me to lunch. It was clear that I was chosen for the sensing operation; he was going to try and find out

several things through me. I asked for the consent of the higher-ups at our Embassy, who told me, of course, go ahead and see what the Russians want. I had already met with Vassily Bessakov a few times before, and we had chatted about this and that; he had asked me what he intended to ask, and I had answered what I chose to answer – and vice versa. But on the day we met for lunch at his invitation, there was a coup in Africa, and another country went over to the American sphere of influence. I teased him all in good humor, saying to him (in French), "Nu, Vassily, the Americans screwed you again." Bessakov grew serious, and said, " Isaac Davidovitch, now listen up. The CIA is nothing. There are three forces in the world: Communism, the Catholic Church, and International Zionism." He spoke with complete seriousness, and I suddenly understood that the Russians – or at least the official USSR – really and truly believed in the magic power of International Zionism. All the well-known ugly caricatures of the Zionist octopus with its tentacles grasping everything were suffused with the belief in the tremendous power of Zionism. In the future, this underlying belief would lead me and strengthen me in my part in the struggle to free the Jews of the Soviet Union to immigrate to Israel.

Our authorities used me as well, and more than once, as a kind of sensor to obtain or confirm information. For example, it was widely known that Egypt was about to receive Soviet torpedo boats, but we had no information about these torpedoes. What happened is that when the French army was on maneuvers in the North Sea, when all of a sudden Soviet torpedo boats appeared. When they surrounded the French naval force, French intelligence officers took photographs of the torpedoes from all possible angles, snapping their armaments and operations. This was broadcast on French television, after the French Army spokesman gave them the filmed story of Russian torpedo boats interfering with the French navy, but without engaging them. Our naval attache would have given his soul for the news clip. What to do? They call up Ijo Rager. "But I am a radio person, and this is television news," I protested. "You'll manage," was the response.

I did a bit of homework on the director of the television news, and found out that he was an Algerian refugee from Oran, that is to say, a nationalistic Frenchman who did not have a particular liking for Arab Moslems. I phoned him, introduced myself, and said, "I'd very much

like to meet with you. I am inviting you to lunch." Since I'm mentioning the lunch, it would be impossible for me to leave out some details. I chose the Marius et Jeannette restaurant on the Boulevard George V. The sommelier approached me, dressed in his finest uniform, and asked, "Sir, which wine would you like?" At that time, I was still inexperienced enough not to ask for the price list, so I spontaneously asked for a Rothschild, thinking that I could not go wrong with a Rothschild. With great ceremony he brought out the bottle, and with still greater ceremony and a flourish he opened it, poured a bit into my glass for my tasting and approval before serving. I sipped a bit, and didn't like it – it seemed sour to me. I was embarrassed, here I am a young Israeli in a fancy restaurant, saying that the wine was no good! For a moment I was at a loss. Then I took another sip and said to the waiter: "You know, my guest here is a greater "connoisseur" than I am, he is French, and I'd like him to taste the wine this time." The guest took a sip and immediately said that it had the taste of the cork. The wine waiter did not only not become angry, but actually grew pale, and apologized: "So sorry, I don't know what happened, this is the first time this has ever happened with this wine." The bottle was switched, and as we were eating and drinking merrily, I made my request to my guest. He said, " No problem. Let's go to the studios together." In the studio, I waited about an hour while they copied the film for me, and that very same afternoon it was safely with Hilik, Israel's naval attache in Paris at that time.

Your faithful Paris radio correspondent was sometimes in on secret political matters, such as visits of high-level officials, some of them secret, such as Yitzhak Rabin's visit when he was deputy Chief of Staff, a visit to inspect the AMX tank. Or Ezer Weizman's visit to check out a new airplane. And as for the official visits that were open, they, too, had their amusing sides, such as one visit that was extremely serious for me, and not at all entertaining.

It was very well known that General Charles De Gaulle had the highest regard for David Ben-Gurion, and we Israelis were proud of it. Ben-Gurion was an amazingly colorful figure. He would come and buy antiquarian books, make a big impression on his host, and the amusing picture of the very tall De Gaulle next to Ben-Gurion who was dwarfed in comparison, seemed only to increase the honor and due given our

Prime Minister. However, I was in Paris when Levi Eshkol was at the head of the government.

After a period of a feeling in Israeli public opinion that there was a considerable cooling-off of relations between France and Israel – and in my job as radio correspondent, I felt this myself, and did not hide it from my listeners – we were privileged to have Prime Minister Levi Eshkol invited on a state visit, and the Jewish and Israeli community in Paris was extremely proud and happy. We hoped for a rekindling of the warm ties that had cooled, and were hoping that President De Gaulle would once again declare that "Israel is our friend and our ally." This was the expression that had defined how close the ties where. But now, De Gaulle did not mention anything like this at any public event, and when Eshkol left the meeting, I heard the news straight from him so that I could use it for my lead story for the radio news. I must remind you that there was not yet any television in Israel, and at that time I was the only source of broadcast information.

I sat in front of the very emotional Eshkol, a very pleasant and nice man, and saw with great sadness that we had not succeeded. I asked him in his own style, "Nu?" and he said: "Yes, he said 'Israel is our friend and our ally.'" So I asked him, "Mr. Prime Minister, what did you say to him?" And Eshkol spread out his hands to his sides and, with a touch of naivete, said to me, "I said to him, 'Please, help us.'" I understood that there was no great chemistry between the two personalities, and that in effect, this was the end of a golden period of relations between the two countries. Shimon Peres tried to save things somewhat, but when he realized that there was no chance of anything coming out of this visit that we could speak about on the news, he had the good idea to suggest to the French a cooperative project in oceanography. Just think about it, Israel, lying on the coast of the mighty Mediterranean Sea on one side, with the Jordan River on the other side, and a bit of the Gulf of Eilat on the other, was participating in joint oceanographic research with the French. Nevertheless, it succeeded, the French agreed, and their Science Minister came forward with an official announcement that France and Israel would cooperate in the area of oceanography. The Israeli press went wild, and in big headlines announced that France and Israel would cooperate in oceanography as well, but I said to myself that it was the end of an era.

I started to nose around and one day I heard from a most reliable source that a delegation from several Arab countries had toured the Marcel Dasseau works, the factory producing the Mirage jets. I was told that France would once again supply arms to the Arab world. I didn't hesitate a moment and broadcast the important news headline, but asked the studio to open a direct line to Israel immediately. I broadcast the scoop that France had decided to sell arms to the Arabs. This information was the main item of the news, and Moka Limon, at that time our defense attache in France, was immediately asked if what the Kol Israel reporter said was true. Moka was boiling over with anger. He, who loved the French so dearly, and believed so firmly in the alliance with France, realized that the Kol Israel radio correspondent had discovered, behind his back, as it were, what he himself did not know, that France was supplying arms to our enemies. (Moka was later the architect of Israel's plan to spirit away the missile boats of Cherbourg). He called me to his office and reprimanded me, but I still wasn't able to convince him that the era of "Israel our friend and ally" was over.

Historians have yet to determine what brought about the cooling off of relations then. It was clear to me that part of the blame was ours, since we angered De Gaulle personally, and especially before the Six Day War, when Abba Even didn't let him know during his visit that we were going to attack. But even before this, there were all sorts of "little episodes."

I heard one story after our second bottle of wine, from General de Boussier, De Gaulle's son in law. De Gaulle was a big basketball fan, and one day while watching television, he saw an entire grandstand of the stadium waving Israeli flags to encourage Maccabi Tel Aviv against Strasbourg. He immediately asked his aide, "What is this, so many Israelis came to root for the Israeli team?" The aide answered, "No, these are Strasbourg Jews." De Gaulle was extremely offended. He truly believed that the French Jews were Frenchmen of the Mosaic faith, and that they were loyal to France first of all. Seeing this exhibition of dual loyalty was very difficult for him. I myself was not surprised at all when he called us a "domineering people" at that famous press conference.

As the Paris correspondent of Kol Israel in those days I was one of

the main sources of information outside of Israel for what was going on in Europe in general. And I had acquired the reputation of being a reliable correspondent. One day, I was told that Golda Meir also admired me. I liked hearing that the "iron lady" of Israeli politics, that tough old woman, liked me, since it was so hard to get onto her good list. And how sweet it was to hear Golda say that our Paris correspondent would cover her state visit to Denmark, rather than a reporter that she would bring along. I had no idea how much I would regret this later.

At this time, our relations with the Scandinavian countries were quite cool. They were "sitting on the fence" regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict, and wanted to keep their ties with the Arab countries. So the visit by an Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs to Denmark was very important politically. We landed and were received royally: the Danes are marvelous hosts, and the trip was full of tours, visits to the Tivoli Gardens, and of course, there was no lack of those frightful parties where you had to have a drink with each of the guests. A real nightmare. The drink, of course, was aquavit, nearly pure alcohol, and you had to look straight into the eyes of the person who asked you to have a drink, while draining the glass. Even when I learned the trick and tried to get around the problem by taking just a little sip each time, I would still leave the table with difficulty: there would be about a dozen people seated at such a table, and about half of them would ask to drink with you. They have no limit to their ability to drink.

Then came the last evening. Foreign Minister Jans Otto Krag hosted a grand ball to honor our Minister of Foreign Affairs. Everything was quite pleasant, there was a good atmosphere, no tension, everyone having a good time, and me, of course, having drunk merrily, invited the wife of the Danish Foreign Minister to dance. She was a beautiful movie star, and I was a young man; Golda did not like this at all. From the corner of my eye, I could see in her face that I had committed a deed better not done. But there was no chance of stopping the dance, and so I had to stretch out the conversation, mustering up all the charm that I could summon. I asked her what do a movie star and a foreign minister have in common, how did the two combine. And the lovely lady answered me: "I really was surprised when he offered to marry me, I nearly fell off the bed." Just like that, in the middle of the

dance, with a sweet smile and a spark in her eyes. This time I nearly fell over in surprise. I saw that I was dealing with a really terrific lady, so I asked her, "Well, when are you two coming to Israel." She answered: "I understand that that will be in a month or two, they already agreed." Just like that, a scoop just fell into my hands, that the Foreign Minister of Denmark would visit Israel. At that time, with the relations being as they were with our Arab neighbors, this was an extremely exciting and important piece of news. This was also the time of the problem of a ship stuck in the Suez Canal. In short, this was a pretty important scoop.

I decided that I had had enough of a good time. It was still early, and I could still manage to broadcast this on the eleven-o'clock nightly news. After that, everyone went to bed, and only at 6 a.m. would they hear the news again. At the close of the dance I returned the charming lady to her place, bowed to her and took leave of everyone. As I left, I bumped into Lou Kedar, Golda's secretary, who asked me where was I running; I replied that I was going to broadcast some news. She asked me, "So what is there that's new anyhow?" I answered, "Yes, there is something new. He accepted the invitation to visit Israel, and that's news." I managed to broadcast the bulletin in time, went back to the room, took a good shower, and immediately fell asleep.

Ten minutes later I was rudely awakened from my deep sleep by the ringing of the telephone. "Rager," said Lou Kedar, "the Foreign Minister would like to speak to you." I immediately understood that something unpleasant was about to befall me.

"Yes, ma'am," I answered.

"Who told you that he was going to visit Israel?"

"She said so," I replied.

"That's a lie. I never said that to you, and you mustn't eavesdrop on politicians," fumed Golda and hung the phone up on me.

I was still a bit tipsy, and it took me a minute to realize that Golda didn't understand that I meant the wife of the Danish Foreign Minister, and took "she did" to mean that I was talking about her in the honorific third person. Only after two hours did I fall asleep again, tired and unhappy, full of doubts. At 6 a.m., Hanoch Gibton phoned me up and asked what happened with Golda. "She herself asked you to come, and now she wants you out. I won't agree, of course, but just

stay away from her." In short, this visit left a bitter taste in my mouth, and I was on her blacklist for two years.

But there were also some great visits. Jans Otto Krag went on to become Prime Minister of Denmark and the new Foreign Minister was my friend and colleague Per Hekerup, the very same, a journalist by profession. He would come to Brussels to cover the European Common Market for Copenhagen's *Politikan* newspaper when I was in Brussels for Kol Israel coverage of the same beat. We met and became good friends. One morning we were eating breakfast together in a restaurant. To my utter astonishment I saw this nice man with the thick mustache order two steins of beer and pour two raw eggs into each of them – "first thing in the morning." I would have dropped in my tracks from one sip of such a meal, but that is how he would begin his day. He loved his liquor, and it was very hard to find him sober after 11 a.m., but he was at the same time an extremely brilliant and sharp man and an exemplary political correspondent. One fine day, the phone rang: it was Per greeting me. "Hi, Ijo. It's Per. I'm the Foreign Minister of Denmark. I've just been appointed. I have a standing invitation for Abba Eban, your Foreign Minister. I'm inviting you to be my guest and to cover the visit." Just like that. In those words. With Hanoch Gibton's approval, I very happily flew to Copenhagen.

That was an unbelievably lovely visit, all things considered, Denmark being such a beautiful country and its people so friendly, I enjoyed every minute with the Danes. I also experienced pure enjoyment from Abba Eban, who always knew just what to say and how to charm his audience. On the last evening, when we had been drinking and were in a good mood (I had meanwhile learned to somehow manage the fearful "trink") Foreign Minister Per Hekerup arose and offered a toast. He was already completely tipsy, and said in a loud voice: "I would like to propose a toast to my good friend Ijo Rager. Let us drink to journalism. It will get you anywhere." This wonderful evening sadly ended in great embarrassment. The drunken Per once again rose and said to Abba Eban: "Tell me, are you also surrounded by fools?" His senior aides and Abba Eban's Foreign Ministry aides were still seated at the table.

At any rate, Per Hekerup was right. Journalism got me to so many places, and so many important jobs, the last one being Mayor of

Beersheba. I have no doubt that it was because of my background in journalism that I did so well at my jobs. You learn so much as you chase down new stories daily, as you crowd into each place where an event takes place, and by rubbing shoulders both with the greats of this world and with the simple folk. Something from this entire experience sticks to you and gradually builds itself up into an entire collection that enriches the life of the person experiencing all this. You become more versatile, more aware, and if you are good, you do indeed reach everywhere.

As I close this chapter about Paris, I cannot help but return a bit into the past, to the time before being sent to Paris. As a senior correspondent during the late 1950s, I had received a scholarship from the French Student Union for foreign students for a three week tour of France, to do what I wished. The French would give such a scholarship to public opinion makers from around the world. It seems that they thought me a rising star in Israel radio. When I arrived, I submitted my study tour plans – I was interested in going to such and such places, so and so museums, to go out with the army alpinist unit and one more thing: I said that I was interested in meeting General Charles De Gaulle.

The young man facing me turned to his superior, asking: "De Gaulle – is he still alive?" That's just how forgotten De Gaulle was on the local political scene. That was about a year before the Generals' Revolt that brought him back to power. They said to me: "What do you want to see him for? He is living far away, at Colombey-les-deux-Eglises." I insisted, and several days later, the answer arrived: General De Gaulle was prepared to give me ten minutes of his time. They were astounded: "For ten minutes you would go as far as Colombey?" To make a long story short, they gave me a car and driver, and I went to our meeting.

I was ushered into his room, and I drew myself upright and saluted him. He liked that. I apologized for having to speak in English, since this was before the cram courses in French. I explained to the General that I was a captain in the Israel reserves, and that I wanted to salute him and thank him for what he had contributed as head of the Free French, and how he had helped save my country during the Second World War. I could see that he became very emotional. He let me stay with him for more than an hour and a half, and at the close of our meeting he said to me: "Captain, please come and see me again when you can."

I am telling this story, because in 1962 when I traveled to France as the Kol Israel radio correspondent, it was to a different France, one in which General Charles De Gaulle was president of the state. It was as if the entire world had shifted meanwhile. As for me, I didn't hesitate. Several days after I arrived in Paris, I contacted the Elysées Palace and explaned to spokesman Gilbert Ferroule who I was, and said that the General asked me to visit him. There had been much water flowing down the Seine since our meeting in Colombey, and no one could get in to see De Gaulle, certainly not a mere journalist. But about two weeks later, I was asked to fill out a special official form with my personal details and attach a photograph; within another two weeks, I received by return mail a rare document: a Press Card authorized by the Elysées Palace. I kept the card, and still have it; it opened nearly every door that there was during my time as European correspondent.

Perhaps it was because I showed De Gaulle that I remembered his days of glory though he was in semi-retirement that he took me along with him on his historical visit to the Soviet Union. I was the only Israeli journalist traveling with him. I managed to tell my friend Uri Dan of the Tel Aviv based daily *Ma'ariv*, and as usual, he managed to get to the USSR at the very last minute; I was very happy to see him. During that same trip, I attempted to meet with Jews in Leningrad and in Moscow, as well as the science city of Novosibirsk. Not a single person had succeeded in getting into that city during the heydey of the Communist rule. De Gaulle was the first one to break the seal of isolation, his hosts having decided to impress him with this "Akademogorod" – a city of scientific geniuses who had been gathered together and given laboratories – so that they would work for the government. They invested a great deal of money in this project, and everything was quite splendid – at least on the outside. However, when I asked for a drink of water, I was referred to the hall, where I found a tap with an aluminum cup hanging from it on a rope. The drinking fountains of the type which are found in every elementary school in Israel still had not reached the Soviet City of Science.

In Leningrad, I asked to be allowed to enter the splendid synagogue, but when I arrived, I was told that the Jews gathered to pray in a more intimate prayer hall – the *shteibel* – adjacent to it. When I went there, the KGB man made sure he kept me close to the wall so that I

wouldn't mix with the local Jews. But the Jews had already developed methods to circumvent the KGB and slowly and unnoticeably, each minute a different Jew would stand at my back of me and send regards, or ask a question. Then I heard the question: "Are you from Jerusalem? Maybe you know Moishe Bar Sela, my brother?" I couldn't believe my ears: Moshe Bar Sela was the director-general of the Ministry of Religion, and his son Yoram was a friend of mine. Of course I promised to send regards. That same night I sent a postcard from Moscow to Itzik, a mutual friend, sending "warm regards to Moshe-father-of-Yoram from Yakov-brother-of- Moshe." This was understood immediately by the parties concerned. But let's get back to the *shteibel.* When the prayers were over, I asked an old man in the group to show me the synagogue, which I knew to be one of the most elaborate in Eastern Europe. He said, "All right, go and wait for me near the gate." The old man got me in, and after he came in I had a chance to look at him. With his handsome white beard, he looked to me exactly as I had imagined the Prophet Elijah when I was a child, on Passover seder night. Without any small talk, he said immediately: "*Kinderlech* – children, get us out of here now, because in another generation it will be too late, and there won't be any Jews left here." I have no doubt that such direct orders gave me the power and the drive during the ten years that I struggled on behalf of Soviet Jewry, as I'll describe later. The very same Yakov-brother of Moshe-Bar Sela was to be among the first Jews allowed out of the Soviet Union in the 1970's. On his first evening in Israel, he went out for a walk and returned totally depressed. They asked him what happened. He answered: "It's not nice not to tell the truth to your family. You said that the economic situation in Israel was good. But tonight I passed many well-lit supermarkets where I could see through the windows that there were plenty of goods for sale, but not a soul was in the shops. No one has any money to buy anything."

When I finished my assignment in Paris, De Gaulle sent me his book of memoirs, inscribed by him personally with a dedication to me. People tell me that if I am ever in financial trouble, I can always improve matters by selling the book at public auction. I goes without saying that I never even considered it.

Chapter Four:

The IDF

One evening in January 1953, a force belonging to Battalion 54 of the Givati Brigade set out for an attack on Falameh, a small Arab village in western Samaria, over the "Green Line", the border at that time, approximately six kilometers northeast of Kalkilya. This was intended as a punitive raid in retaliation against the village that was said to have sheltered a force of the Jordanian Legion, and from which the terrorists called *fedayeen* set out on their nightly raids of sabotage and murder. This attack, or raid, is remembered as a disgrace in the annals of the IDF – the Israel Defense Force – what we call a crying shame. And I shared the dubious honor of being part of it. We had reached a barbed wire fence and it turned out that we had not the slightest piece of intelligence information that there was even such a fence. We had no "boongalore" (our army slang for the Bangalore torpedo) to blow up the fence. The demolition team sergeant attempted to blow it up with demolition blocks. After the explosion, we ran towards what was supposed to be a hole in the fence, but we bumped up against a barbed wire barrier that had sustained absolutely no damage at all. And then my buddy and I did what we were taught to do: the two of us lay down on the wire for our comrades to step on us and pass through.

No one went over. We remained lying on the fence for several very long minutes until we pulled ourselves inside, and when we stood up to run forward, a bullet pierced my leg. I pulled myself, wounded, back outside the fence again. In short, our operation collapsed in total shame and disgrace. But some good came out of a very bad situation: this burning failure caused an upheaval. Moshe Dayan was so furious, that from this point onward, the best young people and resources were directed to the combat brigades, and the IDF began in earnest to establish elite fighting units to mount attack operations.

At the time of the failed raid, the Givati Brigade was the IDF's combat unit. Time had passed since it had played such an honorable and glorious part in the War of Independence, and the soldiers were replaced with raw recruits. The ranks began to be filled with lads from the mass immigration of the period, mostly from Europe, Asia and Africa. And there I was, a soldier in Company A commanded by Captain Froike, with everyone around me speaking Rumanian or Arabic or any one of a dozen other foreign languages – even Chinese! We had some young Jews from Harbin, China, who had left Russia for China and from there to Israel. I myself joined up in 1952 at the age of nineteen, after I first completed my studies at the Teachers' Seminary in Beit Hakerem, Jerusalem, and so I was older than the other soldiers.

From the very beginning, I had decided to be an exemplary soldier. I was an outstandingly disciplined recruit, orderly, pressed and shiny, so much so that one day the base commander, Colonel Golan, called me in: "Listen, kid, we like you. We want you to stay with us at the basic training base, and you'll make sergeant immediately. We want you to teach Hebrew – we know that you're a graduate of the teachers seminary. Be part of the staff, officer in charge of culture." I said that in no way do I agree – I wanted to be in a combat unit. That's how I got to Givati, and to its special basic training. There was very little pleasure in it: they treated us quite badly, and we had to draw upon every last bit of our sense of humor to get through it. By "we" I mean the several high school graduates that they sprinkled over the different brigades in those days by decision of the General Staff.

We suddenly found ourselves in the company of people that we were not used to being with – a bunch of non-Hebrew speakers. Even among us, the high school graduates, we had several confused fellows who didn't know what was expected from them. I remember one guy who refused to accept a gun, since it would hurt his fingers: he was a cellist. In spite of myself, I ended up being a Hebrew teacher just the same. That is, in addition to being a regular soldier, I also became a teacher, nanny and a sort of liaison officer between the Company and its commanders.

I remember one morning that Sergeant Reiss, a Pole who had immigrated from Belgium, conducted roll call. He would call out, "Count off" and we would have to yell out, "One, two, three, four,

five, six" Quiet. No sound from Number Seven. "As you are!" yelled Reiss, and we would count down again. Again, not a peep from Number Seven. Sergeant Reiss pounced like an angry panther on Private Herszku Pascu, Romanian immigrant. I don't even think that today's GSS (General Security Service – the *Shabak*) would have approved of the shaking that he gave the poor soldier. "Seven, Herszku, Seven! You understand? You are Number Seven!" Finally, the roll call ended well. In the drills, they tried to teach us how to march, and at the end, Sergeant Reiss had us get in line again and repeat the roll. "Seven," called out Herszku, who was eleventh in line. Many soldiers were illiterate. I remember Murdoch Nagi, who asked me to write a letter for him. I sat there, pen in hand, as he dictated: "Salaam, Nazima." So I wrote, warm regards to Nazima. "Salaam, Abuyi. Salaam, Umi." So I wrote, warm regards to Father and Mother, and went on to fill the entire page with regards to everyone. At the end of the letter, Nagi's words were: "And Shalom to the entire *ma'abara* (immigrant camp)." That was his entire letter.

There were also conflicts between the various ethnic groups in the camp. Menashe was a highly disciplined soldier from Iran, while Aziz from Kurdistan was extremely undisciplined. I don't know why, but there was very high tension between Persians and Kurds. Menashe the Persian would sit for hours, polishing his Czech Mauser rifle carefully and lovingly. Aziz the Kurd was the last one to lavish any such care. Every morning as we prepared for roll call, they would tease each other. One day, Menashe, feeling especially bitter, went a bit too far, and said to Aziz: "Aziz, I screwed your mother!" All of us sat there, extremely tense, wondering what Aziz would do; there could be bloodshed. Aziz was silent for a while, thinking up a good answer, until he rose out of his torpor and retorted: "Menashe, I joined the Paratroopers, got on a plane, went to Persia, parachuted down, screwed your mother, and flew back." We laughed until we cried. All of a sudden, it turned out that Aziz, who had seemed to us to be the epitome of the dull recruit, had fooled all of us, when he was actually much smarter and more sophisticated than we had thought.

Another new recruit from Romania went to the quartermaster one morning to ask for a smaller gun, since he had difficulty dragging a large gun around. He had already gotten the point of the fine difference

between "I don't want to" which is a direct refusal to obey orders, and "I can't". When we heard him complain "I can't" we had no other recourse than to tie him with a rope on marches to force him to walk. When Aziz saw that, he said to the commander, "Sir, I was just like that in Kurdistan." "What, Aziz, you were in the army there?" asked the commander. "No – that's how they got me to school," replied Aziz. I'm telling these bits to demonstrate just how much has changed in the army. But so as not to make such sweeping and incorrect generalizations, I would like to add that in actual fact, the IDF had initiated possibilities and opened up a number of opportunities for many of these young immigrants. The IDF gave them a jump-start on their level of awareness and sense of belonging to Israeli society, and some later day's very best senior officers and commanders of the IDF came from this generation of new immigrants.

After my wound healed, following the eight month Officers' Training Course, I received my orders to present myself at Gadna Headquarters (the paramilitary youth training corps) then located at the present location of the Eretz Israel Museum in Tel Aviv. Gadna Commander Colonel Ran Ron decided to apoint a younger editor for the publication *Bemahane Gadna*. He was told that there were two boys in the officers' course who edited an outstanding monthly, and one of them was Yitzhack Rager. That's how I got to edit several issues of *Bemahane Gadna*; one of the correspondents at that time was the young Dan Almagor.

When I was demobilized as Second Lieutenant, I was posted to the Reserves Infantry Battalion 162 of the Jerusalem Brigade as platoon commander. After a while I was promoted to Lieutenant, and afterward appointed company executive officer (second in command). After the company commander's course, I was appointed company commander. For a while I was forward company commander of the Jerusalem city border – this was the company called up when the border heated up in one of the sections of then-divided Jerusalem. The Sinai Campaign of 1956, found me and my reserves unit on the Mount Scopus salient as a "Police Officer."

Today it is an open secret that the police forces permitted by the peace agreements to go by convoy up to Mount Scopus to guard the Hadassah Hospital and the Hebrew University buildings on Mount

Scopus were actually army units disguised as police. After we put on the police uniforms, we drilled saying "Ken, Adoni" ("Yes, Sir" – police version) instead of "Ken, Hamefaked" (army version for the same). Then, under the inspection of the UN, we got into the closed armored bus and went through the lines of the Jordanian Legion. We were to relieve the unit up on top of Mount Scopus and take its place for one month until we were relieved in turn. I am sure that the story of Mount Scopus during those nineteen years until the liberation from the siege by the Six Day War is a story that has been told and will still be told. Each round of "police" added something to improve our security on Mount Scopus.

I would briefly like to describe my main security contribution when I was up there during the Sinai Campaign. A metalworker who was with us dressed as a policeman had developed a method of using pulleys to stretch barbed wire out of the pile of wire that had been left in a heap of all sorts of construction material up at the university – there were tons of barbed wire. When we put those fences in the wadis and other wide-open spaces that could be useful to the other side in an attack, it turned out that they weren't high enough. That was when I suggested that we heap up all the rusty beds from the Hadassah Hospital, and we could put the barbed wire over them. And so we did.

I also had my own way of making a more "journalistic" contribution that I would like to describe. When I went up on Mount Scopus, I was extremely taken aback by the security situation there: it was absolutely clear to me that it wasn't built to withstand an offensive. One of the things that I did was to write a play entitled "How Mount Scopus Fell." The play showed Mount Scopus falling into enemy hands, with the Investigating Committee hearing the testimony of Sergeant Remnant and Private Fugitive. I sent one copy to the General, Commander of the Central Command; another copy to the colonel, Commander of the Jerusalem Brigade; and kept the third. To my distress, it fell into the Thames with my lift a few years later, when I was appointed Israeli Embassy counselor in London. The general read the play, and I have no doubt that it affected measures taken later.

Let me add one more thing: I found a very thick, blank notebook and decided to start writing a log of Mount Scopus. We called it the FOO Log, because the forward observation officer, who had to control

the artillery fire in time of need, was the one who wrote the first entries; he was followed by the other officers. I hope that the FOO Log is preserved somewhere in the IDF archives, because if not, it would really be a pity. The Log is a truly historical document; it was filled in by people writing in it until the Israelis liberated Mount Scopus in 1967.

I did my reserve duty with love and devotion. I had ambitions in this field as well, I admit without shame, and I wanted to advance in rank as much as possible in my reserve duty. As Voice of Israel personnel, I could have easily become an IDF Spokesman, but I didn't. I went through all the courses, including the company commanders course, where I made many friends, many of whom later became generals, such as Jacky Even and Ephraim Pichotka – these were my teammates on the course. Among other idle thoughts, the "what if's" and "maybes" that I liked to toy with, sometimes with a touch of seriousness and regret, I used to wonder if I should have remained in the army. Maybe I would have managed to make Brigadier General, and then had a second career. People's heads are full of brilliant ideas.

The Six Day War caught me as senior company commander in my battalion. Lucky for me they had taken me back since my government job in France had taken me back and forth over several continents and I was absent a lot from my reserve duties. The regiment received reinforcements: a company made up entirely of cadets, and I was appointed commander of this Riflemen E Company. I was named battalion executive officer (second in command) after David Alfandari (now head of the SuperSol supermarket chain) was wounded in the bombardment on our tent encampment on Mount Herzl at the beginning of the war. In this capacity I led the battalion to the assembly area in Ramat Rachel. Then the war began, and my friend Gideon Rothschild came to command the battalion.

We dug in at Ramat Rachel, where the original trenches that remained from the War of Independence had added connecting trenches and bunkers. We took up a position facing the dominating ground of the Mar Elias Monastery, the formidable hill commanding the south of Jerusalem. At first, there was a exchange of gunfire with the Jordanian Legion stationed on Mar Elias, and we were shelled incessantly. We suffered casualties during this exchange of fire, then received orders to proceed to Bethlehem, but there was a "slight"

obstacle on the way: the Mar Elias hill. I led the attack and we stormed it. We ran up the steep hill and into the trenches – but found no enemy: when we began the attack, the Legionnaires fled south to Bethlehem. When we went up Mar Elias feeling the unbelievable euphoria of victory, two tanks from our brigade commanded by Aharon Kamara to our right fired on the retreating enemy. One shell was shot so close that I lost the hearing in my left ear for several months. I was worried that I had sustained irreversible damage, but I finally did recover.

On our way to Bethlehem we expected resistance, but there were only scattered shots fired at us. We had almost reached the outskirts of the town, when the commander of the scout platoon told me that an Arab armed with a knife was running towards us. I looked through the binoculars and did see someone running towards us holding something, but refused the suggestion that a sniper pick him off. Even if he were armed, he was alone while we were an entire battalion. Within several minutes, the man reached us: it was an elderly Arab, tired and sweating, holding a giant key. And so I was the Israeli officer who received the key to Rachel's Tomb into his very hands. I instructed my signal operator (RATELO), Yohanan Fried, an observant fellow who is today a Rabbi (in charge of the Ministry of Religion Torah Culture Department), to hand his equipment over to another soldier. He was to take the shortest way to find Rabbi Goren, then chief IDF Chaplain, and give him the key.

Entering Bethlehem, we were welcomed in English by a group of very frightened civilians, most of them Christians, who were terrified of our army. They had heard so many lies about us, they were sure that the army would burn down their homes with them inside and rape the women, and who knows what else. As we continued, we saw two large black Mercedes: local notables got out, including the religious heads and mayors of Bethlehem, Beit Jallah and Beit Sahour. I asked them what was their request and received the reply that they were there to officially surrender. Battalion Commander Gideon Rothschild was already up ahead, where he was discussing with the commander of the brigade reconnaissance company how to continue to the city, since Legionnaires might still be there. I said to myself, the battalion is exposed in hostile Arab territory, it's better to have them hesitate to

shell us if the notables were with us. I told the notables that I was sorry that I couldn't sign right now, but it would be better for them to join our line. Fire was opened up only from one hill to our left. I was just about to send the battalion scout platoon to take care of it, but just then Gideon Rothschild ran back to us and suggested that the brigade reconnaissance company should do this, and we continued to the El-Hader junction. We organized ourselves to spend the night on Hirbet El-Hader, located slightly above Solomon's Stables. It was there that I sat with the Arab notables and received a notebook page signed by them and by me accepting the surrender of Bethlehem, Beit Jallah and Beit Sahour.

At the crack of dawn, barely before first light, we received orders from the brigade to move towards Gush Etzion. We went in trucks that had been sent for us, and by about 10 a.m., we were all at the main camp of the Jordanian Legion in Gush Etzion. Gideon Rothschild was again called to his usual secret activities, and so there I was, in command of the battalion, sitting in the Legionnaires camp. We had to immediately disarm all the surrounding villages: I divided everyone up into small task force teams, each headed by an officer in a vehicle. I was still busy with all that, when all of a sudden an urgent telegram from the brigade was handed to me: "An international group of journalists is heading this way, and you were chosen to brief them." A job perfectly suited for me. I had barely read the telegram, when two buses full of photographers and reporters reached the gate of the base. The war had already become an international sensation. Some newspapers had been a little slow on the uptake as to just how big the story was, and it took several days for their correspondents to arrive. And there I was with two buses full of journalists starving for some information, very hungry for a good story. How well I could understand them, since I had been in their place quite a few times. On the other hand, I had other very pressing matters.

I called the journalists all to come over. I got up on an ammo box, and apologized, explaining that I had some things to take care of, but that they should come into the officers' club where the Master Sergeant would see to it that they got drinks. I went back to the office and finished handing out the assignments that were left, including camp security and as usual for me, I was sure to have the kitchen organized. I went back to the journalists, and asked for quiet. I began speaking in

English, "Ladies and gentlemen, welcome" when I was interrupted by the loud, clear voice of a journalist with a British accent:

"Sir, before you begin – may I ask you a very important question?"

His colleagues were amazed. "Yes, sure," I answered.

"Is this what you call 'drinks' in the Israeli army?" he asked, raising his glass of juice or soda water, from the bottles that they were given.

"Yes," was my answer.

"Well, it's no wonder," said the Brit, "that you don't lose wars."

That afternoon, a helicopter landed with Minister of Defense Moshe Dayan, Chief of Staff Yitzhak Rabin, General Rehavam "Gandhi" Ze'evi, and a party of Israeli journalists – which was not a small party. Included was Eitan Haber, later to be head of the Prime Minister's Office under Yitzhak Rabin – may he rest in peace – when his life was cut short by the evil assassin.

Rabin came right up to me and asked, "Nu, how does it feel?" I remember I replied: "There is no better feeling. I feel that we closed an account. I remember the pain, sorrow and fury when I heard that Gush Etzion fell and the Legion took everyone prisoner. I see it as a great privilege to have been among those who liberated Gush Etzion and to take part in this great moment in our history." Rabin patted me on the shoulder and immediately went back to taking care of things he had to do, but Moshe Dayan, Gandhi and others stayed with me for the celebration dinner that was about to take place. Photographs of this feast were published on the cover of Life Magazine, and I still have a framed copy hanging in my office in the Beersheba Municipality.

The officers and I celebrated our return from the war later with a very rich meal at the Shemesh restaurant in Jerusalem's market. I believed wholeheartedly that this would be the last war, and I said as much to the officers. Man proposes, but God disposes: despite the hopes that I expressed in my speech, within a short time our battalion was once again called up to help restore order in the Gaza Strip, commanded by Mordechai "Motta" Gur. Already on the second day of our service a grenade was thrown at our patrol jeep. Luckily, no one was hurt. I immediately went out to the area, and Motta Gur also arrived. Motta's order was clear and decisive: "Blow up the house from which the grenade was thrown."

"And what if the person who threw it doesn't live in that house?" I asked.

"You have your orders," he replied. "By this evening, you'll be receiving other orders and instructions for further preventive measures."

I was very heavy hearted. I gave the people living in the house some time to clear out their things, and then stood with several soldiers on the corner to make sure that no civilian was hurt in the blast. While I was still standing there, looking all around, along came a redheaded Arab man who threw himself at my feet and began kissing my shoe. I was flabbergasted and spoke to him in Arabic," Get up! Up! What are you doing?" He got on his knees and begged: "It's my house. I didn't throw the grenade. Have some pity on me, I have a wife and children." I held back my tears with difficulty, only because of the soldiers all around me. With a lump in my throat, I spoke through an Arabic-speaking soldier: "Sir, it's out of my hands. This is the order we received. I cannot help you. Please, get up, don't humiliate yourself. Maybe you are not guilty, but if people throw grenades at us, we're in the middle of a war."

That same day, we received orders to provide security for scores of GSS people who arrived in Gaza to begin their jobs. My battalion was also ordered to guard those detained by the GSS. When I asked Motta where we would put them, he answered me, "It's your problem". I consulted with my friends. Aviv, one of the sergeants, was a famous Jerusalem building contractor and he thought up the idea of a sort of detainee cage, a detention facility for civilian suspects. We found storerooms full of barbed wire, and an open area on the seacoast, and within a few hours we had constructed a pen that could hold hundreds of people. And, indeed, hundreds were arrested before nightfall. And again the difficult question: what would I do if they all suddenly decided to go over the barbed wire and escape? I wouldn't want to shoot them. Darkness came, and in a short while we would hardly be able to see them. Then I thought of using the tank platoon that was at my disposal. I quickly summoned them to the beach and placed one tank at every corner of the area. I gave them instructions to put on the searchlights by turn, and for the entire night the detainee pen was lit up together with the unfortunate arrestees who were sitting on the

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ground being interrogated by the GSS. So my hopes of the "last war" were dashed.

My reserves duty was a patchwork of bits and pieces due to my various government jobs abroad. From 1969 onwards, it was again broken off as I went on my missions in London and New York, which I'll come to later. When I returned to Israel, I was too old to command an infantry battalion. However, the commander of the Jerusalem Brigade and General Moshe Levy (nicknamed Moishe-and-a-half because of his physical stature), Commander of the Central Command, who both knew me from my previous service, appointed me commander of a battalion of older infantrymen, and I was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel. The Rear command tested us in an exercise where top IDF personnel also were present. At the close of the exercise the General shook my hand and said: "You have proven that even the most veteran infantrymen can be taken into account as second line combat troops." But very soon I was sent on another government job abroad, and this ended my active reserves service in the IDF.

Chapter Five:

Savyon: Where am I Headed?

In 1968, the Israeli government made a crude attempt to take over the Broadcasting Authority and muzzle it. The radio was then under the jurisdiction of the Prime Minister's Office, so it seemed not so difficult to do. Hanoch Gibton and I protested and we were trying to get people to take action and establish an official broadcasting authority that would be independent of the government, like the BBC in Great Britain. True, there was a wise person who said that if the BBC's set of regulations were imported to any totalitarian country, for example an Arab or South American dictatorship, the radio would continue to sound like the mouthpiece of fascism and no one would notice anything reminiscent of the BBC. In any case, we won our struggle: an independent broadcasting authority was established. However, part of the deal was that Hanoch Gibton and other senior staffers were forced to leave.

And so in 1968 I was out of radio. I accepted a job with General (Reserves) Meir Amit, then appointed head of the Mossad, who needed someone with access to the world media. I did what I did there for two years. The work was extremely interesting, but this part of my life is still classified as secret.

At that time, Meir Amit was offered the position of director of the Koor conglomerate. He invited me to his house and told me all about it, then asked me if I were interested in going over to Koor to work for him. He was the one who brought me to the Mossad, and now that he was leaving suddenly, he felt some responsibility for me. I asked for twenty-four hours to think it over.

When I arrived home, Joseph "Yoske" Kremerman phoned me up. He was a MK (Member of Knesset), very actively involved in Gahal (the Herut-Liberals bloc) and the owner of *Hayom* daily paper, a

merger of the Liberal party's paper *Haboker* with the Herut newspaper. These two dailies had a loyal but limited readership mostly made up of old-timers from Jabotinsky's Herut movement and the old General Federation of Zionists. Even with the civilian circles, there were not enough subscribers to continue publication. They hoped that the merger would generate an increased circulation, and Kremerman hoped that I would edit the new *Hayom*.

I was the editor for two years. We conducted several serious experiments with a small group of extremely talented people, such as Sarahleh Frankel, Yehudit Winkler, Yossi Ahimeir and Salek Okun. However, it was clearly not an economically viable proposition, since the paper was forced to employ all the journalists from the two papers that had merged to form the new one. Mr. Menahem Begin had laid down the rule that a journalist from the nationalistic camp [then in the opposition] could not be fired. In addition, there were quite a few Herut party activists who demanded work on the paper. I therefore advised Kremerman to shut down the paper, and he heeded my advice. Kremerman told me that this was a first for him, having the head of one of his projects telling him to close up shop instead of asking for another two million Israel pounds (old lirot, for those who remember) "just this once" to hold off the crisis, etc. He made me a reasonable financial settlement and I once again found myself at a crossroads. I was wondering where was I headed this time.

That very same day Gershon Schocken telephoned me. He was the owner and editor in chief of *Ha'aretz* daily newspaper, and invited me to be managing editor of the paper, with Yair Kotler as editor in chief. I agreed. I was to be Number Three at the paper, after Schocken and Kotler. That's how I went to work for *Ha'aretz*, but I made one mistake. I closed the deal with Schocken, without waiting for Kotler to return from abroad. When Kotler found me in the position of editor, he came into my office and asked me: "Are you with me or on the Hungarians' side?" I asked him, "What Hungarians?" He named Salpeter and all the other *Ha'aretz* veterans, including Shabtai Teveth. So I said, "But Teveth is not Hungarian." His reply: "I'm not interested – are you with me or with them?" I answered: "I'm with myself." Kotler said to me: "So you're out of here through the window." I replied: "This is a very interesting conversation. What do

you say that we replay it in Mr. Schocken's office." I got up and went into Schocken's office. "Mr. Schocken, Mr. Kotler is just in my office right now, sitting on my desk actually, and he says that I have to be on his side and not on the Hungarians' side, or else I'll be out of there through the window. What is your opinion?" To my utter surprise, I saw Schoken fold. He seemed to shrink down a bit, and I heard him say, "I expect that *Ha'aretz* senior management will settle matters between themselves."

Only later did I understand that Schoken had asked me to work with him because he had heard how I stuck loyally to Hanoch Gibton and defended him when government representatives in the Broadcasting Authority revolted against him. He had asked me to work with him so that I would get rid of Kotler for him. Not that I would have done so for him, but at the time I didn't understand the situation. When I saw his reaction, I said to him: "Mr. Schocken, it seems to me that we have a deal that isn't really going to work out. Why don't we just end it on a friendly basis?"

That is how my career as Managing Editor of *Ha'aretz* ended after four full days. It was 11 a.m. when I left the offices to have a coffee at the Cafe Tamar. Just then, another one of those coincidences happened in my life – who should land out of the clear blue skies, or rather, at my table, but Arik Sharon. I told him all about what happened at Schocken's and he in turn told me that Hillel Kook was looking for an editor for a new newspaper he was about to publish. Right then and there Arik set up a meeting with Kook at the Tamar, and half and hour later Kook strolled into the cafe.

Hillel Kook, né Peter Bergson, member of the First Knesset, had made a fortune investing in Libyan oil and the New York stock market. He had a brokerage company and had become a multi-millionaire. His good friend and partner, Meshulam Riklis, who had by then set up the huge McGrory's conglomerate, was his partner in this newspaper venture as well. Hillel Kook declared, "If you didn't get along with Schocken, that makes you perfect to be the editor of my paper." But first he wanted the whole story of what had happened at *Hayom* and why it had folded. I explained the whole thing, and I felt that we had "good chemistry" from the very first moment of our meeting. Within one hour of our sitting down for coffee, we shook hands on my

appointment as editor of the fledgling newspaper which I had already mentally named the "Evening News" *(Hadshot Ha'Erev)*.

Hillel Kook and I set up the office in a lovely apartment facing the sea on Hayarkon Street. We organized an editorial board, advertised, invited journalists for interviews and I began to build the staff. My salary was then a thousand dollars monthly – a very satisfactory sum in those days. Kook also took care of all my expenses including car maintenance. We developed a genuine friendship despite his personality: he was very difficult and aggressive, with rigid points of view on everything. Flexibility was the very farthest thing from his mind. He had definite opinions on everything, without the slightest possibility of ever admitting that he was mistaken. Yet despite all this, we agreed that I would be independent and work as editor as I saw fit. Within a few months I was all ready and about to publish.

Just then something happened: There was a revolution in Libya, King Idris was deposed, a young colonel named Qadaffi took control and nationalized all the oil companies. Overnight, Hillel Kook and Meshulam Riklis lost what I would guess was about $100 million. The next morning, Hillel Kook invited me to meet him at a cafe. His face was the proverbial "black as stormclouds," or rather totally ashen. He explained to me that he could not finance a paper now, having sustained an extraordinarily heavy economic loss. However, he wanted to preserve part of our deal and offered to pay my salary for the entire year on the condition that I would be on call to work for him. He wanted me to edit articles that he planned to write occasionally for the newspapers. I went home to the house we rented in Savyon, sat staring at the large citrus orchard behind the house, wondering if I wanted to be paid for doing nothing at such a young age. I phoned up Hillel Kook, thanked him for his offer and found myself once again at a crossroads, wondering which way I was headed.

Once again I was sitting in a cafe, this time in Savyon, reading in the evening paper that Arthur Ben Nathan had just been appointed Israel's ambassador to Paris. Arthur and I knew each other, so I phoned him up and said: "I just heard that you've got the job of ambassador in Paris. I can be your Embassy spokesman." After all, I had been Kol Israel Paris correspondent for four years: I knew Paris, I knew France and its officials, and had important press contacts – all in all, I was the ideal

candidate for the job. Arthur responded: "Look, I know you as a journalist, but I do admit that you would also be a good spokesman." We sat and talked for two hours, at the end of which he said to me with a smile: "If you succeed in 'selling' the embassy as well as you just 'sold' yourself to me, then we'll be in great shape. As far as I'm concerned, the job is yours. Just let me fix things up with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs."

I went home and told Tikva that I was about to go abroad on a government job. She was absolutely stunned. Moving again. Once again having to uproot ourselves. She didn't really like it. I told her it was a great opportunity and that I had to grab it. Our conversation ended on a very bad note, but my mind was totally set on taking the job.

Arthur Ben Nathan was supposed to meet with Foreign Ministry officials that very week and tell me by Friday. Friday passed. Saturday. And Sunday. By Monday, I still hadn't heard from him. I picked up the phone and said that I had had the impression that he would let me know by the weekend. He was hesitant and almost stammering as he told me: "It turns out that there is someone else, his name is Ephraim Tary. He's originally from Belgium and was lent by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the jobs dealing with "Bar" and "Nativ" (government organizations set up to deal with the immigration of Soviet Jewry). He was based in London until now, and it's time for him to be recalled to the Ministry. If he wants it, he can get the spokesman's job – we won't know until he is asked. I am really sorry. I can't tell you how sorry, but this is the way the bureaucracy works in the Ministry."

Ephraim Tary was very glad to accept the offer of a new job in Paris. As for me, I sat at a crossroads in my life once again, wondering where I was headed.

Chapter Six:

London: Bar and Nativ

"Bar and Nativ" were the names of two Israeli governmental organizations set up to deal with immigration of Jews from the Soviet Union. Not long after the spokesman's job in Paris that had fallen through for me without any visible result, I received a phone call from Zvi Netzer, head of Bar. His superiors were Shaul Avigur, who headed Bar and Nativ, and Nehemiah Levanon, director of Nativ. Zvi Netzer asked me: "Remember me? When you were the editor of *Hayyom* you expressed support for our cause and were very sympathetic to the whole subject of absorbing Jews who immigrated from the USSR. I'd like to ask you a question: You wanted the job that Ephraim Tary got in Paris – would you be prepared to take his job at 'Bar and Nativ' in London?"

I answered immediately with a positive yes. I had a great interest in the whole matter, and during my years as Kol Israel correspondent in Paris I was an active "collaborator" in the process of helping Soviet Jews.

Back home, Tikva started crying again; she didn't want to be dragged out of Israel, it didn't make a difference to her if it was London or Paris. Avishag, my beloved little daughter, was then less than a year old, and my dear son Eviatar was about twelve. Tikva warned him that he would have to go to an English school; finally she said to me: "You go on, and we'll decide later if we're joining you." I told her that I was absolutely determined to go.

Before my trip, Shaul Avigur called me in and said: "Please remember, your mission will be accomplished only after 100,000 Soviet Jews immigrate to Israel. See if you can raise public awareness in the UK, since public opinion ignores the issue, and see to it that the British press writes about the Jews in the USSR. Use any methods you can to make sure that the Soviet Jews are able to listen to the BBC or

any other means of communication to let them know that British Jews feel solidarity with them in their struggle and will do whatever they can to aid them. This is your assignment."

Very soon after landing in London, it became clear to me that I had no tools for the job. My predecessors in the job were people from the theoretical side only, but not practical people of action at all. They did very thorough and basic work in informing political circles and updating the Jewish leadership; they had excellent relations with Emmanuel Litvinoff who was the editor of a British newspaper that covered everything going on about Jews in the Soviet Union. However, they lacked the drive and type of ingenious thinking now necessary to translate thought into practical action.

I asked what was at my disposal for the task, and I was told that there was a University Committee for Soviet Jewry, the UCSJ, but that its leader had resigned. In his place there was a young, inexperienced kid of nineteen, Alan Freeman. I said to myself, if that's what the situation is, then let me first try to use what I have. From the outset, I felt that he, his group, and I had great "chemistry" between us, so we began to act.

Our activities immediately made headlines in the UK. For example, just a few days after my arrival in London, I heard that several Jews had broken into the Moscow offices of TASS, the Soviet Press agency, to present a petition for permission to immigrate to Israel. This was a real piece of news, but what was the best way to bring it to the attention of British public opinion? One of the things I did was to go to David Floyd, correspondent for the Daily Telegraph and expert on the USSR and the Eastern Bloc. He was anti-Communist and very sympathetic to anything that was against the USSR, and quite in sympathy with the Jews' wish to be Jews. I went to him and asked him to make the news public. His reply: "Look, you are a very experienced newsman, and you were an editor, as well. You have to understand that I just can't write here in London what you tell me, that they arrested a Jew in Riga, or that Jews broke into the offices of TASS in Moscow – I have to name my sources. If you are willing to have me say that I received the information from the intelligence liaison of the Israeli Embassy – please go right ahead." I answered him, "What's the big deal? I could just as well publish the news in Israel, but I would really like you to get your

correspondent in the USSR to check out if it is really true." I could not persuade him, and I realized that this wasn't the way. That's why I gave instructions to my students, and that very same evening that I got the news, students broke into the TASS offices on Fleet Street and forced the workers there to send an encouraging telegram to the Russian Jews in Moscow. Journalists then had to investigate why young people broke into TASS in London. They were then told it was because in Moscow Jews broke into the TASS offices to present a petition to let them leave for Israel. Needless to say, the whole affair made headlines. This was the only way to get the issue into the forefront – by creating news in London. From that point on, I took great care to have such activity take place every few days, so that it would make the news in Great Britain.

However, I also understood that I couldn't lean on a handful of young students forever: they had to do well in their studies, and could not be only ones to carry on the struggle. The Jewish establishment in Great Britain was not at all enthusiastic about the vociferous manner of demonstrations. The Board of Deputies of British Jews was the managing body that represented the Jewish community in Great Britain, with a more than proportional representation by the Janner family. Lord Janner, the father, his wife Elsie and son Greville were all members of this board – three out of seven. At that time, the unanimous opinion was that "modesty was the best policy": Jews should be seen and not heard. Jews do not demonstrate, do not go out into the streets nor man the barricades or make a fuss. Jews speak, lobby and go gently. June Jacobs, head of the Jewish women's network, a beautiful and impressive woman from the British Jewish business aristocracy, said to me as well: "Silva Zalmanson? Don't mention her in my presence. She is a hijacker, and we in Britain find such things unacceptable." Despite such pronouncements, I thought that the best thing to do would be to recruit women for the struggle from these very social circles: the women were educated, they had leisure and maybe this would result in some good achievements.

I made rounds of phone calls to all the women's organizations and invited myself to lecture on what was happening in the USSR. At the close of each lecture I would announce, "If there is anyone in the audience who would like to lend a hand and help, please be so kind as

to remain after the lecture." Usually, no one stayed, but in some cases one or two women stayed. I collected these women and asked them to meet one evening at Joan Dale's home in Hampstead, one of the lovely garden neighborhoods of London. I spoke to them: "You are the few souls who have agreed to help actively. I am asking you to organize yourselves in a group to help me in our struggle against the Soviet Union."

I remember Valerie Green, a lovely Jewish woman, who asked me: "The USSR is a power that even the USA is hesitant to stand up to – what could a small group of women like us do?" They never let me forget my answer: "If there had been a small group of women such as yourselves who had demonstrated in front of [British Foreign Minister] Sir Anthony Eden's office during World War II, maybe the British would have bombed Auschwitz and destroyed the Nazi extermination machine. The trouble is that then there was no such group. You can work miracles." The women became extremely enthusiastic about the fight and organized themselves, ready for the task. The most prominent women among them were Doreen Gainesford, Barbara Oberman and Joan Dale.

Hardly any time elapsed before we received our first assignment. One day upon my arrival at the office, I found a telegram informing me that the Russian authorities had arrested Reisa Palatnik, a thirty-five-year-old Jewish librarian who had requested an exit visa to leave the USSR for Israel. Her parents did not know what had become of her, and we had to act immediately on her behalf. I immediately called the trio of women over to the office – Doreen, Barbara and Joan – and told them what had happened. I explained: "Look, Reisa Palatnik is thirty-five years old, approximately your own age. I suggest that you get together thirty-five women, all of you dress in black, and demonstrate in front of the Soviet Embassy. If the press asks you what the demonstration is about, tell them about Reisa. Tell them that she is thirty-five years old, and that thirty-five Jewish women are out here to demonstrate solidarity with her." Barbara, a stunning beauty, went to the demonstration wearing her lovely Royal Ascot hat. It was a totally luxurious hat that more than held its own in the ladies informal "hats competition" that takes place at the Ascot races, to see who had the most gorgeous, expensive and longest hat. Of course, the picture of

Barbara in her hat with the group of women dressed in black was published in newspapers all over the world, and the name Reisa Palatnik became the symbol of the struggle of British Jews on behalf of their brethren in the USSR. With time, we perfected our ways and means. I would sit for hours thinking up ways to make the news to arouse people and keep the issue at the forefront of public interest. I met Reisa Palatnik quite a few times in Israel after we succeeded in freeing her. Later, when she was in her fifties, she succumbed to a fatal disease and died in Israel.

Another person we fought for was Ruth Alexandrovitch, a seventeen-year-old nursing student arrested with her parents in Riga for daring to express their desire to immigrate to Israel. I phoned up "The 35", which is what the women had named the group, keeping the name even when it later grew to a hundred. The few had drawn in the many, with an added bonus: women in their forties could join and be thought to be thirty-five year olds! I phoned them up, and the next day, thirty-five women dressed as nurses showed up in front of the Soviet Embassy in London. We easily explained Ruth Alexandrovitch's distressing situation in Riga to the curious group of journalists, and the group of demonstrators gave the papers, so hungry for news, great photo-opportunities. This communicated the situation to many more readers and made them aware of this burning issue.

My "disciples" – Doreen, Barbara, Joan, and others – soon surpassed their "master" in thinking up ideas that were more sophisticated and clever. For example, in the middle of the struggle to have Silva Zalmanson freed, we received reports that her health was deteriorating in jail. Doreen thought up a great idea: she had a medallion struck with Silva Zalmanson's name on it and got Ingrid Bergman, the great cinema star, to wear the medallion on a televised interview. When the *Izvestia* correspondent asked her bitterly, "Tell me, Ingrid Bergman, of all the important things happening in the world, this is the case you have chosen – some girl who hijacked a plane in the Soviet Union?" Miss Bergman replied: "The world is full of trouble, that is why each one of us should adopt a cause and try to help."

After several months of such activities, more important personalities were swept up in the struggle, people who at first had not liked our way

of doing things, but who changed their mind along the way. Lord Janner, for example, a very amiable old gentleman, and one of the seven members of the Jewish Board of Deputies, relished publicity and did not understand how these Hampstead housewives could appear on the front pages; he wanted headlines too. I arranged several events for him at which he was spokesman, and, in fact, it made a powerful impression: Lord Janner himself appeared as an active protester outside the Soviet Embassy. The very same June Jacobs, who at first did not want to hear about the "hijacker, Sylva Zalmanson," conducted a hunger strike in front of the Soviet Embassy about three months later – for none other than Silva Zalmanson.

I would like to mention a few things about my friend Elie Wiesel. I had met him back in the days of Kol Israel in Paris. He had been awarded a very prestigious literary award in Paris, and I telephoned the hotel to request permission to tape him in the studio for a direct broadcast to Israel. I respected him enormously, since he was the first voice to be heard in the USA speaking about the suffering of the Jews in the Soviet Union at a time when American Jewry had no idea of what was going on there. Wiesel charmed me with his gentle way of speaking, with his world-view and the depth of his wisdom and Jewish belief. When we left the studio after the program, he wanted to take a taxi back to the hotel, but I said to him that in our company we take our customers "both there and back." From then on, we kept up extremely cordial relations. Now in London, on assignment for "Bar and Nativ" and afterwards in New York, the bond between us strengthened. Elie Wiesel was then the moving spirit of the movement on behalf of Soviet Jewry. I also used his book, "The Jews of Silence" to sway the hearts of several local Jewish leaders who did not believe that the situation for the Jews in the USSR was that bad. At any rate they claimed that we had no right to interfere. The same reversal that took place in June Jacobs' attitude towards Silva Zalmanson was to a great degree thanks to Elie Wiesel's book.

But more than anyone else, the couple who worked most energetically on behalf of Soviet Jewry was Greville Janner, son of Lord Janner and his wife Moira. They must be commended especially for the Friday evenings when they would telephone the USSR to speak to the Prisoners of Zion after the Sabbath meal. The Janners would

invite us along with other activists for dinner and afterwards we would telephone encouragement to some of the prisoners who later became historical names, such as Vladimir Slepak and Viktor Polsky. I have more to add about Viktor Polsky later. In any case, the Janner family was wise enough to get Victor Mishkin of the Board of Jewish Deputies onto our side, giving us four out of seven. The Board's attitude therefore changed, and it became a fighting Jewish organization that allowed loud protest.

The work in London on behalf of Soviet Jewry was extremely intensive. We would receive telegrams daily, telling us about more Jews in distress. We managed to drum up interest in their cases, either with Members of Parliment or journalists or the new women's groups that had meanwhile grown up around us. The most prominent was the Manchester Group, headed by Sylvia Sheff. Later she received an official British Honour for her activities on behalf of Soviet Jews.

But before my story brings us from London to New York, I must recount two more episodes. With work going along at such a mad pace, I hardly had time for family life, and so one day Bracha (no mistake – my private life had meanwhile taken a few turns) said to me that we must take the weekend off. An ex-Israeli travel agent found us a very interesting vacation package to Ireland, from Friday morning through Sunday night. Everything was packed and ready to go, the car was ready, when all of a sudden the Embassy notified me that an urgent, top-secret encoded telegram had been received for me. I said to Bracha that we would go by the Embassy and see what it was about. It was a cable from Shaike Dan, the man behind all the "Nativ" contacts with Communist dictators. Shaike was directly responsible for all the negotiations to save the Jews of Romania from Ceausescu. He had cabled me from Bucharest that he was on his way to Vienna: would I please meet him there on a matter of most urgency.

I was afraid to go outside to Bracha who was waiting in the car and tell her this, but I did have the presence of mind to phone our travel agent and ask him how much it would cost to add Bracha's ticket. We really didn't mind if we went to Ireland or Austria, we just needed to get away from the tension. It turned out that there were very low prices on weekend flights to Vienna – if we could be at the airport within three hours. In a mad rush, we headed for Heathrow, where our tickets



After the Officers Training Course



In the hospital, after being wounded in the Falameh reprisal raid



Ijo broadcasting



With Moshe Dayan after the Six Day War



The Israeli delegation at the funeral of Sir Winston Churchill in London (Ijo is the first from the left)



Interviewing Abba Eban in Paris



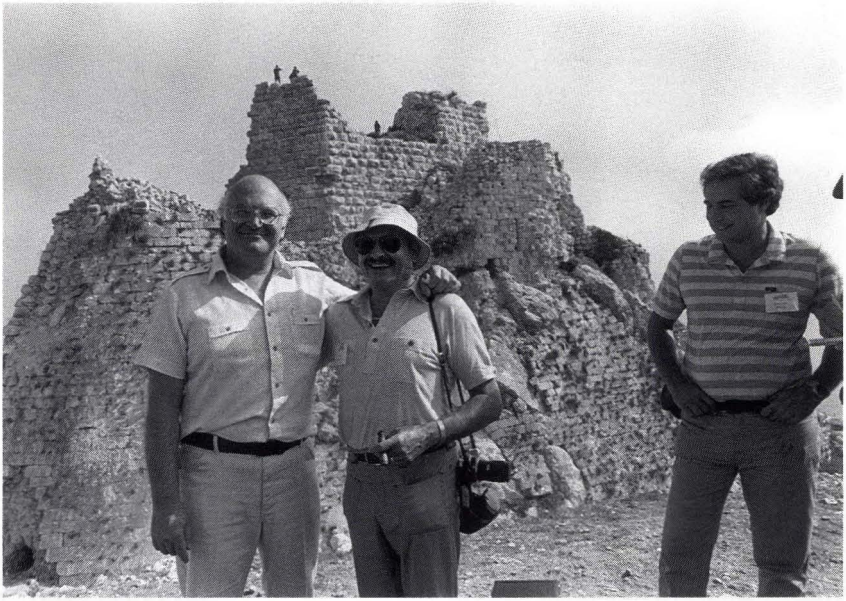
Interviewing Shimon Peres in Paris



With Silva Zalmanson during her hunger strike to free her husband



Ijo as President of the Israel Bonds awarding the Shield of the Council of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations to Stanley Lopata; Tom Green at the left



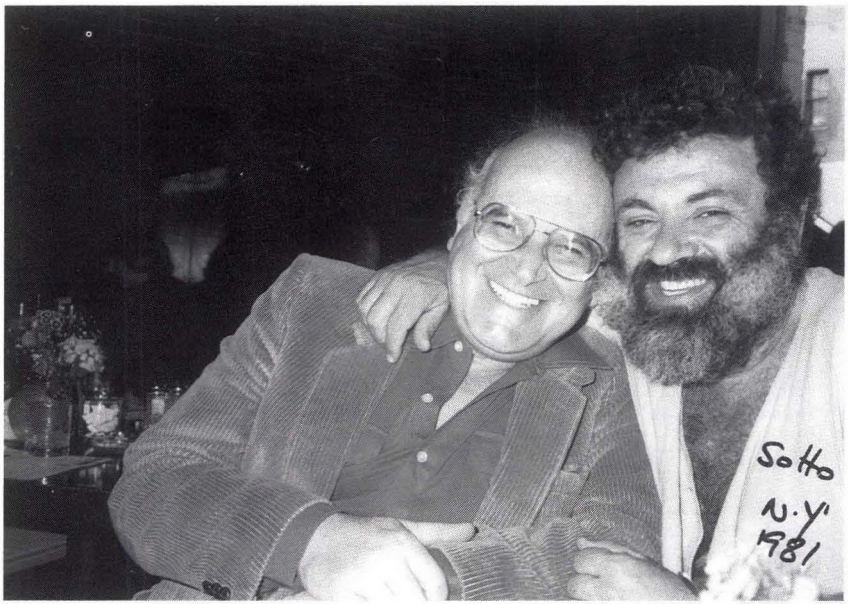
At the Beaufort with Israel Bonds leadership mission



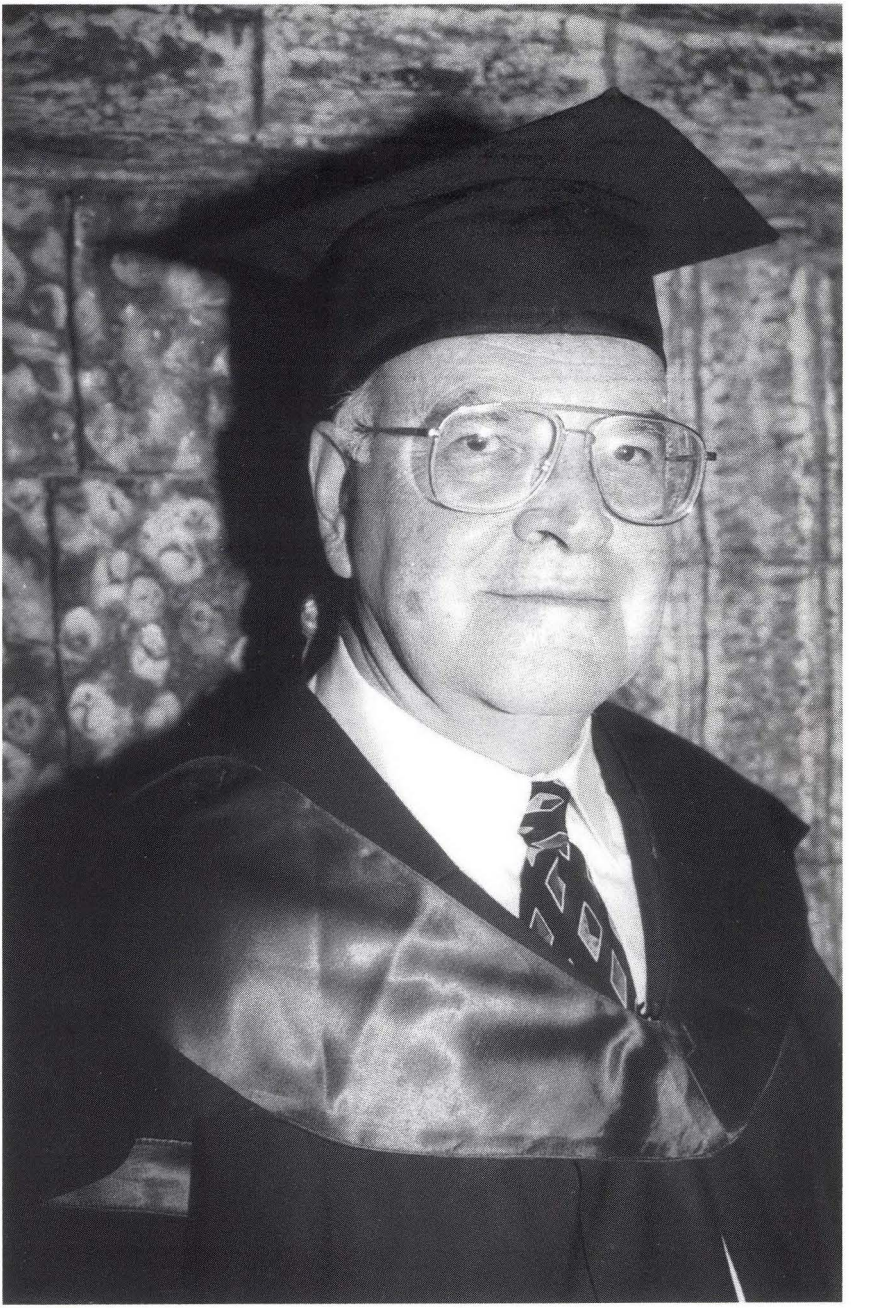
With Minister of Tourism Gideon Patt



With Malcolm Hoenlein, Chairman of the Council of Presidents of Jewish Organizations, and Rabbi Arthur Schneier, on a Bonds fund drive



With artist Menashe Kadishman



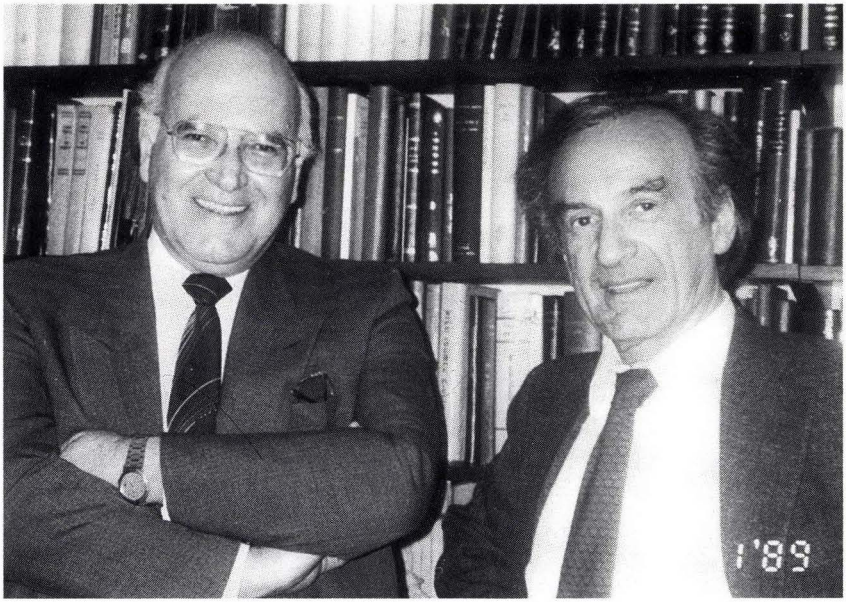
Ijo at the degrees awards ceremony, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev



With the Lubavitcher Rebbe



Ijo promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel by General Moshe Levy, Commander of the Central Command



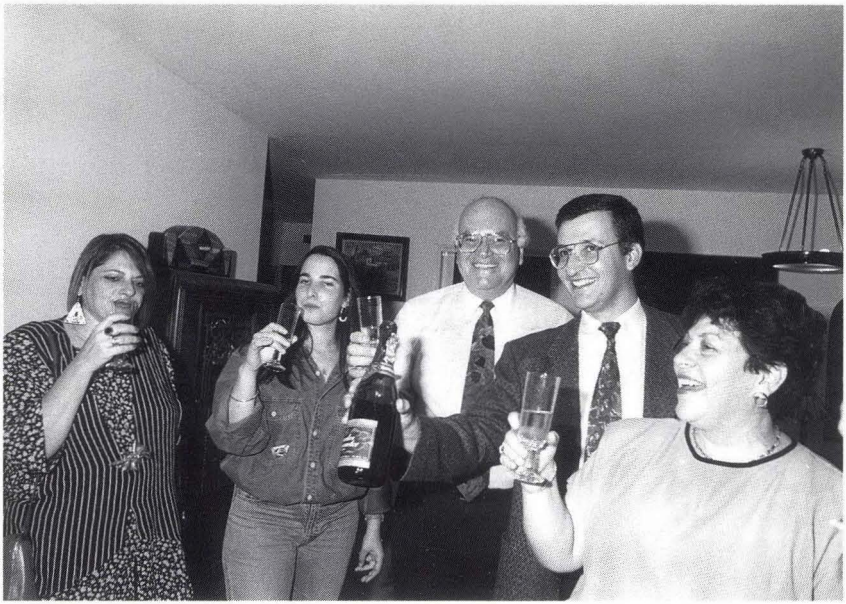
With author Elie Wiesel



With New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and Malcolm Hoenlein



Cornerstone-laying ceremony for the Shopping Mall of the Negev, with David Azrieli



Election victory celebration November 2, 1993. From the right: Bracha, Eviatar, Ijo, Avishag



Inauguration broadcast of Radio Darom (Radio of the South) January 9, 1996



Showing around newly-made Honorary Citizen of Beersheba
Yitzhak Shamir



Independence Day – kindergarten children perform in the stadium



Laying the cornerstone for Kiryat Avot with former Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef and MK Aryeh Deri



Honorary Citizenship to Minister Arik Sharon



With late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on a visit to Beersheba



Seeing soccer team Hapoel Beersheba off to Europe

awaited us, and several hours later landed in Vienna. Shaike Dan himself greeted us at the airport: "Welcome to Vienna. First of all, we are going to Wienerwald to eat some fried chicken."

Wienerwald – the Vienna Woods. I remembered childhood tales told by my father about those woods and the films that I saw about Strauss waltzes. Such a waltz began playing in my head the entire way to the restaurant. It was a very fine restaurant in a well landscaped part of the forest, actually a large park. A light wine was served, so light that you're not careful, and you down the first glass like juice. The second glass already goes to your head, and by the third, we were high and very happy. I was feeling very good, and said to Shaike: "What would really be nice is a ride in a carriage through the Vienna Woods – I saw something like that once in a film." Shaike grew serious and said that it was impossible, since at 3 o'clock on the dot we had to be at the Cafe Haas in Vienna. And if Shaike said so, so it must be without any argument.

The Haas reminds me a bit of the films about eighteenth and nineteenth century royalty. There were waiters in uniforms more resplendent than admirals', absolute quiet, and bourgeois Austrians taking most of the seats. I said to Shaike, "It's OK, it's already five minutes to three." But Shaike replied, "Three means three." Just then the clock struck, and out of the swinging doors of the kitchen two carts full of pastries began to move towards the customers. Not a word was spoken. The pastry waiter stopped near each table, with the diners pointing in utter seriousness to the item that they wanted. It was unbelievable how quiet it was – not a person spoke. We also ordered, and then the admiral-waiter turned to us and asked us if we wanted coffee, chocolate, tea, or any other drink. Austria will be remembered quite favorably in any history of the exodus of Soviet Jews from the USSR, not only because she consented to building transit camps near Vienna, but also by its very existence, a neutral country surrounded by Communist regimes. The fact that she allowed us to meet on Austrian soil, the way that punctually at three o'clock we met at the Cafe Haas in Vienna. Right there and no other place was the setting for Shaike's special request. He urgently needed intervention on the highest political level: he needed someone to get to Harold Wilson, British Prime Minister, about something that could put a bit of pressure on

Ceausescu, Romania's dictator. He didn't want to speak about it on the telephone, and a telegram would not do either. Over the years he had established a working relationship with Ceausescu and his Securitate people, the Romanian secret service, who, by the way, were armed with Israeli Uzi submachine guns. I said to Shaike that I could probably do this, and that when I returned to London I myself would go or I would send a reliable person to see Harold Wilson on the subject.

There is one more episode worth mentioning involving one of our London demonstrations. We planned that students and women would enter the Russian Consulate in London, innocently enough, and ask for forms for a visitor's visa to the USSR. In the space marked "Purpose of Visit" they would write in "To encourage my brethren in the USSR who are living under deplorable conditions." It was a very successful idea. We told sympathetic journalists – but that's how the word got out to the Soviets. When the women, headed by Doreen Gainesford, together with the students, headed by Alan Freeman, began to enter the building, some KGB thugs were already waiting for them. Two of them grabbed Alan and began dragging him up to the second floor. Doreen kept her wits about her, and hung onto Alan's belt and began screaming. When the KGB men saw that they were in an embarrassing situation, they let go of Alan, but pulled his leather briefcase out of his hand. To our utter consternation, this naive nineteen-year-old had taken nearly the entire office with him enclosed in the case. The papers included a detailed list of all the activities and budgets, division of tasks and names of all the members of the UCSJ.

The Russians looked the material over very carefully and decided to use it to point an accusing finger at me, the man who sat within the Israeli Embassy controlling all the women and students who gave the Soviets a hard time. The following day, the Soviets called a press conference where they exhibited all of Freeman's documents, explaining with each document that it said, "Report to Yitzhack Rager", "Planned Budget to Yitzhack Rager" – with my name mentioned as part of each paper. Michael Comay, Israel's Ambassador to the UK, was beside himself with rage. He called me in and said: "This is terrible! It all points to the Embassy!" I replied: "I don't know what you're talking about. Just because the Russians added my name to every paper, does this mean that they are telling the truth?" Comay said

that I would have to leave immediately. I looked at him pityingly; he looked truly miserable standing there in his office. He was a brilliant man, and very impressive, but not a big fighter. It would be a foolish stunt for the Government of Israel, I said to myself, to ship me out of there and thus admit fault. I quickly cabled Nehemiah Levanon with a full report on the pathetic conversation with the Ambassador. Yigal Allon, who was then Minister of Foreign Affairs, wasn't the slightest bit impressed by the Soviets, and, like the man he was, he quite gently told the ambassador to cut out the nonsense. And so I stayed on the job. It had already been decided at Bar and Nativ headquarters not to send me home, but rather to send me to New York, the nerve center of the struggle for Soviet Jewry.

The Soviets' attempt to abduct Alan Freeman and the sensational press conference at which they blamed all their trials and tribulations on me cost them dearly. The angry British were already a bit fed up with the Soviets and this was the straw that broke the camel's back. Not very many weeks passed when Britain, showing extraordinary courage, expelled 101 Soviet "diplomats" from its soil. Among those of course were those who tried to catch Freeman and to expel me as well. Ambassador Comay, who was so eager to send me home, was interviewed in an Israeli paper a few weeks later on a home visit and he boasted about how the activism among British Jewry on behalf of Soviet Jewry was really so fantastic.

One more word in praise of Cyril Stein, a gaunt English Jew who had grown up poor then built a mighty economic empire. Just as an example, he owned quite a few hotels, including the Hilton chain. Cyril Stein dedicated himself, literally, to the struggle on behalf of Soviet Jews. All I had to do was confirm that we needed a particular type of help – and money was no object. Life was easier just with the thought that there was a Jew like that around and on our side.

And last but not least in the London chapter of my life: Alan Freeman's parents, who were ready to have heart attacks when they heard the news about what the KGB tried to do to their son at the Soviet Consulate, decided to do the wise and correct thing. They sent Alan to Israel to continue his studies. Alan is now deputy director of development at the Jerusalem Foundation for Development, and a good, devoted Israeli. The leather case that the Russians

had snatched from his hands was returned empty; Alan presented it to my son Eviatar, who used the gift as a student at the Jewish Free School in London.

Chapter Seven:

New York: Bar and Nativ

The Yom Kippur war began in October 1973, two weeks after I arrived in New York. I rushed to the airport and flew home for the war. In London, we were pulled off the plane, since orders were to fly the armored corps and gunners commanders out first; and I was now in the infantry. I stayed in London for two and a half days until Nehemiah Levanon's telegram reached me, ordering me in no uncertain terms to get back to New York immediately, where I was needed more. Utterly depressed and demoralized, I returned to New York. Gradually, names of the fallen reached us, names of friends' sons, such as Ben Golan, my friends Miriam and Yitzhak's oldest. That broke me. I got into bed, feeling total inertia, and couldn't move, eat or talk. Bracha was frightened, and took command, ordering me out of bed to a Ben Shahn retrospective on 57th Street. I understood that I had to take hold of myself and get out of my depressed state.

We went to the exhibit, and the very first picture I came face to face with portrayed a very careworn face, with an inscription from the prophet Jeremiah at the bottom of the piece: "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eye a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people." I stood there, rooted to the spot, thinking again about those who fell in the fighting, until the gallery owner came over to me, asked "May I help you?" "No, thanks, but this picture speaks to me." "Sir, perhaps I may have your card?" I gave him one of the consul's cards from the Israeli Consulate in New York. Then the gallery owner said to me, "Just take the picture and send me $100 each month. When you come to the end of your tour of duty, talk to me and we'll see how much you still owe. If you change your mind, I'll give you back all the money." I took the picture and had it framed in black velvet and gold. I haven't parted

from the picture and often look at it hanging in our home, with love mixed with awe.

Those were extremely difficult times. The Egyptian Third Division was surrounded, and the Soviets, determined to save it from the IDF, threatened Israel with a nuclear strike. Henry Kissinger, US Secretary of Defense, was extremely worried, and concluded that he must pacify the Soviets. But there was something else that stuck in the Soviets' craw: Senator Henry Jackson, a truly Righteous Among the Nations, had proposed the "Jackson Amendment" by which the USSR could not enjoy most favored nation status, especially in commercial ties with the USA, until it let the Jews immigrate freely. Jackson proposed this with the support of the Jewish establishment. But then Kissinger decided to make the Jewish establishment capitulate. He called in Max Fisher, a distinguished Jewish leader and ardent Republican, explaining that the Jews must cease their support of the proposed Jackson Amendment. Fisher asked Simcha Dinitz, Israel's Ambassador to the US, and he said: no way out of it, Kissinger should be heeded.

Fisher called in all the leaders of the Council of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations, headed by Jack Stein, a big supporter of Fisher, and Richard "Richie" Mass, chairman of The National Conference for Soviet Jewry. Mass was an exceptionally decent and unique leader who had grown up in the ranks of the American Jewish Committee. The meeting ended at 10 p.m. By midnight, I was already meeting with Richie Mass, hearing with my own ears about the catastrophe and the decision that had been made to stop supporting Jackson. I was deeply troubled. The clear-cut order from Prime Minister Golda Meir was that we were not to interfere in an obvious way in the difference of opinion between the American government and the Congress; it certainly was a difference of opinion. I sat there, totally tense and worried, since it was obvious that something was about to happen that history would never forgive us for: during times of trouble, Israel was turning its back on Soviet Jewry and throwing them to the wolves. This was the gist of the cable that I sent to Nehemiah Levanon.

The next morning I knew what I had to do. The person who took care of the Soviet Jewry file at the NACRAC – the National Council for Foreign Relations of the American Jewish Communities – was Abe Bayer. Young, friendly, energetic and very well informed – he wanted

to know everything and would also tell all he knew to help and appeared always to know what was going on. I phoned him up and pleaded: "Abe, I must see you now on very urgent business." I had already made up a story, that I needed a lawyer fluent in French and Russian, to go to Moscow that afternoon on a mission. I knew that he couldn't get me such a lawyer before afternoon, and that, indeed was the case. I thanked him for his good will and got up to leave. Then, as if in an afterthought, I remembered to ask him if he had Jack Stein's home phone number, which, of course, he did. I asked if I could use the phone, he graciously allowed me to, and it was clear that he would listen to the conversation. So I phoned up Jack Stein, chairman of the Council of Presidents, in these words: "Jack, I hear that you told the Jewish leaders last night that the 'voices from Israel' are telling us to stop supporting Jackson. Is that true?" "Yes," said Stein. So I said, "Then it's lucky that I'm talking to you, because I don't want there to be any misunderstanding between us. I am in charge of the issue of Soviet Jewry in the USA, and you never heard any such things from me." I repeated myself twice, and closed the conversation. I took my leave of Abe, thanking him, and with a tremendous feeling of relief I went into the noisy Manhattan street. Just for fun, I called up Abe, and sure enough, the line was busy. Abe was already telling all those who needed to know that the truth of the matter was that Israel was not in favor of withdrawing support from Jackson. Later I found out that Ambassador Simcha Dinitz wrote to Golda that she should have me recalled from the States since I was an undercover agent for the Herut movement, but Golda, who had plenty of other worries during the Yom Kippur War, delegated the investigation to Yisrael Galili. Galili knew me from the old days when I so firmly backed up Hanoch Gibton in our fight at the radio, and he told them: "Ijo Rager is a fellow with integrity, and if he did something, that means it had to be done." Galili's verdict was that I should keep my job.

Finally, the Jackson supporters had their day and the amendment was passed. In my office, we had a map of the USA covered by a blind, and every time that one of my people told me that a state had lobbied successfully for ratification with a Senator or Representative, we would put a white flag on the map. When Nehemiah Levanon came for a visit later, Simcha Dinitz told him that the whole story was nonsense, no

one would support the Jackson-Vannik Amendment, and that it was better to stop our actions. Nehemiah came to see me in a panic and said that Dinitz said that the Amendment would never pass. I pulled up the shade with a dramatic flourish to show the map: "Nehemiah, just count the white flags – all these support the Amendment."

We couldn't have done it without the help of Richard Perl, Jackson's personal assistant, later appointed Under Secretary, and Dorothy Fosdick, his secretary. And, of course, the brave fighters for the rights of Soviet Jews in New York, headed by the one and only Malcolm Hoenlein – a young, kippa-wearer from the Philadelphia Jewish community, who took the responsibility of leadership of the New York Conference on Soviet Jewry. No words can express the great contribution of Malcolm Hoenlein himself and of his organization. Though small, it was very efficient, made up of enthusiastic and energetic young people who accomplished some amazing things. I remember Margy-Ruth Davis and Zissy Schnur very fondly for their fine accomplishments: they led the Conference after Malcolm. All these young people showed up everywhere, organized large-scale demonstrations of more than 100,000 people, and reached Senators and other leaders. Let me also mention the good work of two public figures who were also part of the leadership of the New York Conference: Eugene Gold, preceded by Stanley Lowell, New York Deputy Mayor.

Just the part that the New York Conference played in the struggle for Soviet Jewry could fill an entire book, let alone the whole story. It's hard to describe the creative imagination and the resourcefulness, the total devotion that activists all over the world and throughout the USA showed in their struggle for our brethren beyond the Iron Curtain. By the very nature of my story, it is inevitable that I cannot do full justice to the story nor to its heroes, since I probably left people out. For example, I remember the wonderful work done by "The Union," the student groups on Long Island and San Francisco, and many other groups that I really should mention. There is no end to the list, so I'll just end with a small example of the terrific actions by describing only two incidents.

As in London, we would also get our information from telegrams from the Tel Aviv office regarding the difficulties of Soviet Jews, and we would inform various Jewish organizations with this confirmed

information so that they would act. But we must never forget that the movement couldn't have kept its constant vitality without the tremendous response and feedback received from the Jews of the Soviet Union themselves. I would always say that they were the ones who activated us, that with their enthusiasm and relentless purpose they drove us forward by the very fact that they were not cowed by the Soviet regime that threatened them.

One of these indomitable Soviet Jews was Viktor Polsky, a Muscovite. It was obvious that he was under scrutiny of the authorities since he was such an activist, and the authorities were already having him shadowed, having decided to manufacture a pretext to pull him in rather than wait. One day, someone in the KGB remembered that several years before, a young woman, the daughter of a Soviet colonel, had tried to commit suicide by throwing herself in front of his car. Polsky had succeeded in braking just in time, and the young woman was just wounded; now, years later, the KGB pulled out the old file and arrested Polsky. He was accused of reckless, drunken driving and endangerment. That is, they already decided to put him away for three years, since in the USSR, a person who has been indicted is considered guilty until proven innocent, with the trial only setting the punishment. Only one detail escaped us: Viktor, being a clever man, had seen what was coming. On the very day of the suicide attempt, Viktor had sent his wife to tape the visit with the young woman as she lay wounded, and his wife asked her why she had done what she did. They kept the tape. I remembered Maurice Najari, New York State District Attorney, who had made headlines every day. I thought that he was an American of Italian or Arab origins. I went to see him and told him that we were trying to save an innocent person: would he fly to Moscow to meet with Viktor Polsky; this alone would encourage him by his very presence. I was sure that when Polsky saw whom we sent to him, he would pass whatever information he had to us.

Najari did go to see him, and Polsky did understand the type of man he was dealing with. He asked Najari to arrange a private visit with his wife, which Najari did. To his surprise, he received the tape in which the young woman confessed that it was indeed a suicide attempt. I had briefed Najari very well in advance, but he was a wise enough person: he rushed straight to the American Embassy and sent the tape to

himself in the express diplomatic pouch to New York City, and he himself got on the first plane out to return to New York. At 4 a.m. he phoned me saying, "Listen, I have a tape that makes it absolutely clear that they fabricated the case against Polsky. I'll rip them to pieces. I'm going to call a press conference in the morning and reveal them for what they are." He was so worked up and furious that I could barely calm him down. But I said, "Mr. Najari, do you want a press conference, or do you want to help Polsky?" "Help Polsky, of course," he replied, adding something about all Jews being responsible for one another. I realized he was Jewish and I was astounded. "So what do we do?" I suggested that in the morning he should phone up the Soviet Ambassador to the UN and tell him that he had solid proof of the false case. "Tell him that you don't want to embarrass the Soviet Union, so you won't publish the proof, but that you expect Polsky to be freed" That's what happened. Polsky was found guilty, as usual when accused, but his sentence was a hundred ruble fine – and he was given an exit permit for Israel.

As for the second story: there was a Jewish activist in Tblisi in Georgia, a shoemaker against whom the authorities also made up a totally untrue story of a swindle regarding windows, a mock trial at the close of which he was sentenced to three years in prison. The KGB, which was seemingly so sophisticated in its evil methods, didn't notice that one of the women on the jury received permission to leave for Israel. Once in Israel, she publicized the facts on the trial, emphasizing that the jury was given no choice, but had to convict him, since he was indicted. The only thing they could do was to recommend a lighter punishment, "only" three years.

I had the idea that we could prepare a serious appeal against this trial in one of the western countries or in Israel. We could protest on the basis of Soviet law itself, basing our testimony on the woman who had been on the jury. Maybe we could embarrass the Soviets so much that they would free the prisoner. I called Eugene Gold, then Brooklyn District Attorney; Carl Vergari, a very fine man of Italian origin, then District Attorney for Westchester; Nicholas Scopetta, working for the New York City Prosecutor's office, and Melvin Stein, legal affairs assistant to the president of Equitable. Stein was a devout and observant Jew, who wore his kippa to work on the 28th floor of the

Equitable Building, to his job as vice president for legal affairs of this huge insurance company. I asked them who was the best person in New York or the rest of the USA who could prepare the appeal for the prisoner from Tblisi. Scopetta had a brilliant idea. Every Sunday he had a tennis game with retired General Telford Taylor, Professor of Law at Columbia University. This was the General who had been the American prosecutor at the Nuremberg War Crimes Trial, along with Soviet prosecutor Roman Rudenko, who was now the Public Prosecutor of the Communist USSR. I couldn't contain my excitement at the idea of General Taylor appearing in Moscow to appeal the unfair trial of a Jew, years after the two prosecutors had worked side by side to bring the Nazis to justice at Nuremberg. "What do we do?" I asked. They said that the best way to proceed would be to enlist the help of two more high level lawyers, Alan Dershowitz and Professor Lipson, expert in Russian law. Scopetta took upon himself to speak to Taylor, who, to our surprise, did not hesitate a second but immediately said that he was ready to contribute to the cause. His only condition was that the Government of Israel would not involve itself in any way. We accepted. Next step was to raise the $50,000 for the campaign, which I did not yet have. We needed the money to ensconce Dershowitz and Lipson and their group of assistants in a good place to work. They must be able to go over other Prisoner of Zion cases to find the weak points in order to attack and appeal.

Where was I going to find $50,000? I had the authority to draw up to $10,000 from the general account at the Consulate without any details, which I did so, without any permission from home. Being hard pressed, I phoned Rabbi Haskel Lookstein, who headed Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun, one of New York's most prominent synagogues, a center of Zionism, Judaism and love of Israel. "Haskell, I need to come up with $50,000!" I said to him. With the help of Noam Shudovsky, principal of the excellent Ramaz High School, Rabbi Lookstein got together the big money people, we explained the situation, and requested a donation. These fine Jews did not disappoint us, since they often gave to important Jewish causes. That same evening I received assurances of the money, and I was able to breathe a little more freely. Not only that, but I was able to return the $10,000 to the government

account, the money that I had withdrawn on my own with pride and a feeling of responsibility.

The drama continued, and I won't tire you out with details. Several weeks later, General (retired) Telford Taylor together with Alan Dershowitz, landed in Moscow, with sixteen appeals files, very firmly based on the very principles of Soviet law. It's impossible to describe the confusion that gripped the Soviets, nor can I properly describe Rudenko's rage, or my own feelings of pride and joy at this marvelous achievement. This operation was documented in full in the book "Courts of Terror," written by Telford Taylor himself. He personally inscribed a copy to me with the words, "Nothing that I can say can describe your contribution to this important operation."

The struggle on behalf of Soviet Jewry was one of the grandest efforts by world Jewry, expressed in two conferences in Brussels in the 1970s. I participated in the first one as part of the office staff of "Bar and Nativ." By the second conference, I was already the right hand man and chief assistant to Aryeh (Leon) Dulzin, chairman of the Jewish Agency. When we decided that the time had come to organize a second conference, we wanted first to meet for consultation in one of the cities of Europe, and we chose Rome. We then found out that the head of the professional trade unions of Australia was then in the USSR. He was in touch with Isi Leibler, one of the most prominent Australian Jewish leaders, who was with us in Rome. We made sure that on his way home, the secretary would stop in Rome. There, for the first time, we heard the welcome news that the Soviets were willing to open their tightly clenched fist and to begin to allow larger groups of Jews to leave the USSR.

I should just like to close this chapter on a lighter note. During that meeting in Rome, Zvi Netzer asked me if I would like them to reserve a hotel room for me in Rome, but I said that I was already taken care of. I could see in his eyes that for him that meant that I had an arrangement with a member of the fairer sex. He was right. I went very happily to the lovely little apartment that the University of Rome had put at the disposal of my wife Bracha, since to my delight she had been invited at the same time to give some lectures at the University. Of course, I called in the phone number to the office, and Netzer was no slouch: he found out that it was located in the area of the University.

All his doubts melted away: this was merely a case of the combination of high matters of national import with the nitty-gritty of the here and now. At the close of the visit in Rome, the Ambassador invited us to a reception in his home, which I attended with Bracha at my side. "Bracha," called out a surprised Netzer, "since when are you here?" Bracha, with that same even, pleasant, slightly nasal tone so familiar to all her friends, replied quite casually, "I was here before you. Ijo just joined me."

Chapter Eight:

New York: President of the "Bonds"

The "Bonds" is the company established to extend loans for Israel's economic independence and development. It is the organization that sells Israel government bonds throughout the world. From its establishment by David Ben-Gurion to the present time, the "Bonds", as we call it for short, has succeeded in obtaining a considerable amount of credit for the State of Israel. In 1979, I was appointed president of the World Bonds. To understand what the presidency means, I must first explain that it is actually an organization that sells securities to the American public, so a special corporation had to be set up in the States called the DCI (Development Corporation of Israel), which is actually a brokerage company. So actually, the president of the World Bonds is the managing director of a brokerage company; we sell securities of only one type – the State of Israel's bonds – but we are in reality licensed to sell any other type of security.

The State of Israel always made sure that the president of the Bonds would be an Israeli. The remaining members of the Board were wealthy American Jews, and when I arrived to take office, I realized that several were founding members of the organization. And so when I became president, I realized that it was not so simple just to take office: I had to first pass some tests! In the United States, a country based so firmly on law, they make sure (and you can be sure that they make sure) that the agent selling securities to the public is very well versed in his profession, especially someone with the standing of President of the Bonds. My test would be that much more difficult. I innocently asked what was I to be examined on, and it became clear to me that it was "only" on the subjects of international law, commercial law, economics, the American capital market, and other fields that had not yet been within my expertise before. So I found myself in a kind of "Catch 22": if I had

known all this in advance, I wouldn't have taken the position at all. On the other hand, I was already in New York, I accepted the job, now what was I supposed to say, that I was afraid of an exam? It reminds me of the story of the man who was innocently watching a horserace when an insane roughneck jumped on his back, whipped him, all the while yelling "giddyap." People asked him, "Then what did you do?" So he answered: "What could I do? Did I have any choice? I came in third." I felt like that man – my only choice was to do what I usually do in life when a difficult challenge lands on me: I try with all my might to come in first.

I explained to the gentleman of the administration that I needed to learn the job first, and that meanwhile would he please find me the very best private tutor so that I could prepare for my exams. For five weeks, I flew to all of the major American cities to get to meet the regional leaders and introduce myself to the Bonds people, while at the same time I carried all the material that I had to study with the tutor. I studied stubbornly and thoroughly, learning by heart all sorts of amusing terms in the field of the American stock and securities markets. Whoever heard me drop phrases such as "blue sky" and "red herring" and other choice pieces of jargon from the securities sales field wouldn't have dreamed that it was only a few days ago that I had learned them by heart in order to produce them at the right moment for the right impression, that I was knowledgeable in the field. About five or six weeks later, when I felt that I had mastered the material, I asked the official to set up the test. Suddenly he remembered that people in my position had to score over 90 on the exam. Did I have any choice? I took another few days of backbreaking study with my tutor, who also coached me using previous tests from the last few years for practice. He tested and re-tested me, while I studied and studied and then went back and studied some more, while the tutor checked the results, corrected papers, and kept up the encouragement. I went to the exam on the appointed date. Did I have any choice? I got a 94, and today yours truly is an officially registered USA broker who can go there and open a brokerage office and be "in business."

Why did I tell you all this? Because after a very short time, it turned out that all that was the easy part of the job. I found myself in a murderous job. I'll try and describe it in terms that will show how I

felt: just for example, let us say that the bonds have to sell $365 million per year, the same figure as days in the year. Let's just suppose that this is the level that must be reached, and performance must not drop below it at for any reason whatsoever – you are not allowed to sell less than your predecessors sold the year before. This means, in our little example, that if a day passed without a sale of a million dollars, you are in trouble, since tomorrow you have to go out and sell yesterday's quota plus today's, let's say, at a $1,100,000. That means that if you haven't met the quota for five days, you are liable to finish the year with a net loss in sales. And if we take into account the weekends and US national holidays plus the Jewish holidays, if you want to sell $365 million, you have to sell $1,300,000 every working day.

I began my presidency with Bonds sales less than $500 million, and when my term of office ended, sales reached an excess of $750 million annually. But the tension was unbearable. Just before 5 p.m. each day, as the computer spat out the reports from all branches, I was totally wrung out and under extreme pressure. If we sold fewer securities than we should have, danger signals went off all around me.

There I was, in 1982, towards the end of a terrible week just as I described, in which each day we sold less than the previous day, I understood that I was in real trouble. It was time for me to "pull a leadership stunt" as we said in the army, so I invited all of the top management for an emergency meeting on Sunday. You can imagine how they all complained and were totally annoyed at spoiling tennis day, family day and so on and so forth. I begged them to come at 8 a.m., promising to end by 9 a.m. so that they could join the tennis games and picnics meanwhile I sharpened the ultimate "prod" with which to spur them on. Meanwhile, I fell asleep Saturday night and woke up after seven the next morning! Sounds like a bad schoolboy's excuse to the teacher, but the six o'clock alarm did not work! That meant that I had exactly forty minutes to get to Downtown Manhattan, to the offices on Park Avenue at 17th Street from my place on 89th. Without going into too much detail, suffice it to say that I leaped into my clothes, made another running jump into the car and went rushing down Park Avenue while shaving in the car.

Sunday morning traffic is quite light and I was speeding down the street, telling myself that it was really not good form for the demanding

one who called an emergency meeting to be late. I had always been the one who always expected precision and punctuality – and today was especially important, since I had put all of my people to a lot of trouble at an unorthodox hour on an unacceptable day of the week. Nevertheless, at 7:57 a.m., three minutes before the meeting, I was still three blocks away from our parking place on the corner of 16th Street. I made the split-second decision to park in front of the building and get to the meeting on time, and suddenly made a sharp left onto 17th Street.

I awoke about twenty minutes later, at 8:18, sitting in my large Chevy. I remember the exact time because I looked at my watch out of compulsive habit as passersby and policemen got me out of the car. I was stretched out on the seat, the car had become crushed into an accordion shape and was a total loss.

The car was wrapped around a lamppost facing north, as if it were headed back uptown. What had happened is as I made my impulsive left turn to 17th, a taxi was driving up the north direction of Park Avenue and hit me head on at about 60 miles (one hundred kilometers) an hour. I was knocked sideways for some reason onto the seat, while the car was sent flying onto the post. As is usual in such cases, the steering wheel was pushed straight into the driver's seat. Luckily for me, the first blow had sent me out of the seat and so I did not end my life with the steering wheel going through me.

I was pulled out of the car and stood up, looking over myself for signs of injury. I did not find one scratch. (After a careful inspection, I saw a teeny-tiny scratch on my right index finger.) I stood there in total astonishment at the miracle that I was saved. The cops already had all the details, and I asked them if I were still needed. I wasn't; the wounded were already taken away by ambulance while I was still unconscious, my car was being towed away – everything was happening so fast, they had to clear the road. So I went up to the meeting about half an hour late, and wiped away the half smiles when I said, "Sorry for being late. I was just in an accident."

They all became pale at once. "Do you mean to say that that tremendous 'boom' we just heard at eight was you?"

"I don't remember any big boom. I was out cold."

They immediately surrounded me, becoming worried and affec-

tionate, checked me all over to make sure I was OK and really celebrated out of joy that I came out of it alive. Of course, the meeting was short, I told them how worried I was, that we had to make every effort, and so on. (Let me say that that year brought us record sales, not because of any extraordinary measures on our part, but because of the war in Lebanon – when there's war in Israel, the Jews of America open their purse strings.)

As we went down the steps, Morris Sipser, my assistant, suggested that we go to the hospital for tests, since after all, I had just been in a serious accident. I said OK and we went into the very well-known hospital on my way home, at 67th and Park. They examined me for several hours, poked me, prodded me, X-rayed, slides, but didn't find anything. Finally, the doctor put an elastic collar around my neck, prescribed several days bed rest, and said everything would be fine. I sat at home, but didn't feel well at all. I was in a kind of black funk and I felt that a strange fatigue had descended on me. In the meantime, the office rented a new car for me – exactly as the old one, a Chevrolet Caprice Classic, and three days later I went back to work – did I have any choice? On Monday, I telephoned Dr. Ariel Diestenfeld. He was a friend who had been wounded in 1948 in the shelling of besieged Jerusalem. He had served in the war with a company of the paramilitary youth corps, and after many operations in Israel and abroad, his leg was saved and he went on to study medicine in the USA. He remained in New York after his studies and became very successful. When I said that I didn't feel well, he invited me for an examination. At the end, he said, "It's summer, we're all hot. Working too hard and feeling awful. Let's go, I'm taking you to lunch, make you feel good." A day later, I wrote a postcard to my daughter, when my secretary asked me, "What's your daughter's
name?" "Avishag." "Then why did you write 'Avigash'?" she asked.

It was probably only a slip of the pen, I said to myself. But about an hour later, I sent a watch out for repair under warranty. The company required only $3 handling fee for the return. When my secretary said, "With this amount you can buy a new watch," I asked her what did she mean, "$3 is really not a lot of money, is it?" "Yes, but you wrote $300," she replied. That was when I realized something was very

wrong. Not only that, but an unpleasant incident had happened to me that morning. I was supposed to have phoned Minister of Finance Yoram Aridor at excatly, 8 a.m., but when I went down in the morning to the garage and my car was brought to me, I didn't feel well enough to drive. Better to take a cab, I thought. But then at 8:10, in the middle of the cab ride, I remembered that the Minister of Finance had been sitting in Boston and awaiting my phone call since 8 a.m. I immediately had the taxi stop at a public phone booth, where with my company credit card and a code number, I could make the call. But, when the moment came to say the code, I couldn't remember it! By the time I managed to reach Yoram Aridor, he first let me know exactly how it felt for a man in his position to be stuck in his room waiting for my phone call.

I realized that I needed further tests and telephoned Ariel Diestenfeld once again; within hours, he had arranged an appointment with a top neurologist. The latter examined me thoroughly but couldn't find anything. Then he added, "Sir, I can't find anything, but Dr. Diestenfeld told me that you're a serious man, so let's give you a CT (computerized tomography) scan tomorrow. Don't eat anything, and we'll be able to inject the dye for the blood." All this was accomplished early in the morning, and for the price of the treatment you can have an entirely clean conscience accepting the "complimentary" breakfast of bagel and cream cheese with coffee afterwards.

After the exam, I went to the meeting of the Board of Directors, when an hour later, my secretary came in with a slip that the doctor had called and I should call him back. I wrote on it, "You know better than to disturb a meeting of the Board." After a few minutes she came back, "He insists that I get you out." So be it; the meeting had already lasted an hour and ten minutes. We went "lightly over" the last few items, and I was out of there within ten minutes, and the doctor was already on the line again. I picked up the phone and answered with an impatient, "Yes."

"Are you sitting or standing?" he asked me.

"Standing," I replied.

"Well, sit down, carefully. Hold your head very straight and steady, and don't shake it at all – you are in mortal danger. There is a blood clot pressing on your brain, and we can see on the scan that the brain is

pressed like a kid's ball that received a punch, and you could be out of commission any second. I don't understand how you've continued to function until now. An ambulance is on its way, and I'm waiting for you in the operating room. Your wife is on the way from Albert Einstein College of Medicine to the hospital." My wife Bracha was already called out of the institution where she was a guest professor.

I sat down very slowly. Here's a fine story for you, I said to myself in Yiddish, of all things, maybe because I felt the need to feel close to my mother at such a moment. Some story, all right. I didn't even have a will. I called in my secretary, scribbled a few lines, then said: "Sign here that I have written all this in sound mind, and put it in an envelope. Seal it, put it in the safe. Only if something happens to me open the safe."

"Mr. Rager, what happened?" Then the secretary grew pale as she understood: two male nurses were in the door, saying "We're from the ambulance." I was wheeled to the ambulance in a wheelchair, onward to the hospital at 80th Street – no short distance from 17th Street. I had time to think, and I decided: no operation. My mind was absolutely made up.

At the hospital they were already waiting for me, they put the identity band on me, and the neurologist ordered, "To the operating room." But I said, "Just a minute. Stop. No operation." At that moment, Bracha walked in, and I smiled at her and said, "Doctor, meet my wife, Professor Bracha Rager." "Doctor," he said, "you tell him! His life is in danger. We must operate."

"I've decided: no one's opening up my head. Just tell me what would happen if you operated successfully to remove the clot, but another one would result from the operation – then what would you do?"

"In such a case, we would give steroid treatment," was the answer.

"So begin the treatment now," I replied.

"Maybe you don't realize how great the danger is to you," the neurologist said.

"I'm fifty years old; I've had a full, rich life. If it's my fate – I'll die."

He looked straight at me and said: "I just want you to know that such an amount of steroids can have a very depressing effect on the person. There have been cases of suicides from the depression." I

answered: "I'll make a deal, doctor. If you come into my room and I don't tell you a joke, you can operate." He turned to Bracha: "Maybe you can talk to him?" But she answered, "No, I already know that look. I see it in his eyes, nothing will change his mind. Do what you can for him."

They took me to the room and began the series of injections and other treatment. A day passed without my losing consciousness. Not only that, but in the evening the doctor on duty came in, surprised to see me in my condition; according to the sheet, he expected a zombie. "Mr. Rayjer," he said, and I corrected his pronunciation: "'Raagger.'" Then he asked: "Can you tell me your first name?" which I did. Then he asked me to count to five. OK, I counted to five. The man was amazed. "Can you count backwards?" I hope, I said to myself, that the countdown doesn't mean anything. So I counted, five, four, three, two, one. A very confused doctor left the room. What he saw didn't exactly match what he expected to find; at least I should have been unconscious.

Not only was I fully conscious, but I was oohing and aahing over the wonderful room that I received overlooking the park, and I asked Bracha how I got the room. She asked the nurse, who told her: "This is the top. We understand that Mr. Rayjer is the president of a company with a $500 million turnover in bonds per year, so we put him here." So now I knew how I came to have the privilege of being among the notables and nobles of the earth, to be settled in the directors' suite, the VIP suite as it were. I had the backup insurance of the hundreds of million dollars of my corporation.

The next day, to the amazement of all, I even had enough strength to look at my personal diary to see where I stood, and I saw that it was the anniversary of my late mother's passing. I called up my friend Rabbi Shmuel Butman, the head of the Lubavitcher Youth Organization World Headquarters. I told him I was in the hospital for tests, that since today was my mother's *yahrzeit*, could they please recite the *kaddish* memorial prayer for her on my behalf. At 4 p.m., Rabbi Butman showed up in my room with his group of yeshiva students. "Here we are," he announced, "we're going to pray in a *minyan* (quorum) so that you can say kaddish yourself." I was very moved. We were given the doctors' lounge for the prayers, and Rabbi

Butman took me aside to say: "I told the [Lubavitcher] Rebbe that we are going to pray with you. The Rebbe knows what's the matter with you – and that you are in here for treatment, not just tests – but he asked me to tell you that within two weeks you'll be out of here, totally healthy."

Today I can say that that's exactly how things turned out. Even the doctors at the hospital were astonished at the results of the repeat CT after ten days of treatment. There was no sign of the clot. It disappeared as if it never had existed. It seems that I had obeyed the Biblical commandment, "And you shall choose life."

And now for the story of how I met Rabbi Butman of Habad. In the late 1970s, I was Aryeh Dulzin's right hand man and assistant for two years when he was Chairman of the Jewish Agency. My official title was Advisor to the Chairman, a rank equal to Deputy Minister. I was his liaison mainly on the issues of Jews in countries where they were persecuted. One day, Rabbi Shmuel Butman, the head of the Lubavitcher Youth Organization World Headquarters, made a request that I promptly and willingly fulfilled.

Years later, when I was president of the Israel Bonds, Rabbi Butman came into my office in New York and asked if he could please come along when a leadership delegation went to Israel. I didn't see any reason not to accede, and only then did it become clear to me that all my predecessors in the job had refused because they were afraid that the Rabbi would try to "*schnorr*" (beg for) contributions on the way. Rabbi Butman did not seem to me to be as irresponsible and lacking in worldly wisdom as tha, so I added him quite willingly to the mission. Not long after we returned from the first trip, Rabbi Butman came into my office one day with an invitation: "The Rebbe invites you to a "farbrengen." In the Yiddish that I knew, this meant to go out and have a good time, as in a date situation. Of course I realized that that's not what the invitation was, and I asked what did the word mean. He explained that it meant a Hassidic meeting together with the Rebbe.

In my mind's eye, I saw a long table filled with Hassidim, with the Lubavitcher Rebbe at its head, and me, sitting down to dinner, enjoying the *shirayim,* the remnants of the Rebbe's food, of which the Hassidim partake as a matter of honor. I smiled and accepted the invitation with pleasure. Rabbi Butman made the appointment and

gave me the address, and when the time came I set out from Manhattan to Brooklyn. I was told to come at 8:30 p.m., but when I reached the place at 8:00, I already found myself in the middle of a black human, filled with Hassidim dressed in black, and I didn't know where I would find a parking place. I kept on going until I could find a place to park, then took a taxi back to the building. I was wondering how I would be able to push my way through the people to the gate and tell them that I had an invitation, when a cute boy with *payes* [sidelocks] came over to me. "Mr. Rager? Come with me." He led me, said something, and the Hassidim parted to let me through. I could see that there was order here, people were used to the drill, that when a guest came they made way, and within a minute I was at the entrance, being welcomed by Rabbi Butman, then led into another room.

I stood there, silent and gaping. I was in a room as large as a basketball court, totally "black" with people, thousands of Hassidim, with the older men sitting at tables. It was unbelievably crowded, with no room to pass. If anyone wanted to go through, he had to climb over the benches. The hall had been entirely full for two hours, with people lined up along the walls, rows and rows ranged, in one, two, three layers deep, as I asked Reb Shmuel, that is, Rabbi Butman, where were we going. "The Rebbe has saved you a place behind him, on the platform with the rabbis."

I looked around me, and asked: "How will we get there?" "Not to worry, when you're with me, you'll get there," was the answer. As soon as they saw Reb Shmuel with a guest, they immediately made a narrow path for us to press through. Within a few minutes, I had crossed the entire large filled hall and took a place of honor on the stage, behind the Rebbe's chair, which was upholstered in red velvet embroidered with gold. There I was, sitting with the greatest of the Habad rabbis. I was in a crocheted skullcap and the only one wearing a grey suit rather than a black one. I asked Reb Shmuel where the Rebbe would come from; he pointed to a small opening at the edge of the auditorium. I was surprised, and asked how could he get through, it was hardly wide enough for a pin to come through, but he said to me not to worry.

At 8:30 on the dot utter silence fell in the hall. And then an amazing thing happened: the sea of people parted in front of the Rebbe, and the Rebbe passed through on dry land through the sea, and the Hassidim

were a wall to the left and to the right of him. To this day I still can't figure out how this miracle of the parting of the black sea took place in a hall that was packed beyond belief. The eighty-year-old Rebbe went to his seat with sprightly, firm steps, and sat down. It is very difficult to comprehend just how great is his authority and leadership. Any battalion commander in the IDF knows that it is not so easy to get four hundred soldiers in one place to be totally silent. Here one person got thousands to be absolutely quiet, with total reverence.

The Rebbe opened up with the lesson of the day, twenty minutes of Torah teaching. When he finished speaking, plastic cups were distributed, wine poured for everyone, and the singing began. The Rebbe conducted: if he wanted fast singing, they sang fast; if he wanted slow singing, they sang slowly. If he signaled for volume, he got it, and when he wanted soft sounds, he got that too. Then the cups were filled, and eveyone drank a *lehayim,* a toast to life with the Rebbe.

There are very few people who have the privilege of being singled out by the Rebbe's while having a drink with him. All of a sudden, the Rebbe turned around on his seat in my direction, held up his cup of wine, and, with a wide smile said "Lehayim," with his beautiful blue eyes looking at me fondly. He did this twice in my direction. Besides my job and my position, perhaps it was because I had the privilege of being descended from Rabbi Yisroel Yitzhak Karpachevsky, my late maternal grandfather, whose name I bear, who had been the head of the Habad Yeshiva in the Old City under the Turkish rule. At any rate, the Rebbe had particular good will towards me, and later he received me twice in a personal audience. When I was elected Mayor of Beersheba, the Rebbe requested me – some say ordered me – to establish a real "Kiryat Avot" [City of the Patriarchs]. And, he said to me, twice, that it would be a good thing if I arranged for the cooperation of the "Gentile nations" in the construction of Beersheba. I was very happy to have been on the same wavelength as a great man, since I had been thinking along similar lines. During the time I served as mayor, I did bring in investments from all over the globe.

When the Rebbe passed away at a ripe old age, I felt sad. This was indeed a wonderful and great member of the Jewish people.

Chapter Nine:

Beersheba: the "Kanyon" – the Negev Shopping Mall

Friends and acquaintances living on the Coastal Plain and in Jerusalem, as well as guests and American friends would ask Bracha and me from time to time why we live where we do. Why, we are asked, don't we live someplace worthy of the description "city", such as Jerusalem or somewhere in the Dan Bloc. What did we see in the Negev that made us want to live there in particular? I could see through such questions and felt that the questioner was of the opinion that the Negev was a desolate desert, the lonely, faraway abode of wild tribes. I could have answered that in a way, I was second-generation "Beersheba-ite". My late father, David Rager, was Beersheba's first municipal engineer, and even though I myself didn't live in Beersheba at the time, nevertheless, I had a very strong link to the place. I felt that I was truly a kind of second-generation founder. If truth be told, we were in the Negev out of love for our country and Zionism pure and simple. It's not so easy to admit, but that is the truth. You have already seen that our work, both Bracha's and mine, had made it necessary for us to live in very interesting and busy world capitals, crossroads of progress and culture. After Paris, London and New York and all the countries that we had crisscrossed in our work while living in these great metropolitan centers, Beersheba was just a small town, not a "big deal." Just because it was such, because it was a place that we could do something to help it progress, a place that had a future and a destiny in Israel, we had no doubt – we would go to the Negev and join in the national destiny. And I firmly believe that one day, people will ask their friends why they are living in the Dan Bloc, instead of moving to the Negev, to Beersheba and its suburbs, for example.

But we really hadn't thought about Beersheba in particular when we decided to move to the Negev, but rather to an even smaller and lonelier far-flung location: Mitzpe Ramon. In 1976, my term as Consul in New York was drawing to a close; one day we read in the Israeli paper that was flown in daily that the residents of Mitzpe Ramon were staging a hunger strike. They were so bitter that they blocked the road. The new Arava Highway had been completed and it left Mitzpe Ramon cut off and isolated on its hilltop overlooking the crater. With one blow, the passing traffic dwindled and lessened. And with one blow, Bracha and I both decided that we had something to contribute to this place, with my contacts and with Bracha's profession. We immediately cabled the head of the local council, informing them that I was finishing up in New York and that we had decided to settle in Mitzpe Ramon. They were so excited that they told the press.

We were very serious about our intentions. I took a week's vacation and flew to Israel to arrange things. I was welcomed very warmly. The appointed head of the local council, Eliyahu S., an Interior Ministry official, welcomed me with fruits, and seemed to be amenable to my every wish. I asked if I could be part of the Build-Your-Own-Home project, and that meanwhile I would like to rent two apartments in the houses that were just standing there empty. Why two apartments? Because we had children, a lot of furniture and paintings. "What do you care?" I said to him, "the houses stand vacant anyway." All well and good, the official took care of my request, agreed to give us a post office box, signed me up for the Build-Your-Own-Home project, I left a deposit for the project, and left for New York feeling quite pleased.

However, when I started writing to Mitzpe Ramon – no answer. When I wanted to find out something about the apartments – not the slightest whisper. In the meantime, we had to pack our things in a container, but we had no address where to ship it. Inevitably, a month and a half later I flew back to Mitzpe Ramon to find out what happened. Mr. Eliyahu S. was not there, even though I had notified him that I was coming. No one was there to meet with me or talk to me. I went wandering around in confusion, asking what about the apartments. I was told that I could rent only one, since there was absolutely no precedent for one family having two. Not only did we want some breathing space, but Bracha intended to turn one room into

an examination lab for blood and urine tests, to save residents a trip to Beersheba. And as for the post office box? A stammered non-reply. And the Build-Your-Own-Home? The same stammer. I left quite disappointed and depressed.

That evening, I received a phone call in my Tel Aviv hotel from a very nice young man, Uzi Haimovitch, who lived in Arad and was some sort of functionary in Mitzpe Ramon. Hesitantly and with some embarrassment, he asked me if I would please keep this conversation confidential for a while. I replied that of course I would, and asked him what was going on. Then the truth came out: after my conversation with Uzi, I remembered a small detail of my meeting with head of local council Eliyahu S., which had seemed to me at the time to have been a good meeting, but I hadn't paid enough attention to one small thing: he had asked me twice what I was going to do, and I answered, "Not to worry. I'll manage." I very innocently thought that there was no better answer to calm him down, but the truth is that I myself was a bit worried. One of my ideas was for some sort of private business venture, such as building a tennis club and hotel especially for asthma patients, for whom the clear, clean desert air was especially beneficial. I had behind me a promise from Meir Amit, who was then the head of Group, that if nothing else would help, he would consider the idea of establishing a plant in Mitzpe that someone like me would run. At the time, I didn't see the need to tell all this to Eliyahu S., thinking that it was not the right time to tell all. And this was the mistake and the cause of all the trouble. Uzi told me that this petty clerk, Mr. Eliyahu S., appointed head of council by the Ministry of the Interior, thought that he would eventually be elected to the council in the general elections. Now along comes this former consul in New York; this ex-top newsman, that when asked what will he do he doesn't know, he'll find something. And that Yitzhack Rager, Eliyahu S. must have said to himself and to others, that Rager is probably planning to be the Head of Council of Mitzpe Ramon, and that's why he came to town in the first place!

I explained that this was total nonsense, and that that was the furthest thing from my mind, I was perfectly willing to let him have it in writing. Uzi was visibly relieved at my words, and he replied, "Very good. I would really like for you both to come." Among his several

jobs, Uzi was in charge of the local culture, and he understood that it would be enough if one of my friends just stopped by for a visit, an evening lecture was practically a sure thing. He would be quite happy to have personalities such as Haim Guri or Elie Wiesel, or some politician or big radio star or top journalist. I told him: "Uzi, you can let people know that I said so. Call me tomorrow." The next day, he phoned up again, and with real distress told me that that very same Eliyahu S. heard him out, looked at my file, and at the end, said: "Aha. This man knows everyone, he knows all the politicians and the journalists – him I don't need here – no apartment, no home to build, no nothing." That's how my affair ended with Mitzpe Ramon. It stands to reason that thirteen years later, when I agreed to run for the election of Mayor of Beersheba, Eliyahu S. probably said to his cronies, "Told you so."

Since Mitzpe Ramon was out of the picture, we had to decide right away on another place, and so naturally the decision was made to go to Beersheba, my father's city. It turned out that there was a vacant house of the sort that we liked, perfectly suited to our needs. Just then, someone mentioned to us that we should try Omer, where one or two houses were for sale. I had to remain in New York, but Bracha flew back to Israel alone, to arrange her acceptance to the staff of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. She had been on the staff of New York's Albert Einstein College of Medicine for a number of years.

The owners of the house weren't there, but Bracha just looked into the window and said, "That's it. It's sold," and wrote a check as our deposit on account. That's how we became homeowners on the basis of a peek. It was on the corner of a main street, opposite the bank and the supermarket, and I still hadn't seen it. Then the young lawyer started to bombard me with telegrams to New York on behalf of the sellers, I must sign here, absolutely, you can't just buy a house with a handshake. I explained that I would be flying home in three days, and that I would come to his office right away and sign. He was extremely on edge and absolutely insisted that I sign immediately upon my arrival, not even the next day but the same evening that I landed. So I did come in the evening, and by nightfall we had signed the contract and paid another check to their account. I awoke the next morning a very lucky man, due to the considerable devaluation of the shekel that

occurred overnight in accordance with Simcha Erhlich's new economic policy. Within a month or two, our house rose in value 30%, all thanks to the lawyer's obstinacy regarding the immediate signature. And that's how we came to live in Omer. My younger sister Shoshana had been living there for several years with her husband, the late Dr. Peretz Bracha, and their children. We did not go back to Beersheba until I was being talked about as candidate for mayor.

Years passed and my story continues in 1983: Bracha's daughter, Sharon, was about to be inducted into the IDF, and I decided that it was time to finish up my job at the Bonds. I notified the Minister of Finance as well as then Prime Minister Menahem Begin. Before he retired to isolate himself from public life for several years, he sent me a very warm telegram with heartfelt thanks for all that I had accomplished as president of the Bonds. To everyone's surprise, it was Yitzhak Shamir who replaced him. The CIA and other American experts had bet on Moshe "Misha" Arens, and some thought David Levy. Shamir was a "dark horse" who had come up from behind; now they all raced feverishly to gather information on him. So I wasn't very surprised when the day of his appointment I was phoned up by a Dr. Whatisname (I forgot exactly) of a Washington based Middle East think tank, one of the many that the CIA established. He reminded me how we met and said that he and his friends would be in New York the next day. Could they take me out to lunch?

I really wasn't too surprised when our lunchtime conversation soon turned to the topic of Israel's new prime minister. I was in a very good mood, my bags were already packed, and I decided not to beat around the bush: "Friends," I said, "take out your notebooks and write this down: Yitzhak Shamir has steel balls. You won't be able to put any pressure on him." That's what I said with a smile, and continued eating the absolutely delicious food. "What do you mean exactly?" they asked. I decided to spare them the metaphors, and told them two or three well-known stories about Yitzhak Shamir, ex-commander of Lohamei Herut Israel (Lehi), the armed underground organization acting against the British in Palestine before the establishment of the State of Israel. Somehow I felt that my table-mates slightly lost their appetite.

With Shamir being appointed Prime Minister, the opportunity of a senior government appointment opened up for me just as I concluded

my Bonds job. We were very close to the Shamirs; Bracha and Shulamith Shamir had been friends, and the friendship had lasted. But I wanted a break from jobs in the public sector. I wanted to do something in the sphere of private business, but preferably in Beersheba. For the past decade no entrepreneurs had done anything in Beersheba: there had not even been one big investment project. Even before I resigned from the presidency of the Bonds, I looked the whole thing over, I thought about it, was searching for ways, when all of a sudden, on one of my last tours of duty I met Canadian businessman David Azrieli. After he bought some Bonds from me, which he usually did, for a considerable sum, he told me that he was about to build a shopping center in Ramat Gan, a "*kanyon*" [from the Hebrew *k'niya* - buying, and *hanyon* – parking lot]. He told me very proudly how he had managed to overcome Israeli bureaucracy, how he had wheeled and dealed, pleaded and persuaded, and now, at last, the groundbreaking was about to take place. I said to him, "You know, if something like this went up in Beersheba, the city would instantly advance by about twenty years." Then he asked me what was its population. At the time it was approximately 100,000." Then he asked, "What about the surrounding area?" I figured at least another 120,000. Azrieli then said: "You know what? If you, personally, would agree to take care of things, I would be willing to build a shopping mall in Beersheba." On the spot I agreed.

We agreed on the terms of my job. I was very flexible and said that I would be happy with the same salary as Sar-Shalom Shiran, who was supervising the Ramat Gan project. It turned out that the sum was a very nice Canadian salary, with a bonus of about 5% of profits once it was built. I returned to Israel very happy and pleased, letting all parties concerned know that I was not interested in a government appointment. I was so naively sure that within several months only, we would begin to build the Beersheba shopping mall and march the city into the twenty-first century.

How wrong I was! Beersheba was fast asleep, and so was its Municipality. My good friend, Mr. Eliahu Nawi, the mayor, was melancholic and depressed, and with good reason: since the death of Minister of Finance Pinhas Sapir, the government of Israel had not shown the slightest interest in the city. Things were extremely difficult

for him as mayor. Sometimes he could barely meet the payroll, and the Municipality sank into debt, which grew deeper and deeper since the bank loans were dollar-linked. This was the time of runaway inflation, with the debt increasing and compounding every month; the situation looked pretty terrible. No private investors came to town, and the citizens' situation was not at all good. Eliahu Nawi listened to my proposal with growing doubt. "Where do you want to put it?" he asked me. I said that I would check it out and tell him.

That day I went into Beersheba by bus, and came back by bus as well. When I was waiting at the Central Bus Station, I noticed a Bedouin woman passing by with her large flock of goats through a large field between the main Egged Bus Station and Eli Cohen Junction. Right then and there, I said to myself, how could that be? This is the very heart of the capital of the Negev. I decided: we were going to put the *kanyon* right there on the field. I went back to City Hall and said as much to Eliahu Nawi. The answer was "No. This field is slated for the new future opera house and the municipal theatre and other cultural institutions." I nearly fell over. "Eliahu, can you hear what you are saying? Goats are grazing on that piece of land. I'm going to bring in a $40 million investment, to build a huge shopping center that will change the face of Beersheba. You don't even have a good movie theatre here, there's no nice place to sit comfortably and watch a film – and you're talking to me about an opera house?" Eliahu was convinced. "OK," he said, giving up. "Let's do it."

So we "did it." But things went so slowly and tiredly. However, I managed to find two young people who were not yet tired, people who cared: Avi Har Sagi, city treasurer, and Asa Avliav, legal counsel. But still, things dragged on. I submitted an official request, and waited. I waited a week, two weeks, then three; before I knew it, four weeks, a month or two went by – and still no answer. I approached Eliahu again, who told me, "I spoke with everyone, even the Municipal Engineer" I phoned up Avi Har Sagi again and asked him: "What is going on with you all? Do you have so many entrepreneurs all lined up, each ready to pump $40 million into Beersheba that you don't have time to get back to me with an answer?" Avi mumbled something and promised I would hear from him. Once again, absolute and utter silence.

About two months later, I bumped into the deputy municipal engineer at the egg sales counter at the local supermarket in Omer, where I lived. With a smile, I mentioned to him "I can see that you are overwhelmed with work, with the thousands of projects being built over there in Beersheba." He replied: "Are you making fun of me?" I answered, "I come and bring you the plans for building a huge shopping center. The city owns the land, we'll buy it from you for good money – why haven't I received any answer?" He promised to get back to me. That very same evening, some people called me up from a certain engineering company. "Mr. Rager, you're the one who wants to build the *kanyon*? You should know that we have very close ties with the Municipality and we can get things moving. It would be a good idea for us to meet."

I nearly slammed the phone right town on them. Nevertheless, I answered them in cold, even tones: "Now listen up, and listen well. No one does me any favors by letting me build a *kanyon*. I want to save a town that is going down the drain. If Beersheba doesn't want a *kanyon*, then there won't be one here. I don't want any favors. If the Beersheba Municipality doesn't come to its senses soon, I'll listen to David Azrieli and go and build it in Bat Yam!"

They got the message. They called me up and said that it would be a good idea to begin negotiating – about prices, size and all the rest. This was no simple matter either. I would be speaking to the city's legal counsel one time, next time with the city controller and next with the municipal engineer. In the end, I burst into the office of the mayor and said, "Listen, Eliahu, just appoint a negotiations team. It should include all interested parties – secretary of the municipality, legal counsel, engineer and anyone else that you think should be on it." That's how there came to be a team of eight municipality functionaries to negotiate with us. On my part, I brought Sar-Shalom Shiran, the man who pushed through the Ramat Gan *kanyon*, and for several weeks we conducted negotiations together on everything. We fixed on the sum of 5% more than the appraisers invited by the Municipality to avoid an open tender and thus save more time. We filled each capricious demand made by the negotiators.

My trials and travails went on for four years until we received all the building permits. It's very hard to believe to what degree provinciality

reigned. One functionary invited me for coffee and gave me some advice: "You're a very nice man, but don't delude yourself into thinking that you'll be able to build a building within Beersheba that doesn't have window displays facing the outside." "But there are display windows inside," I tried to tell him. No one understood what I was talking about – and this man was the representative of the National Association of Engineers and Architects, none other! Just as bad was Mr. Sheetreet, the regional planning officer: the matter was wholly beyond his comprehension. What was I talking about? What sort of building was this going to be? What kinds of stores would there be inside? Not only the municipality and the authorities were doubtful and put up obstacles on the way, but I could tell of scores of others incidents of interference, of putting spokes into the wheels. For instance, one evening a local journalist called me up to ask in the name of a local contractor – who later went into bankruptcy – why did I think that such a central piece of property should be given to a Canadian entrepreneur? Why shouldn't a local contractor handle the job? I replied immediately without hesitation: "Sir, just tell the person who sent you that if he pays me for all the blueprints, I'll give him the rights to the property, and let him build it for $40 million." Needless to say, I never heard another peep out of him.

Plus there were many other strange incidents. There used to be (and I think that there still is) a social group made up of young couples of the upper middle class who would meet once a month for an evening lecture followed by socializing. They heard about what I had done in Eilat (more about this later) and wanted me to speak about it. I consented and came to the group, where I met a group of very nice residents of Beersheba, most of them business people. At the close of my lecture, I opened the floor for questions. "Yes I have a question," said one fellow, "are you the guy who is going to build a *kanyon* here?" "Yes." "Tell me something, are you crazy? You're going to invest millions in this town? Everyone who put money here went bust. I'm warning you, tell the investor behind you not to make this terrible mistake!" I was astounded. I tried to explain that I fully believed in the economic potential of the area, and that I was convinced that the city needed such a shopping center. Then someone else raised his hand: "Everything that he said is true. No one should invest here!" At that

point, I finally lost my cool and began speaking with great fury at them: "You yourselves are the crazy ones. You live here, your businesses are here – why are you speaking like that about your own city? Every time that you talk like that the value of your property goes down – your apartments go down in value, your businesses depreciate. You're the nut cases!"

The municipal engineer kept the blueprints in the drawer for about a year and a half because, according to him, he wasn't convinced that it was a serious plan. Not until Avi Har Sagi started pressuring him. At any rate, at last came the day that Architect Avraham Yasky and yours truly arrived at the meeting of the regional committee to receive the approval papers for construction. The committee approved, and then Mr. Sheetreet turned to me: "Mr. Rager, as the entrepreneur, would you like to say a few words?" "Yes," I said, as I rose. "It's lucky that this committee did not exist in the days of King Solomon; I doubt that the Holy Temple would have been built then"

But even with the granting of the permits my long series of ordeals was not yet over, and things were not so simple. We began construction only to find that it had been a Christian burial site. Of course, Haredim [ultra-Orthodox Jews] protested and said that what was dug up wasn't a cross but a directional sign for the grave. We got over that hurdle. Then, we found out that there was no drainage in the area. I asked the municipal engineer how that happened. He responded: "How much does it really rain in Beersheba? Rain falls, sinks in, gets in the gutter, flows out and dries up within an hour or two." I looked at him in amazement. "Mr. Municipal Engineer, look at the blueprints! The roof area is more than 17 dunams [4 acres]! Do you know how much water there will be if it rains?" To make a long story short, the bill for the drainage system out to Derech Hebron went on David Azrieli and the Canit South Company's tab. City residents remember how we dug up the entire Derech Eilat and laid down huge drainage pipes. When we put up the construction signs saying "On this site" etc., people said, "Nothing's going up here at all. It's just a sign." When we began the excavations, people said, "It's going to remain a hole in the ground." When we poured the concrete, they said "There won't be any frame." And when we built the frame, people said, "It's going to remain a 'white elephant' just like the Tel Aviv central bus

station; nothing will come of it." Small minded people without any faith kept up their mockery. I suffered quite a bit in those days. Only when the *kanyon* finally opened did people begin to understand what happened to them.

Today I have no more need to justify the project. All of a sudden, Beersheba became a city with a comfortable movie theatre, with air-conditioned coffee houses, and with an air-conditioned shopping center. In the intense Beersheba heat, at last people could shop with ease just as in America and Europe. The old city merchants didn't like it at all; they attacked me with harsh words, accusing me of being the big businessman who took away the little guys' living. But gradually they understood that the people who made their stores look better and improved the service could also make a better living in the old part of town. The consumers could no longer be duped by buying anything at any price. The *kanyon* did allow Beersheba to take a great leap forward.

Four years, as I said, was the length of the planning stage, with construction lasting a year and a half. This period of waiting was extremely difficult for an activist like myself. I felt that my strengths and talents were not being used to the fullest, and I began looking for a job in the public sector that I could do during the time that I was promoting Azrieli's *kanyon*. Then I once again realized that if you spend years far away from Israel, you see that the pie has already been cut, and the most interesting jobs have already been snapped up. I am very grateful to then Minister of Tourism Avraham Sharir, who invited me for a coffee and spoke to me: "Listen, Ijo, you were the president of the Bonds. You handled many millions and were king of the hill. I can well imagine that it's a little hard for you to be out of action. I would like to offer you an interesting post – head of the Eilat Beachfront Development Corporation, with a salary of one shekel a year, as a public service job."

That week, the residents of Eilat including the Timna mines workers blocked the road to Eilat and declared that they were abandoning the town. They had nothing more to do in the town. The mines were about to be closed down, putting about five hundred men out of work. This meant that the wives – the schoolteachers, kindergarten teachers, hospital nurses and hotel waitresses, would also leave town. The country was on the brink of the war with Lebanon,

and tourism was down to a few dribbles. The situation was frightening; Eilat seemed on the verge of collapse. Nevertheless, I took the job quite happily.

I decided to gamble on one man – David Lewis, Head of the Isrotel Hotel Chain. The man came and chose property to build the King Solomon Hotel – right on the Laguna Beach. I buckled down to help him however I could, and now we all know that David Lewis was the man who saved Eilat. This was the period of recession. Minister of Finance Yitzhak Moda'i had announced that there was no development money for Eilat, and that there was no development money at all – so what about my job? I had to develop, we had to build! So I said to David Lewis: "Listen, David, you want to build several hotels here. Why don't you do the development work now, since you can't put a hotel in undeveloped surroundings, and the second hotel that you'll build will have to be landscaped nicely all around it. You pay for the first one, and I'll take care of matters so that when you build your second hotel we'll settle up, and the Eilat Beachfront Development Corporation will refund your money."

On the basis of a handshake, David Lewis did the development work. Eilat looked beautiful, tourism started up again, lots of people including many Israelis came to stay at the lovely beachfront hotels that Lewis built. For the next eight years – among the best years of my life – I worked to develop the lagoons and white sand beaches, the drawbridge, the palms, the gardens and cobblestone pavements – everything that went into making Eilat an international tourist city. All this overlapped the promotion of the Negev shopping mall project in Beersheba – Kanyon HaNegev.

Chapter Ten:

Beersheba: The Mayor

I

Looking back, I can say that this whole thing started when *Kol-Bi*, the local weekly, decided to publish a "Who's Who in the Negev." I also received a form to fill out, which I did. After a while, I heard that they were totally astonished. Here was someone living in Omer who had already served as president of the world Israel Bonds organization, following a career as European correspondent, consul, embassy counselor, large scale entrepreneur, and more. And after all this, he still doesn't appear or give interviews and there are no words of wisdom quoted weekly in the press. They came to the conclusion that they should grab this man. It was obvious that at some point I would draw the attention of political and journalistic circles, but it seemed to me that the *Kol-Bi* editorial staff was the one who decided that I should be a candidate for mayor of Beersheba. They kept it to themselves. But one day, I heard that they wanted to send a team of correspondents to me: I had been chosen as *Kol-Bi's* "Man of the Year." The reporters were at my house for the whole day, photographing and scribbling away about my work. The late Amos Hanoch edited the piece. He was a very talented journalist, then editor of the Kol-Bi, and the feature took up several pages. The article caused ripples of sensation and there I was suddenly in the public eye.

The pressure was difficult. People were urging me to enter the ring for mayor. At first, the delegates were loyal groups of citizens who loved their city (the exact names have fallen from my memory), but I believe that it was the *Temurot* ("changes") and the *Vatikim* ("old-timers"), two non-profit organizations, who approached me and tried to convince me to stand on their party list. I explained to them, "Gentlemen, first I have to finish the job with David Azrieli. I'm

involved here in a $40 million project – it doesn't grow on trees." I also had my private reasons: my family would not exactly jump for joy if I exchanged my salary from Canit for an Israeli mayor's salary. Not only that, but I had my serious misgivings about politics. I refused all of these attempts to convince me.

Then the Likud began organizing. All my life I had been a member of the Likud party or a member of its previous incarnations, and tried to help out in my modest way in each election campaign. I didn't ask to be head of the campaign staff nor head of a committee, but did what I was asked to. I remember one night that I pasted up posters, since the opposition had covered town with theirs. I had a good reputation in the party. When the Likud branch in Beersheba began to gear up for the elections, its mover and shaker Eli Boker, branch chairman, decided that he would convince me to be a candidate no matter what. It was obvious to them that if I were to be Number One on the party list, the Likud members would have more of a chance of getting onto the City Council with me. I rejected them politely, again stating my reasons. Defense Minister Misha Arens, then chairman of the party secretariat, called me up one day and announced that he was sending David Magen over to represent him. Magen had just been appointed head of the Likud's municipal division, and had been an excellent mayor of Kiryat Gat. I loved that man and welcomed him warmly; very shortly I understood the reason for his visit, and very shortly he received a resounding "nyet" from me. No, I was not a candidate for mayor. One week later, Arens telephoned again and said: "I'll be in your area next week, and would like to visit you." I told him that I would be honored to have him. I already knew what he wanted, but you can't refuse a visit from Misha Arens. He arrived with Salai Meridor, and put on intense pressure. Misha Arens knows how to be extremely persuasive, and to summon up all the best reasons in the world and press the right buttons – but I stood my ground, sorry, but I couldn't run for mayor.

At the same time, public pressure increased on me. Groups of volunteers as well as more politically-organized groups came to see me. Then one day a group of elderly emissaries came to see me. This was a group of the old-timers of Beersheba who had known my late father when he was municipal engineer in the days of Mayor Toviyahu. "Your

father together with us," they told me, "we really started something here. Now just look at what is happening. You have obligations to his memory. You have got to do something to help this city because it's sinking fast." I felt a lump in my throat and I could barely answer them. When they left, Bracha could already see what was happening. "I see that you are going to give in and agree to run." She so didn't want this to happen. She had a healthy sense of disaster: our health and finances would suffer and we would reap only pain and bitterness. However, she saw the change in my eyes. And when Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir asked to see me, I could guess what he was going to ask me, and knew that I could not refuse.

I called up David Azrieli in Canada to tell him what was going on. "David, they are pressuring me very hard to run for mayor of Beersheba. Do me a favor, send me a telegram that you in no way agree, because I am watching over your $40 million project. It's your money, and you trust me to complete it." To my great surprise, I heard him say, "No, absolutely not. You look like the perfect candidate to me. As mayor of Beersheba, you'll accomplish great things. You have to run." "But, David" and I ran out of words. I was trying to say to him that according to our agreement, if I walked off the project before the grand opening, I would lose my 5% of the profits and my shares. But Azrieli read my mind and cut in: "I know what you're thinking about. Don't worry. Go for it."

When we went to the meeting with the Shamirs, everyone was there: Arens, David Magen, and the people from the Negev including Bezalel Gaber, head of the mayorial search committee. Yitzhak Shamir began: "These party members want you to run for mayor, you must." I tried to say, "But Yitzhak" but Shamir interrupted: "Ijo, you have never refused any mission on behalf of our nation. Being mayor of Beersheba is a national mission." As if grasping at straws, I protested: "How can you just drop me from nowhere right into the top slot on the Likud party list in Beersheba? This is supposed to be a democracy, the party branch has to elect me, and I insist that the party elections should be as broadly based as possible, not the choice of the minority." "The members want it," was Shamir's verdict. "I have no doubt at all that you'll be elected." He was right. The local party had been so divided and filled with in-fighting, but that evening it proved its

political maturity and political smarts and decided almost unanimously (only two opposed) that I should be the Likud candidate for mayor of the city.

II

And that's when the trouble began, of course. Many saw themselves worthy of the second and third slots on the list, plus others even felt that they should be first. All these pressures began on the very day that I was chosen to run. Delegations and messengers were hounding me, trying to persuade and convince me – while I stood my ground: I wasn't going to promise anything to anybody. However, in a city where 35% of the residents were of Moroccan origin, I would like to make sure that a prominent place on the list went to an ethnic Moroccan, and I also insisted on a woman in one of the top slots on the list. These were the two pieces of advice that I gave to those who made up the Likud list.

Rafi Sheetreet was a neighborhood activist who had served in Eliahu Nawi's administration and subsequently for Moshe Zilberman. Sheetreet was a very easy-going, impressive looking man of Moroccan origin, and I made sure to get him into the Likud, but first I tested him out. When I was driving with him to a meeting at Misha Arens', I threw a question to him: "Rafi, whatever made you join the Likud?" The answer: "Only after Menahem Begin came into power did the situation change so that a man who grew up in the poorer neighborhoods could be chosen as deputy mayor under Nawi and Zilberman." I liked the way he answered, so I said to Misha, "We should accept him." We had a little ceremony at the headquarters, and Rafi was elected, and he did indeed play a part in the Likud election victory in 1988. At any rate, this was the full extent of my interference, and the only other thing I had to look out for was fulfilling the agreement between Herut and Liberals, according to which every third place would be for a Liberal party member. That is how Advocate Vidovsky and my good friend Danny Cohen got onto the list. As chief organizer, we recruited Ofir Shoham to be head of the campaign. He was a Beersheba resident who really loved the city, and had formerly been Municipal Public Relations and Official Spokesman. I had known him for years. Avi Har Sagi, who had meanwhile resigned and gone into the private sector, was appointed head of the staff.

There were also some very sorely disappointed people who did not make life easy for us. Andre Ouzan, for example, had failed in the internal elections, and wanted to force himself onto the list by getting Misha Arens to pressure us. I didn't know that the national secretariat of the Likud had the authority to force a candidate on the local list, and when I was told of this I let them know in a determined tone that it was "Either him or me!" Arens, who did not yet know me very well, didn't believe that I meant what I said – how could I really mean that I would step down? He had already forgotten how hard it had been to get me to run in the first place, and I was quite firm. "I have nothing personal against Ouzan," I said, "but no one forces anything over on me. No one gets on the list who hasn't been elected."

Gideon Patt, the Minister of Tourism, also phoned me up that evening. Arens found out that we had been friends in our youth in Jerusalem and asked him to persuade me. Patt invited me to see him, and since he was the Minister I had to go to Jerusalem at night to our midnight meeting at the King David Hotel. "Gideon, no way. If they make me do it – I'll resign, and you'll be left without a candidate." Right then and there in front of me Gideon Patt called Arens and I heard him say, "Misha, there's no way around it. This guy has his mind made up. We can't let him slip through our fingers." In Beersheba, this matter was to my credit, and people were saying that this fellow doesn't back down.

We had another problem person in Beersheba. He was a lawyer, a very strange man who was on the list, but furious that he wasn't at the top, and still more furious that I suggested that we add Rafi Sheetreet to the list. So there was no lack of pressure on me from within the Likud itself.

On the outside, Bentz Carmel, the Labor candidate, was running a despicable campaign. Disgraceful, ugly campaign posters were put up, and Bentz even hired private detectives to shadow me and my wife Bracha. The large cash outlay was funded by Uzi Baram, paid for out of Labor Party central headquarters; Baram was party secretary and Carmel's good friend. After a long time, the detectives found out that Bracha and I had not sold our house in Omer and were still using it. This is how it happened: when I became a candidate, I rented a house on Yehoyachin Street in Beersheba, from a family abroad on a

government job, and we had an agreement that when they came back, we would exchange houses. They were supposed to move into our house in Omer and we would stay in their place in Beersheba. But, when they returned to Israel, they started raising all sorts of difficulties, and I had a hunch that "someone" was stirring things up on purpose to show that we weren't really residents of Beersheba. In short, we were forced to move out overnight, but, lucky for us, one of the old-timers, Shaul Rahamim, found us another place almost immediately, at the very last minute. This was a two-room apartment at Hogla 2, in Shehunah Heh. We moved in but we had a problem: Bracha's computer and the books she needed for her scientific work were in Omer, since our small, furnished apartment had no room. She had to go to Omer a lot, while I either stayed on Hogla Street or joined her in the house. This is what the detectives found out. Not only that, they found out that we allowed the recently widowed Professor Prywes to stay in our apartment on Hogla Street once a week when he came to the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.

The reader probably realizes that during my prior life experiences described above, having worked for several organizations, some out in the open and others undercover, I should have known a thing or two about surveillance. One evening, when Bracha and I were returning from abroad, I said to her as we exited the Lod airport, "Listen, I think we're being followed." It didn't seem logical to Bracha and she pooh-poohed it. We weren't traveling directly to Beersheba then but rather to Tel Aviv, to see the children and Grandma Itke, Bracha's mother. I insisted that I was right. "Bracha, I'm telling you, we are being followed." In Tel Aviv Bracha went to have her hair cut, and we headed home that evening, deciding to sleep over at Omer rather than go to the apartment with all the heavy luggage. When we stayed in New York (I had gone there to among other things to set up the Beersheba Foundation) friends gave us a daily report of what was happening in Beersheba. They also informed us that there had been an electrical failure in our apartment on Hogla and that they didn't think that it had been repaired. On the way to Omer on the Beersheba Highway I had no more doubts that there were tails, but Bracha still didn't believe me. So I decided to stage a little demonstration, made a sudden right just past the Kiryat Gat junction, and headed into the gas station through the exit

instead of the entrance. The tail became confused, braked, hesitated and at last went into the gas station; he didn't seem overly professional. Now Bracha believed it. They followed us to Omer, which appeared in their disgusting detective's report, among other things.

The Labor Party took us to court to throw out my candidacy. The case was in the name of a local activist who claimed that I was a carpetbagger and not a bonafide resident of Beersheba, claiming that my water bill in Omer was higher than the one on Hogla, and more of the same. Of course, they didn't consider the fact that we had a large garden in Omer – a dunam (a quarter of an acre). The trial caused quite a lot of tension in town. The fact was, that even people who didn't know me, and weren't especially Likud supporters, wanted change in the city leadership. We could feel support for me on the grass-roots level. Then along comes a Labor Party hack who tries in the old, time-worn Mapai style, to have the courts throw out the candidacy of a new man who had breathed new hope into the city. The matter was clear-cut: if a district judge disqualifies you, you're out. There could be no appeal.

So, there I was in court, just weeks before the elections, having to explain just how I considered myself truly resident in Beersheba. Fortunately, my local grocery store owner in Shehunah Heh was willing to testify that I would usually buy fresh rolls and cream in the morning. District Judge Yitzhak Banai even accepted the idea that a person is allowed to have more than one home and the verdict was that I was allowed to run for mayor. Then everything hit the fan. The Bentz Carmel supporters in the opposition put up some very ugly notices, some of them extremely childish, such as the ones calling me "KugeRager" [to rhyme with *kugelager*]*. It gave me great pleasure to return their puns after my victory, telling the papers that the "Mercedes Benz" had turned into the "Carmel Sussita" [a defunct Israeli car].

We did indeed win the election, on the basis of a very wise campaign as well. Quietly, without a big to-do, keeping a low profile, was the way Avi Har Sagi conducted my campaign. Every evening, we would meet with another group of citizens. Each evening I would

* From the Hebrew expression equivalent to "I'll eat my hat" – Ifthen I'm a *kugelager* (a ball-bearing).

present my plans to the gathering without promising a thing. I repeated this declaration in public as well. The person who makes promises in the Beersheba of today, I would say, is not serious or not to be trusted. While Bentz Carmel of the Labor party was doing his best to assure his place as party representative, I was quietly building up my base as the candidate in the lead. By the time that Bentz was elected top of the Labor list, he did not realize that the battle was already lost. Polls showed that I already had 42% of the vote, while 40% was enough to win. When all the votes were counted, it turned out that I was voted in by more than 60% of the voters. This was a tremendous revolution in a city that had been led by Labor since 1948, and now had a sweeping Likud majority. I can say that I carried ten out of twenty-three council members to victory. They were all long-time Likud members, except for Rafi Sheetreet, our "acquisition player" whom I brought in.

III

All of my worst pre-election nightmares came true soon enough. Barely two weeks in office, the press tore into me with viciousness that we had not seen the likes of yet. One of the worst was Amir Rosenblitt of *Davar*, who, in a signed article three weeks after the elections, asked "What Has he Done to Beersheba?" as if I could fix all the ills within one month. I had entered office to find a total mess: the cupboard was bare. Even before I agreed to run, I went to have a serious talk with Moshe Zilberman who had taken over from Eliahu Nawi after he retired, and served for about a year and a half. "Moshe," I asked him, "what do we owe? What's the sum total of what we owe everybody?" The answer was nineteen million shekels, part in long term loans. I was thinking, telling myself it wasn't so terrible, that I could still manage to raise several million dollars, that the debt wasn't so bad for a city of that size, and didn't worry about it. However, when I took office, there was no city treasurer. I called in the chief of accounting, and asked for the exact sum. No one could tell me – the figures were anywhere from 19 million to 190 million shekels. In my distress, I called in Avi Har Sagi, who had been the city treasurer, and told him that he had to take the job of my financial advisor. I asked him to find out exactly what financial shape the city was in and tell me how much we owed. I asked him to get us a treasurer as well. It turned out that applications for the

job were sitting in the municipality in answer to the public tender, and we chose Meir Balaban. His resume promised that he would be an excellent treasurer: he had been deputy treasurer of Bat Yam, and had his Ph.D. in municipal fiscal management. So we made him City Treasurer. During this same period, Avi Har Sagi had been poking around, digging as deeply as he could to find out just how big the debt was. After several weeks of research, it turned out that the total debt owed was 130 million shekels, owed by a city that barely took in 90 million shekels in taxes and rates. Anyone who knows anything about business knows that this means bankruptcy.

I sat there, head in hands, wondering how I got myself into such a mess. In my distress, I turned to all the government ministers involved in the situation. The Minister of the Interior and the Finance Minister gave me their best pitying smiles, telling me that there was nothing to speak of, no budgetary allocations, and surely not to the tune of 130 million shekels. My first few days in office were almost too difficult for me to bear. The city was "the pits". During my first few months in office there was no money from which to pay out the municipal salaries. For many months, sidewalks and potholes had not been repaired; stolen sewage manhole covers were not replaced. There was not a single area of municipal management that we could say was in a reasonable condition. The welfare department was functioning, but it turned out that about half of the city's residents needed its services, either for subsistence payments or to care for invalids or wheelchair bound relatives. In short, the situation was horrible beyond belief. O flee thee away, Mr. Mayor, I said to myself. Let people know that you didn't really know what you were getting yourself into. No one can repair this mess. Of course I didn't tell people any such thing. I missed the chance to get away, and I agreed to be elected, there was no way out any more. Only in the innermost chambers of one's heart could a responsible public servant in a position of mayor of a main city allow himself the thought of escaping and dumping the mess on someone else. On the outside, one must grit one's teeth and go on with the struggle.

And struggle we did. My friends and I had an unceasing series of very difficult times fighting over the image and status of Beersheba. My vision was of a flourishing metropolitan area, a genuine capital of the

Negev. This was the only city in Israel that still had undeveloped land, in a state in which no land is to be had. My reality was the furthest thing from my vision: I was working for a city which couldn't even pay the office supply companies for the pads, paper or scotch tape, let alone sewage covers, and often not even the salaries. One day, a report crossed my desk that the only successful businesses in town were the Georgian moving companies, using their Mercedes trucks to transport the household goods of residents who left for the north.

In the decade preceding my election, 1979 to1989, about 60,000 people left town. This was a real disaster. I remembered that at one point I commented to Moshe Zilberman on this exodus. His answer then was, "It's not so bad; others come to replace them." Others did come – about 40,000 – but what Zilberman forgot to mention was that those who left were subscribers to the theatre and the Sinfonietta, while the newcomers were mostly new immigrants or welfare recipients, "clients" of Head of the Municipal Department of Social Affairs, Rachel Levy. With the economically well-off leaving their apartments, weaker strata of society from the area pounced on the bargain-priced housing, and sometimes people received free housing. When I was elected, the population was a bit over 100,000, of which about 40,000 were weaker elements that were added to the poor population that was there already. This was felt in every sphere of public life – particularly in municipal taxes: no one could pay.

The picture of the educational system was just as bad and depressing. The schools couldn't manage to keep the pupils from dropping out before the end of high school, and so the standardized test results were just as low as the development towns of Yeroham, Ofakim and Netivot. The physical infrastructure of the Beersheba educational system was wholly dilapidated, with some of the forty-year old schools falling apart, never having been renovated. Every summer, during the vacation, crews of painters and whitewashers would come in and slap another layer over the dirt and filth the students left. In several of the schools you could poke your finger through twenty layers of whitewash. The electrical system showed its age, and some schools had leaks, causing danger of electrocution. This was the Beersheba we received on our electoral victory in 1989.

It was clear that the first order of priorities was to deal with the city's

educational system. The municipality made the dramatic decision to press for educational reform, and appointed a team to produce an educational master plan. The plan was to be designed by the Municipality, the Ministry of Education and the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. We decided to improve the educational infrastructure, not an easy decision, and set out for a big fight with the public. When you go on television and show people just how bad the situation is, it's only natural to show the worse cases, exposing your weakest side. It's hard to drum up money from investors at the same time and ask them to "please invest in Beersheba, future city of industry," just after having shown the city schools last night on the news. However, I had no choice, and I gave a free hand to the Municipal Parents' Committees that uncompromisingly exposed the weak points of public buildings all over the city. It was extremely embarrassing and nearly catastrophic. Finally, to my great joy, we came out ahead on two counts: we won the public battle over the infrastructure, while the plans progressed nicely for the educational reform. And Beersheba was on the right path. Today, I can say that without doubt, Beersheba's educational reform was second to none.

While we were struggling for a better image and status for Beersheba in other spheres as well, I understood that I would have to work around the national government in order to help my city. But first, I would have to stop the people leaving town, or at least to stop the skilled laborers and construction workers from leaving: the carpenters, metalworkers, plasterers, stone-pavers, painters, glaziers and all the artisans who would build the city as it revived. How would I provide business for them? I called up Col. (Res.) Peleg Tamir, Director-General of the Shikun u-Fituah construction and development company. I shut us in my office, and I explained the situation: "Peleg, you're going to announce that you're building 1,000 housing units in Beersheba." He burst out: "You're nuts! According to your computer, there are 12,000 vacant apartments in the city!" Sure, on the computer, but the truth was, that most of them were tiny, and meanwhile, people had combined two or three apartments to make bigger ones, and they were living in them now. "Shikun u-Fituah is under the supervision of the Ministry of Construction and Housing," Peleg went on, "and as long as the computer shows vacant units, I won't be allowed to build."

I answered: "Peleg, you're not leaving this room." Finally, based on our friendship and a lot of persuasion that this would save the city, Peleg announced to the press that Shikun u-Fituah would be building 600 housing units in Beersheba. This was sufficient to stop the exodus of some of the skilled laborers for the time being.

Sometimes I feel that each job in life that I did was destined by a guiding hand, to lead me on and help me do better in the next. In retrospect, it seems to me that my work on behalf of Soviet Jewry had prepared me to a great degree to be mayor of Beersheba. Many years had passed, but the issue was still important to me and I was still close to people who were active in the field. I could feel that the USSR would open its gates in the future, and that thousands and probably tens of thousands would come to Israel and many of them would come to Beersheba. Peleg did indeed begin building, and when the first wave of immigration from the USSR arrived, there were vacant houses in Beersheba, both old and newly constructed. I was so full of faith in the quality of this immigration and its hidden potential, that I made a sort of covenant with Arik Sharon, Minister of Housing and Construction. I said to him: "Arik, let's build Beersheba together. This is the only chance it will have for a future. If we provide housing, people will come." Arik knew me from our army days and other places and jobs, so he answered: "Ijo, if you guarantee that the apartments will fill up, I'll have them build here. You guarantee, I'll build." I answered: "I do hereby so guarantee." We shook hands on it, and Arik Sharon the human bulldozer pushed through the order to his ministry to begin massive construction in Beersheba and the surrounding area.

Both Sharon and I came under heavy attack for this in the local and American Jewish press. They called us megalomaniacs and ghost town builders. "Who's going to live there?" Finance Minister Yitzhak Moda'i threw in my face, "do you think that you can force people to come here? How are they going to make a living?" I used to joke to my friends, "We're 'getting the government pregnant.' If a lot of people live here, the government will have to help us and find employment." That's exactly what happened. When waves of immigrants began hitting Israel, one or two thousand people overnight dropping down on us, Arik Sharon phoned me from his car one day: "Listen, Ijo, if things keep going at this rate we won't have any place to put them, even if we

evacuate the schools. I have a chance to buy thousands of trailers, caravans – would you agree to have them put in Beersheba?" I agreed immediately. He persisted: "Are you sure? You won't have trouble from the City Council?" I answered: "Arik, put all the caravans you want in Beersheba. They'll be ready for temporary housing of the immigrants who are going to move into the housing units that you are building." That's how Beersheba was the site of the country's largest caravan site – 2,380 units.

The opposition stooped to new depths. "You are building an immigrant transit camp that will remain a disgraceful slum forever," I was told. The residents of Neve Noy ran after me with inflammatory posters, hurling curses at me. "You're bringing down the value of our property," they told me, since the caravan site was just across the wadi from them. I stood firm, and tried to see to it that everything was done correctly. I set up a committee made up of all the figures involved including relevant government ministries, while we built a site that could serve as an excellent example of how to do it right. The site had all the services to provide for everyone's needs. We were also fortunate that Amidar, the government housing company, appointed an excellent director, Adi Habad. The caravan site thus became a sort of absorption and transit camp for immigrants, especially from the Soviet Union, but also for Ethiopians. My plan for the future envisioned the caravan residents moving into the new apartments – and it all came true. Today the site is empty and the caravans have disappeared, leaving 230 acres with a fully developed infrastructure. Thanks to the government, this area has water pipes, electricity, sewage and phone lines. I must also mention that each time this transit camp filled up, it meant an addition of 6,000 people to the city population.

My tactics of "impregnating the government" also worked: as the population steadily increased, we succeeded in forcing the government to have Beersheba declared a Development Area A, according to the law for the encouragement of capital investment. It was extremely difficult to get Finance Minster Yitzhak Moda'i and Moshe Nissim, Minister of Commerce and Industry, to sign any document. If one agreed to something, the other opposed it. But we outflanked them with the cooperation of Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and Economic Minister David Magen, and the law was passed. There was one more

tactic that I used to get the law passed: I appeared before the ministerial Committee on Absorption headed by Arik Sharon, and explained how important it was for Beersheba to be classified Development Area A. "Beersheba has absorbed immigrants, and now it needs this status in order to attract industry." Arik: "But this is the absorption committee; you're talking economics." I looked right at him and said, "Arik, today is the anniversary of crossing the Suez Canal. Sometimes you have to make important decisions. This is one of those times." Arik did so, based on very simple reasoning: any decision of the ministerial committee becomes a government decision if no one appeals it within six weeks. I knew that such a decision would put pressure on both the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Commerce and Industry. The pressure worked. David Magen was the one who brought the suggestion up to the government, and ministers Yitzhak Moda'i and Moshe Nissim both decided to support it. This was not without its lighter moments. Moshe Nissim phoned me up while he was on the road and said that he had something very important to tell me, would I please come into his office the next day. Of course I traveled to see him the next say and he confided to me: "I want you to know that I decided to vote for the Development A status for Beersheba, but Moda'i is against." I phoned up Moda'i, and asked him if he knew that Moshe Nissim agreed. "Yes, I heard. Listen, I want to visit Beersheba. Get together all the financial people, I want to talk to them." I understood, and got the [Histadrut's] Hevra Kalkalit to gather all the businesspeople, industrialists and Chamber of Commerce people for lunch at the tent in Tel Sheva. And Moda'i did indeed come. "So, tell me," he said to me, "is it so important for you to have Development Area A status?" I answered with a resounding Yes. "So who are you bringing?" he continued. "Leave it to me," I answered.

No one – neither Moda'i nor the others – knew that for the past two full years I had been painstakingly putting together, in my trips to Europe and America, a long list of big investors, many of whom I had become acquainted with during my term as president of the Bonds. These were the entrepreneurs who were just waiting for the word of awarding status of Development Area A with its preferred investment status and breaks, and they would create industry in Beersheba. If

people had known this, no one would have supported the law, since each investment of this type means that the government has to put in 38%. Now that Moda'i got up on the podium that I had prepared to announce that from now on he supports the new status for Beersheba. In his usual way, he became carried away right away due to a question, and began a very harsh attack on the massive construction in the city, that the apartments would remain vacant, etc. He ruined things for himself this way, because the press then gave the credit for the decision to David Magen and Yitzhak Shamir. I consider this an historical decision, since the government thus made it possible for us to really take off. Within two years, we had scores of new factories, Emek Sarah was developed, we already finished Emek Sarah Bet, and Gimmel, and now Emek Sarah Dalet is waiting for people to move in. We cannot stop Beersheba's progress now: it has become a city of industry, as befitting the regional urban center of the developing Negev.

IV

You may be wondering what exactly is the mayor's role in all this. We know that the courts administration establishes courts, and the government is the one that builds the government center. But you can see that if it weren't for the pressure, leadership and constant nagging by the mayor, these projects would never have gotten off the ground. My friend Avraham "Ketzaleh" Katz Oz, former Minister of Agriculture, and now director of the Mifal Hapayis lottery, expressed this very succinctly. He came to Beersheba to inaugurate the Career Counseling Center, one of the beautiful buildings built with the help of Mifal Hapayis lottery funding. It was a fine spring morning, and Ketzaleh remarked, "You have a plumber for a mayor." Everyone pricked up their ears in astonishment. He explained: "A good mayor is a successful *schnorrer*, the one who succeeds in getting handouts from as many sources as possible, then presses them together in a system, attaching pipe to pipe into a single large source that builds the project. Just look at this building that we are dedicating today for proof." True, the building was a joint project of the Municipality, the Joint Distribution Committee, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and the Mifal Hapayis lottery. This is the way. The mayor who does not slave night and day to get extra financing from outside will never ever be a success.

From time to time, people meet me on the street, and although most of them are my supporters, the conversation is peppered as usual with complaints and claims. "I pay such high taxes," I heard from one resident, "why didn't they clean my street today?" So then you have to pause and patiently explain that in a good year, the mayor succeeds in collecting taxes and payments from the residents for water, fees for big signs, dog licenses and parking tickets totalling about 120 million shekels. However, the municipal budget has long since passed the 450 million shekel mark. So go take a day off! Taxpayers don't ask where the mayor gets the money from. Some payments come in on a regular basis. Teachers' and welfare workers' salaries, for example, are deposited as usual from payments from the appropriate Ministries. But all of this covers only 65% of the expenses. The mayor must obtain the rest of the money through pleas, threats and roundabout methods – he has no choice. That is why even before I won the elections, I developed the Beersheba Foundation.

I say that I developed the Foundation, because I established it as far back as Eliahu Nawi's term of office. I talked him into establishing a fund to collect donations for the city; it was contrary to his opinion and his personality, and he didn't want it, but I pressured him, and we set up the fund. The fund was all registered, but had not yet actually begun to operate. As soon as I became candidate for mayor, I immediately left for the USA, where I coaxed Elie Wiesel into accepting the honorary chairmanship of the Foundation, while I began my fundraising efforts.

I have no doubt that it was due to the Beersheba Foundation that we improved the standard of living beyond all recognition in the city. There were also cases of contributions to the city not arriving through the Fund, but rather the relationship with the donors was what was important here. Let me explain what I mean by "didn't arrive through the Fund" with this example: A Mr. Leonard Cohen of Canada, who had a mentally retarded son, wanted to do something for the mentally retarded in Beersheba to the tune of $1 million. At first, I had hoped that his donation would be made through the Foundation. But when a donor like Mr. Cohen calls me up and tells me that he can obtain a matching grant of another million from the Joint in New York, it is obvious that the contribution will come through the Joint, or with the

organization that makes the matching contribution. In any case, the Beersheba Foundation kept up the work of inviting donors to our city and to maintain interest in everything connected to the city. It can take the credit for the approximately $50,000,000 in donations that we managed to obtain during my first few years as mayor from various organizations and institutions such as the Jewish Agency and Keren Hayesod, as well as from private donors.

In the field of private giving, you can see some pretty fantastic things. Beit Scandinavia, for example, in Shechunah Dalet was built mostly from donations by Per Stanberg, a non-Jew who had fallen in love with the city and its inhabitants. And he keeps on giving. One day, Clara, a teacher by profession, called me up, told me that she had a distant uncle in Florida who knew a donor, and could she please meet with me. When it's a matter of donations, I'll take a meeting with anyone; you never know where the next big surprise is going to come from. Clara came into my office and asked me to meet with a Mrs. Ethel Posnick who was about to come to Israel sent by Clara's uncle, Dan Levinson. "Be my guest," I said, and sure enough, a few days later, a cab stopped in front of City Hall and out stepped an old woman. She seemed to be in her seventies, and, leaning on a cane, she limped heavily into my office, looked at me out of narrowed penetrating eyes and declared: "I'd like to do something for the new immigrants from the USSR. I understand all about construction and would like to construct a building for these immigrants." I invited Mrs. Posnick to have a seat and explained to her that contractors do the building in Israel or the Ministry of Construction and Housing, and that I had no possibility of deciding who should live in "her" building. Even if she were to build a huge building, let's say for fifty families, how would I ever choose them? Who would supervise? I finally succeeded in convincing her that the idea wouldn't work.

"Very well then," asked Mrs. Posnick. "What else can I do?" For some reason, the lady did not seem to me to be a serious donor, after everything she said about building, but as usual, I asked her if she would like a tour of the city. "Let me show you all sorts of projects. We need just about everything in this town." I took her around and showed her the above-ground bomb shelters that we had been using for nursery schools and kindergartens. I agreed with Arik Sharon that

underground shelters were not a good idea, and the sum of $100,000 would be enough to make the changes necessary to fit them out for the children. A special designer made them look like different forms: one was a helicopter, another looked like a bus, still another a train, and there was a ship as well. That's how we added some beautiful schools for the youngsters. I also showed her the day-care centers built by the Jewish Agency as well as everything else that I could. This still didn't satisfy my old American, until at last I showed her "Scandinavia House," built with donations from Swedes. This was a day-care center for the elderly, who were brought in the morning for activities and various services, including dental treatment and hot meals. Her eyes lit up. "This is what I want," she announced.

I nodded and explained: "Mrs. Posnick, the cost of such a facility is $650,000." "You've got it," was the reply. We returned to my office where she pulled out her checkbook and wrote me a check then and there for the sum of $100,000 to the account of the Beersheba Foundation. I continued, "Mrs. Posnick, you don't have to put today's date on it, since we send it to the Foundation in the USA. You'll be able to get a tax deduction." The lady just smiled: "First of all, I don't need the tax deduction: and secondly, my check is good even with today's date." Didn't I say that I could always expect to be surprised in the donations business? I wouldn't have thought that she "had two pennies to rub together" – and it turned out that she gave me the princely sum as if it were small change. She switched to a cold, businesslike, tone: "Tomorrow morning, I'd like it if your representative came to me with a contract."

The time was 2 p.m. I called in Ellie Rappoport, director of the Foundation, we called in the laywer, and by evening we had a contract in English ready for the donor's signature. Ellie got up at 6 a.m. and presented herself on time at Mrs. Posnick's hotel room in Tel Aviv. We committed ourselves to completion of the building within six months, with one of the conditions being that we would send a photograph of the progress to her every month, and she would send a check of $100,000. We did meet the terms, and the lady paid up to the penny. She requested that the building be named in honor of her parents, and made sure that the sign read "This building donated in honor of the memory of the Chertkoff Family by their loving daughter Ethel." I still

wonder why Ethel refused to have the name Posnick, her married name, anywhere on the sign. She did not live to see the building; she died a year after completion of the construction. It was due to the efforts of fine Jews such as herself that Beersheba has scores of public buildings erected through the Foundation.

For example, some other good people I'd like to mention were Renee and Bob Lewin from London, who promised $1.5 million to build a museum. They had already donated a wing to the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, but when Mrs. Lewin arrived in Beersheba, she really fell in love with it. "It's a very special place," she explained, and I of course agreed. Beersheba, the little place that had grown by leaps and bounds to a population of 170,000, still managed to hold onto its own unique character. Even though here and there you could still hear expressions of the old feelings of inferiority among the old-timers who had not yet gotten used to the city's new look, more and more residents were developing a kind of "local patriotism" and a fighting spirit, as if to say proudly "We're from Beersheba!" (Who goes around saying they're from Tel Aviv, anyway?) Mrs. Lewin felt this unique spirit and that is why she decided that an entire museum would be donated to Beersheba. We're already involved in the plans and have a signed contract in our hands: this museum will be a reality.

We couldn't have run the Foundation without the wonderful volunteers, whom I would like to thank for their efforts, especially the volunteers in the USA. Many personalities lent their names to the Foundation and added prestige and credibility to our work, such as my friend Elie Wiesel. As a very special gesture, he consented to be Honorary World Chairman, despite the fact that he heads his own Elie Wiesel Foundation. There was Rabbi Arthur Schneier, who heads the International InterFaith Organization among other things, and Malcolm Hoenlein, my old friend from the days of Bar and Nativ, now Director and Vice President of the Presidents' Conference. In addition, there were so many good people who worked so hard to collect monies, including my good friend Sidney Cooperman, a retired banker living in Florida, formerly president of the Foundation and today its Chairman; Arthur Friedman, who died about a year ago, was Chairman of the Foundation. Melvin "Mel" Meisel, who had been my main supporter for years, and his wife Selma, meant more to me than

just the term life-long friends: years ago Selma adopted me as her brother since she has no siblings. Mel became Foundation treasurer and today he serves as its secretary. Today, the Beersheba Foundation is looking to the future, headed by a young Wall Street man, Ron Slavin, with the constant support of his energetic wife Janna, the practical organizer of the fundraising events. I hope that even when I am no longer mayor of Beersheba these wonderful people will keep on seeing to the needs of our Capital of the Negev and its residents.

V

Beersheba did not get anything without a struggle. Nothing was handed to us on a silver platter. As the Ministry of Finance clerks saw it, it would have been easier if Beerheba did not develop so fast. It would have been better had it remained a small camel town in the backwaters of Israel. The struggle over its image and position in Israel took various forms political lobbying, articles in the press, public pressure in every framework and every forum, plus lots of yelling and screaming, at every possible opportunity. But there were other easier and better methods. As soon as I was elected, I devoted hours and even days to bringing prominent personalities to Beersheba to see and form their own impressions. I would invite them one by one the MK's, journalists, industrialists, public figures; the end result was cumulative. I'll illustrate this with one such event.

There is an exclusive 'club' in Israel called the "Hhug Tishrei," a circle of former Chiefs of Staff, heads of Mossad, IDF Intelligence, all current or former senior government officials. Once a month, the group tours a certain place in the country, headed by Gen. (Res.) Meir Amit, former head of the Mossad. I had worked with him for a while and we remained friends. I had been trying for months to get Meir Amit to bring Hug Tishrei to Beersheba. After eight months of unrelenting pressure, at last they came, during one of those days that Arik Sharon and I were in the midst of the building fever (or madness, depending on your point of view).

I took the group for a tour of some of the streets with new houses and showed them what we were doing in various fields, including the attempt to improve the school buildings. I spoke to them of the vision of a Greater Beersheba. They smiled, thanked me, and made sure I

could hear their concern and criticism: "Who would come to live here? And if they come, what will they live from, Ijo?" They left fully impressed by my efforts, but worried. I kept this to myself, and several years later, when we were approved for Development Area A, when the industrialization and expansion succeeded and people were making a living, when the unemployment level dropped below the national average, it was then that I brought "Hug Tishrei" on a return visit to Beersheba. Instead of overdoing it in the word department, I'll quote Meir Amit's letter to me.

19 November 1995
To: Ijo Rager,
The Mayor
Beersheba

Dear Ijo,

I would like to express my deepest thanks to you, my friend, the loyal thanks of a colleague, for the overflowing optimism that you have so abundantly shown on our visit to Beersheba.

As you know – it is no secret, when we first came with the Hug Tishrei to Beersheba, we listened to your words with a measure of skepticism and we let you hear our critical words. We asked difficult questions and you answered us with words of a visionary.

Several years have passed, and we acceded to your request for a return visit.

We must express our thanks to you, and admit that we felt the greatest surprise. The changes that took place in this city are far beyond what we ever expected to see. I can say that your vision has been realized in full and what you said came true.

We hope that the forward motion of development in Beersheba will continue apace. There is still much to do and we cannot rest on our laurels.

We wish you every encouragement and hope that Beersheba will enjoy the fruits of this development.

Thank you very much for arranging our tour; we managed to see a lot in a short time.

Let me take this opportunity to ask you to pass on our appreciation to all those who helped in the work, first and foremost to Danny

Nierenberg, Zvi Tal-Yosef, Tami Givon of the Drug Rehabilitation Center and to Yaki Arzi the multi-talented researcher, and, of course, to the woman in charge of public relations. Please don't let me leave out David Mena from "Or HaHar" who provided us with a breakfast that was such a beautiful start of a great day.
All the best and many kudos.
On behalf of the members of Hug Tishrei,
Meir Amit

We were still making efforts to change Beersheba's status and odds for the future. One of the ideas that I thought up was to suggest that the government pass the Beersheba Law. I wanted the municipal legal counsel to draft a law similar to the Jerusalem Law; it has been tabled by the government since 1990. I sincerely hope that it is not totally forgotten, since I regard it as the important means of insurance that this city will not be ignored and abandoned. To this purpose, and in order to change Beersheba's public image, we also had to dig out and dust off some of the city plans that had been stuck without any action. One of these involved the southern approaches to the city, where Wadi Beersheba passed through, site of the old Bedouin market. We realized that the *shuk* (market) had to be moved so that a bold planner could deal with the southern area. At first, I suggested that my friend Yoav Igra take this on. He was a Canadian entrepreneur who had moved to Israel and settled in Eilat, but after he sank about half a million dollars into all sorts of planning, he became disillusioned with the bureaucracy of the Israel Lands Administration, who claimed "What is a private investor doing involved in this? This is a good enough plan and we can carry it out." They threw out the one who thought up the project but the Israel Lands Administration director did not touch it for at least seven years, and didn't budge one inch. At last we found some funding and the new Bedouin market was moved. It is a pleasure to see. I am also glad that we freed up the land for a big project.

We also have other enterprises initiated by other companies. For example, Israel Chemicals Ltd. wanted to move their headquarters to Beersheba. ICL is the perfect example of a plant that lives from the Negev, drawing its sustenance from it and unable to exist without its natural resources the Dead Sea phosphates and other quarries in the

Negev and the Arava. It was an anomalous situation that they had their headquarters on the Coastal Plain, in the Tel Aviv area. We weren't prepared to suffer this absurdity, so we started our fight: we mobilized the local media, political figures, and yours truly. I especially put the pressure on Arik Sharon, Minister in charge of ICL, who finally ordered them to move the main headquarters to the Negev. Then we heard the news that they were renting space in Migdal Sheva, the new office "tower" which was being built in town. A little more than a year later we were invited to the opening of the office. Then we realized that we were being "snowed." The building was under construction, very slow construction, which allowed them to put off the transition and buy themselves more time. They had meanwhile caught us off guard. ICL had decided to move only part of the staff there, needing only seven or eight rooms at most. It's difficult to describe just how disappointed we were. But we didn't give up, and made sure to have an inter-ministerial committee appointed to investigate. They did come to the conclusion that the ICL plant must move to the Negev, including all senior management and the headquarters. Things got so far that Victor Medina, director-general of Israel Chemicals Ltd., resigned. The move actually takes place only after Shoul Eisenberg bought the plant, since he had the healthy sense to figure out that a company that made its living from the Negev should be based in the Negev. He also saw this as a way to forced several figures from the top management to resign. I certainly do hope that ICL will establish company headquarters in Beersheba. Eisenberg himself told me with some enthusiasm that he is also building himself a home in Beersheba.

Planning and carrying out each plan showed me that we had to change the city's status as seen by the national planners. We tirelessly devoted days and nights to this task. When Yitzhak Moda'i suddenly brought up the idea of the "Kidmat HaNegev" plan for the development of the northern Negev we cooperated with him. We felt that every plan that would put Beersheba and the entire area on a better footing was important to us. Yitzhak Moda'i invested much energy and allocations from the Ministry of Finance. We knew that we had to make sure that the Ministry of the Interior planners would give a different preference to the city and consider it a major metropolitan area. We put tremendous efforts into lobbying and convincing people,

and finally, the national master plan for development No. 31 considered Beersheba an urban center and regional capital. This improved our situation and, indeed, it was the only chance for future development.

The significance of this classification is that the government will have to invest a lot of capital in the transportation and transport infrastructure, for example. From the beginning of my term, I worked hard to advance the "Nevatim Plan" because it was obvious to me that without trains or an airport we really couldn't be the urban center of the Negev. Neither would we be considered one of Israel's major cities. We started our fight to set up an international airport to be located not far from town. I even suggested to Prime Minister Shamir that it become the absorption intake airport for new immigrants. I felt that the new airport was both realistic and logical. After all, New York City has both La Guardia and JFK; Paris has Orly as well as Roissy. Israel also needed her second airport and the best possible place considering location and wide-open space was the existing Nevatim air force base, which the Americans set up when Sinai went to Egypt. This was at the heart of the Beersheba-Dimona-Yeroham triangle. This was the "Nevatim Plan" and there was talk even then of making it Israel's international airport. They had only to pave or complete the proper roads and it would be only an hour to Jerusalem or to Tel Aviv. I have no doubt that in the end this will happen, and we can only hope that the State of Israel acts wisely and begin planning and construction immediately if not sooner. An airport of this size takes seven to ten years to construct, so it would be best to begin immediately. I myself started to pressure for it five years ago, and my friend Moshe Katzav, then Minister of Transport, did in fact appoint a committee headed by a pilot, Captain Goldreich, to investigate the matter. I sent two representatives to the committee, my deputy Eli Boker, and Kalman Porath, who was then the head of the Chamber of Commerce. The committee met and investigated, coming up with the clear conclusion that this airport must be built right away.

This report never saw the light of day. It was stuffed into some drawer in the Ministry of Transport and never taken out. When I tried to find out what exactly had happened, I very soon found out that the Israel airlines lobby is extremely powerful. And of course it's easy to

understand, who wants to give up the fat salaries and the perks? Why should they go nuts? All the spoiled airport workers and fat cats who fly abroad on company accounts why should they cut off the sweet flow of goodies to go to the desolate area between Beersheba and Dimona? Who wants to live there? Who wants his office there, anyhow? For years, it was very convenient for the country to think of us as being at the bottom of the heap. And on whose side would the press and aviation correspondents be? Would they support the Negev, that is struggling for its status in Israel, or would they support the airlines who generously supplied them with air tickets?

At any rate, it's clear to me that we have to build this airport. Just imagine how much easier it will be to load the planes directly with the fruits and vegetables grown in the Arava in the winter. This will be a tremendous push for increased exports. Just imagine how many jobs we can provide during the seven years of building the airport, and later for operating it? There would be opportunity to employ thousands of people, university graduates, the many engineers from the former USSR and more. But no, the State of Israel gave in to the lobbying and has proven itself sadly lacking in imagination.

I remember a heart-to-heart talk I had with Yisrael Kessar, who had replaced Moshe Katzav as Minister of Transportation. We had a good conversation about the advantages and disadvantages of such an airport, and about the hazards involved in the expansion of the Ben Gurion Airport and how injurious it was to the quality of life of the residents nearby, and about the transportation difficulties. People would disembark from a four hour flight from Paris to Lod only to spend two hours in their car from Lod to Tel Aviv: the entire area would become one big traffic jam. Yisrael thought the whole thing over, then said to me quite candidly, "Yes, but then I won't be Minister of Transportation any more."

From time to time I would redouble my efforts in the fight. One day, Yoash "Chatto" Sidon came to see me with a plan to establish an airplane repair and reconditioning plant near Nevatim air base operated by the Air Force. The only thing the government would have to do would be to pave another runway on the side in order to bring the aircraft needing work on onto the field. It was like talking to a brick wall. I understood that I had a continuing battle. I believe that at the

end the State will build the airport and that we will have a new Negev Airport.

Another fight we were forced into was the fight over the government offices and courthouses in town. Beersheba is a district court center with Magistrates, District and Labor Courts, where trials are held from the entire region. The problem was the courts were unfit for humans to work there. We had to struggle to change the situation, and, in fact, during David Liba'i's term as Minister of Justice, it was decided to build a 180 million shekel centralized courts building. We slaved over this day and night, fulfilling every request from the Courts Administration, diverted sewage, water, phone and electric lines, and made decisions within a few hours that normally take weeks to decide. The project was launched, and I hope that within one year we'll be able to see one of the country's most beautiful buildings right in the center of our city the Negev Courts of Justice.

It was the same story with the government buildings in the city. It was obvious that a district center should concentrate all ministerial offices in one centralized area. The state didn't have the time to deal with this, so we begged and pleaded, and, in our own way, nagged, reminded and pressured people until we had a decision to build a government center for the entire Negev region. We published a tender for architects and chose three very avant garde plans. I remember the meeting to which Finance Minister Avraham "Beiga" Shochat and I were called in to see what the judges chose. We sat there in confusion. While the buildings seemed very revolutionary in design, and totally unconventional, we were faced with a difficult choice, but we took courage and supported the jury who chose a plan that was thoroughly unique. By now the hammers and drills are going full speed ahead as the new Beersheba Government Center is being built.

I firmly believe that while Ariel Sharon is Minister of Infrastructure, maybe even by 1998, we will witness the construction of an express train to Beersheba. And we'll see superhighway construction. It is an absolute necessity to have a multiple road system that will justify the establishment of an airport and other big investment projects in the city that make it a city with a solid infrastructure. This means that we must also give Beersheba important cultural institutions that may be unnecessary in other cities. For example, Petah Tikva can get along

quite well without a theatre, because a short trip without any trouble brings people to Tel Aviv. Ramat Gan residents can easily get to the Philharmonic in Tel Aviv. But Beersheba needs both its theatre and the Sinfonietta. And in Israel, it's impossible to nurture local pride without a proper soccer team in good standing in the National League. Even in very economically troubled times, I made sure that the Municipality allocated money to the Theatre, the Sinfonietta and Hapoel Beersheba Soccer Team, institutions that must absolutely be part of the cultural scene of any major metropolitan area.


Israel
BONDS


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