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This thesis opens with an analysis and evaluation of the children's anthology *Free To Be...You And Me.* I address the value of that body of work, with respect to shaping the emotional development of children, by examining not only the content, but the presentation and the original goals and objectives of the material as well.

In the second chapter, I discuss an example of modern Israeli Children's literature, *Tzippor Hanefesh*, which lives up to the goals and standards set by the popular success of *Free To Be...You And Me.* I have included the original Hebrew text, and my own translation of that text.

The remaining ten chapters focus on one particular Israeli author, Yehonatan Gefen. In them, I deal with several things: my translation and discussion of a substantial portion of Gefen's original writing for children; my translation and discussion of a substantial portion of his recently published autobiography, *Ishah Y'qarah*; and the ways in which his life experiences and his writings for children are inter-connected.

I have written my own contextual headlines for each of the sections, and I have summarized the important points concerning his relationships with family members and the development of his own personality.

I also attempt, as much as possible, to demonstrate how those life experiences and familial relationships help us to understand the motivations behind his writing, and the ultimate goals of his poetry.

All translations of Gefen's writings are my own. Sources of original English texts, cited by Gefen in his writings, are indicated in the footnotes.

SELECTED AUTHORS AND THEMES IN MODERN ISRAELI CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
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CHAPTER 1 - *FREE TO BE...YOU AND ME*

In 1974, Marlo Thomas and friends created an anthology of children's songs and stories intended to teach children about becoming an authentic self, about children's autonomy and personal development[1]. The anthology is entitled *Free To Be...You And Me*. *Free To Be...You And Me* affirms the true potential of the individual, by challenging sex and racial stereotypes. Kids cannot *choose* the family in which they are raised any more than they can choose to be born male or female, black or white, rich or poor. But how children *experience* each of these realities is determined by the way we adults evaluate our often unexamined assumptions about different personal attributes or family compositions. And just as children suffer from sexism and racism, they also hurt when their personal realities are discredited - either directly or by inference or innuendo. Kids internalize societal criticism. They feel personally stigmatized. They blame themselves for not living "Dick and Jane" lives. They blame their parents for not being Mary Poppins or Doctor Dolittle[2].

When *Free to be...You and Me* was first published, it was presented as a feminist collection of literature. Marlo Thomas took every conceivable gender stereotype, and turned each one completely on its head. She successfully deconstructed gender stereotypes in two different ways: through content, and through form, method, and presentation.

Regarding content, attention was paid to every word. Every phrase and word in

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[1]Letty Cottin Pogrebin, introduction to *Free To Be...A Family*, by Marlo Thomas and Friends (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), 8.

[2]Ibid., 8-9.

the anthology are so well crafted, providing the advanced reader and thinker access to deeper lessons on human potential. Almost every time the words "boys" and "girls" are used together, the phrasing of choice is "girls and boys." The societal norm, however, would be to use the phrase "boys and girls." The song, entitled *Parents Are People*, boasts of the endless options both girls and boys have as to occupation choices. In a rhyme by Dan Greenberg, entitled *My Dog is a Plumber*, stereotypes describing what boys and girls can and can't do are addressed as well. The narrator of Greenberg's rhyme is trying to figure out what gender the dog is by the kinds of toys with which the dog likes to play and by the various skills the dog has. The last line of the rhyme sums up the main objective: "Maybe the problem is in trying to tell, Just what someone is by what he does well."[3]

Boys and girls only expect certain genders to take on certain roles and to display certain characteristics, because of what and how they are taught by adults. They may be taught this by their parents directly, or they may learn these things simply by observing behaviors of others in society.

A brilliant example of the impact of method can be found in the song entitled *It's All Right to Cry*. The song is sung at the end of a story which tells of a boy who is afraid to cry. The song describes how crying helps someone feel better and explains that crying and feelings are perfectly acceptable regardless of what gender you are. The message behind this piece is really driven home by the fact that it is sung by Rosie Greer, a large

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[3]Marlo Thomas and Friends, *Free To Be...You And Me and Free To Be...A Family* (Philadelphia: Running Press, 1997), 49.

and powerful professional football player. Until this anthology was published, people knew Greer only as a football player. Hearing him sing this song, and seeing a picture of him with a tear rolling down his cheek, certainly catches adults off guard. However, adults are only caught off guard because what they see is contrary to what they expect. Children, or boys, specifically in this case, who are raised learning that crying and expressing emotions are legitimate ways of expressing feelings for either gender, don't find this picture off-putting at all -- it doesn't contradict anything they already know because what they're seeing is what they're learning and what they know -- it is their reality.

A powerful example of form is a story about a Princess, named Atalanta. The King, brought to life by the voice of Alan Alda, decides he will hold a race. The winner will receive the honor of marrying the Princess Atalanta. "'Of course you will [get married],' said the King [to Atalanta]. 'Everybody gets married. It is what people do.'"[4] Atalanta, the feminist that she is, convinces her father to allow her to run in the race as well. The deal is that if she wins, she will decide whom she will marry, if anyone at all. In preparation for the race, Atalanta runs across the field to practice. She runs across the field in three minutes, faster than anyone had ever run across it before. Young John from the town also practices running across the field. However, when *he* reaches the three minute mark, the narrator tells us that he has run across the field in three minutes, faster,

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[4]Ibid., 68.

he thought, than anyone had ever run across it before.[5]

When the race starts, Atalanta, the only female in the race, immediately takes the lead with all of the men following behind her trying to catch up, but never quite making it that far. There is never a point where a male is in the lead. Atalanta, however, does wind up tying with young John from the town. When the king informs young John that tying with Atalanta is equivalent to winning, and he now has the right to marry the Princess, Young John is quick to decline. Young John, the feminist that *he* is, informs the King that he could not possibly marry Atalanta unless Atalanta were willing to marry him as well. Of course, Atalanta finds much pleasure in Johnson's statement. They become fast friends and decide that whether or not they will marry some day, they each need to go off and see the world on their own. The story ends with the following quote: "Perhaps some day they will be married, and perhaps they will not. In any case, they are friends. And it is certain that they are both living happily ever after." Unlike all the other children's books of its time, this story tells children that it's not the "getting married" that leads to living happily ever after.

Presentation of the material also adds in layers of nuances to the already well-crafted content. For example, every time a man and woman sing together in the recording, the man always has the high harmony. Especially in the late 1960's and early 1970's, this was not the norm. In the song, *Glad to Have a Friend Like You*, three pairs of male and female friends celebrate their friendship and the things that they, as friends, can

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[5]Betty Miles, "Atalanta," performed by Alan Alda and Marlo Thomas, *Free To Be...You And Me*, BMG/Arista, audiocassette.

teach each other and do with each other. Within each of the three pairs of friends, it is always the girl who tells the boy first about the great things they can accomplish together.

A song about each person's responsibility to care for others and the importance of people looking out for one another, is entitled *Sisters and Brothers*. The default, generic idiom of "brothers and sisters" is turned around shaking the attention of those who never quite noticed the different parts of the phrase yet not affecting the enjoyment of anyone who doesn't find it jarring at all.

In a story about a little girl and her relationship with her grandmother, Delilah's parents go away once a year and invite her grandmother over to stay with her while they are away. The story starts with the following lines: "...Sometimes, Delilah's mother went away on a business trip. Delilah loved spending time alone with her father... Once in a while, Delilah's father went away on a business trip. Delilah loved to spend time alone with her mother, as well. Once a year, Delilah's mother and father went away on a vacation together... Those were the times when Grandma came to stay..."[6]

Delilah's mother is first to go away. When the narrator tells of Delilah's parents, they are called "mother and father," as opposed to being referred to as "father and mother," the societally expected order of words.

"Parents and friends of children are always searching for bedtime stories that we can read to kids that will help stimulate their growth and development. We want excitement without violence, fantasy without demeaning role-playing, stories that are

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[6]"Grandma," performed by Diana Sands, *Free To Be...You And Me*, BMG/Arista, audiocassette.

accessible without being condescending, and art that illuminates without typecasting. We want human diversity, a celebration of life's bountiful choices, a literature that honors the mind, heart, and spirit of every child.

"In fact, these are the very goals and values that fueled the first-rate writers and artists who have contributed to this book. Perhaps that is why love and vitality shine from every page. It's also why this book is both a fun and yet feisty rebuttal to those cultural influences that would stunt children's development by confining them to prisons of gender.

"In *Free To Be...You And Me*, no game, toy , sport, job, idea, or aspiration is off limits to anyone. In this book, girls and boys can find their best selves and the best parts of each other."[7] That's the genius of this book, and of the messages it sends.

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[7]Ibid.

CHAPTER 2 - *TZIPPOR HANEFESH*

Tzippor Hanefesh, by Michal Snunit, is an excellent example of Israeli children's literature that meets the goals and objectives of the *Free To Be...You And Me* anthology. It certainly lives up to those high *Free To Be...You And Me* standards. Although an English translation of this book already exists, the translation at the end of this chapter is my own and was written before consulting the extant English translation. This book provides a perfect opportunity for children to learn to identify emotions. So many different emotions are listed in the book and they are said to be locked away, each in its own private drawer. In addition to identifying emotions, The Bird In Our Soul, that is made up of drawers upon drawers of different emotions, offers an effective image for children in order to help them to differentiate between our many emotions. Understanding that people have many, many different feelings, and that every one of those feelings is okay and essentially part of the very essence of who we are as individuals, are crucial lessons for children and are taught superbly by this book.

The structure of the story does even more than help children to identify and differentiate between emotions. Children learn from this book that there are times when we do not have control over our emotions. Furthermore, at those times, it is not anyone's fault, and we do not need to feel blamed or guilty -- accidents happen, and life does go on.

"Sometimes, people can choose on their own which drawers they want opened, and they tell the Bird which keys to turn. And sometimes the Bird decides for us. For example: someone who wants to be silent, could tell their Bird to open up the "Silence Drawer." But the Bird, all on its own, could open up that person's "Talking Drawer," and

that person could talk and talk without even wanting to."[8]

The book also teaches that we need to do our best to act responsibly and to try sincerely as best as possible to be aware of our emotions. "And, what's most important -- is to listen well to your Bird. Because sometimes, The Bird In Our Soul calls to us, and we don't hear it. What a shame. The Bird wants to tell us about ourselves. It wants to tell us about the feelings which are locked up in drawers, inside of it."[9]

I believe that The Bird In Our Soul is really a metaphor for the collective life experiences of each individual. This book empowers children to feel whatever emotion they happen to feel at any given time and to accept the different kinds of emotions they may have. The book encourages children to talk about what goes on in their lives and how it makes them feel, and not to keep things bottled up inside. Being aware of what's going on in our lives and inside of us can teach us volumes about who we are as individuals.

Just like *Free To Be..You And Me*, and just like *Hakeves Hashishah-Asar*, *Tzippor Hanefesh* is an enjoyable experience for both children and adults, regardless of whether or not one finds the deeper lessons to be learned from this brilliantly created story.

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[8]Michal Snunit, *Tzippor Hanefesh* (Tel Aviv: Am El Oz, 1995), 22.

[9]Ibid., 33.

Tzippor Hanefesh - My Translation

Deep, deep within the body, there lives the soul. No person has ever seen it, but everyone knows that it exists. And they don't simply know that it exists, they also know what's inside of it.

Inside the soul, right in its center, there stands, on one foot, a bird. A bird whose name is The Bird In Our Soul. And this bird feels everything that we feel:

When someone hurts us, The Bird In Our Soul runs to and fro, scurrying about in all directions inside our body, suffering all sorts of pain.

When someone loves us, The Bird In Our Soul skips and jumps around joyfully, forward and back, again and again.

When someone calls our name, The Bird In Our Soul listens carefully to the voice in order to figure out why they might be calling us.

When someone is angry with us, The Bird In Our Soul withdraws inside of itself and is quiet and sad.

And when someone hugs us, The Bird In Our Soul, who lives deep deep within our body, grows and grows until it fills up almost all of the space we have inside of us. So much so that it feels good to be hugged.

Within the body, deep deep down, there lives the soul. No person has ever seen it, but everyone knows that it exists. Also, never ever has a person been born who did not have a soul. Because the soul enters into our body at the very moment we are born, and it never leaves us -- not even for a second -- for as long as we live. It's just like with air -- we breathe air from the moment we are born, right up until the moment we die.

Surely, you'll also want to know what The Bird In Our Soul is made of. Ah, this happens to be very simple: It's made up of drawers upon drawers. These drawers can't be opened just like that, however, because each drawer is locked with a key which fits only that drawer. And The Bird In Our Soul is the only one who can open its drawers. How? This is also very simple: with the other leg.

The Bird In Our Soul stands on one leg and with the other leg -- which, when resting, is folded up under its belly -- it turns the key for whichever drawer it wants to open, pulls the handle, and all that's inside of the drawer is set free within the body.

And since there's nothing that we feel which doesn't have its own drawer, The Bird In Our Soul has many many drawers. There's a drawer for happiness and there's a drawer for sorrow. There's a drawer for jealousy and there's a drawer for hope. There's a drawer for disappointment and there's a drawer for despair. There's a drawer for patience and there's a drawer for nervousness. There's also a drawer for hatred, and a drawer for anger, and a drawer for spoiling. A drawer for laziness and a drawer for vanity. And a drawer for the most hidden secrets, which is a drawer that is almost never opened. And there are more drawers. You, yourselves, can add whatever you want.

Sometimes people can choose, on their own, which drawers they want opened and they tell the bird which keys to turn. And sometimes the bird decides for us. For example: someone who wants to be silent could tell the bird to open up the "Silence Drawer." But the bird, all on its own, could open up that person's "Talking Drawer" and that person could talk and talk without even wanting to. Or another example: Someone could ask to listen patiently -- but the bird could open up that person's "Anxiety Drawer,"

which could cause that person to become very anxious.

And it happens that people become jealous without meaning to at all. And it happens that people spoil things precisely when they mean to be helpful. Because The Bird In Our Soul is not always a very disciplined bird, and it sometimes causes us trouble...

Now it's easier to understand that every person is different from everyone else, because of The Bird In Our Soul which is inside each of us. When someone's Bird opens up their "Happiness Drawer," happiness pours out into their body, and that Bird's person is happy.

And if someone's Bird were to open their "Anger Drawer," anger pours out of it and controls that person completely. And until their Bird closes that drawer, that person will not stop being angry.

Usually, a Bird that has it bad, opens up drawers which are not so pleasant. While a Bird that has it good, chooses drawers that are good.

And, what's most important -- is to listen well to your Bird. Because sometimes, The Bird In Our Soul calls to us and we don't hear it. What a shame. The Bird wants to tell us about ourselves. It wants to tell us about the feelings which are locked up in drawers inside of it.

Some people hear their Bird very often. Some people hear their Bird very rarely. And some people hear it only once in their life.

So, it's worth our while, maybe late at night when it's quiet all around, to listen to The Bird In Our Soul that's inside of us, deep deep within our body.

CHAPTER 3 - TAKING CARE OF ME

In the sections of *Ishah Y'qarah* included in this chapter, Yehonatan Gefen describes some of the events in his life which caused him to realize that he needed to begin taking care of himself. In each chapter of his autobiographical "book for his mother," he uses the term *Megillot Genuzot* (secret or hidden scrolls; Dead Sea Scrolls), when referring to the issues concerning his mother and their relationship, and all of the repressed emotional scars from his childhood -- issues which had been hidden away so well for so long.

The first line of the First Scroll is "Mother, I hate you."[10] One can begin working through issues and receiving help only when one admits that there is a problem. He starts his story about his mother by acknowledging that he hates her. Of course, as the story develops, he discovers information that affects his perspective on their relationship. However, he recognizes that there is a problem hidden inside of himself, and that realization and admission of real emotion is what begins his long and painful process of liberating himself from his past.

In Chapter Eleven of this thesis, there is a translation of his poem, "The Man With The Hair." The man's hair is a metaphor for the "baggage" that he carries around with him throughout his life. He is aware of some of the objects hidden in his hair, and there are some things in his hair of which he is not aware. He spends a great deal of time taking care of his hair, making sure that it stays in perfect shape for collecting all kinds of "stuff." He is even described as preparing his hair so that he can go out and start

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[10]Yehonatan Gefen, *Ishah Y'qarah* (Tel Aviv: Dvir Publishing House, 1999), 25.

"sweeping the streets."[11]

Gefen, through writing this book, is "cutting his hair." He is no longer protecting the familiar, though painful, experiences and memories of his past. He is working through difficult issues, letting go of painful patterns. He is allowing himself to feel and to think and to accept and to doubt... As a grown adult, he is finally allowing himself to take care of himself. He was always told that he needed to think of others, so he always did think of others -- which is not bad, as long as one does not neglect one's own self.

Gefen's songs and poems for children teach many, many lessons. One significant theme, permeating his entire body of work, is that individuals need to be aware of their own needs. In order to be a whole human being an individual needs to feel important -- like a full person. He tries to teach children this lesson which he only learned as an adult.

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[11]Yehonatan Gefen, "The Man With The Hair," in *Hakeves Hashishah-Asar* (Tel Aviv: Dvir Publishing House, 1992), 29.

Ishah Y'qarah - Pages 25-27

"Mother, I hate you."

I wrote that sentence on the binding of my Chase Manhattan Bank checkbook, after returning drunk, once again, to our apartment in New York, knowing that I was going to separate from my second wife. No woman wants to stay with a man who always wants to be somewhere else. No drunken runaway would stay with one woman, or with himself, for any length of time, and I remember that it suddenly hit me: In all matters relating to women — I'm cursed. The only way I know how to get close to a lover is to write her a song, and then to run away — but for how long will a woman stay with a song?

Suddenly, it hit me inside...the love, the feelings of guilt, the powerlessness, the pity. My entire body shook, the fine china coffee cup that was in my hand fell to the floor and shattered. Tear drops welled up in my eyes.

I took two Tylenol and headed for the living room. My one year old daughter is crawling on the hard-wood floor and stammering out her first words. My wife is moving tonight to her parents' apartment uptown, and my baby girl won't be living with me anymore.

So then I went into the living room and said in a loud voice:

"I hate my Mother."

Words that drunkards sometimes say.

"What did you say?" asked my wife.

"Nothing," I said. "I'm talking to myself."

"I hope you're answering yourself, too," said my wife.

She looked at me for a moment, with a patronizing and indulgent look — the kind of look you use when looking at people who are ill, and she continued to change the baby's diaper.

After that, I went to Israel. I took care of myself. I feel strong now. My daughter and my wife come to visit me for two months at a time. I go to see them. We all feel better now. But I've got to figure out this thing with my mother, I have to allow myself to be angry at her.

And to uncover the hidden scrolls of her psyche,[12] that are bound up with my life,[13] repressed issues deep within her, which are all bound up within me.

It's not my intention to hurt my parents, who have perhaps been wounded even more than I. Dr. G told me: "You have to write this book."

"And what about my parents, it won't hurt them?"

"Some people donate their bodies to science," Dr. G. said. "Your parents need to donate their psyches to science."

You understand, Mother, I've waited a long time until I allowed myself to hate you, to mourn for you, and afterward to get close to you and try to love you.

I have no time. I have a feeling that if I don't tell this story, I'll die. Here in

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[12]In recent history, the Hebrew term used here, *Megillot Genuzot*, is the Hebrew name for the Dead Sea Scrolls. This play on words accommodates Gefen's description of this book and its revelations as having been repressed and hidden from him for an extended period of time.

[13]The Hebrew term *sheniqsh'ra b'nafshi* is used here as a play on the language describing the relationship between David and Jonathan in I Sam. 18:1.

Israel, people die all the time anyway -- tomorrow, another war could break out, every time I drive on the roads of our land, I'm escaping from murderers who are surrounding me. I don't want to die before I tell this story. Don't be angry with me, my hated/loved Mother, but suddenly, I want to live.

Forgive me, Mother. Thank you, Mother.

I will try to tell the most truthful story I can about my mother. The woman who vanishes from me, of whom I can't successfully close my eyes and conjure up her image. She just doesn't appear. The same thing happens to me when I try to remember a particular dentist I had once, an Army Company Commander who tormented me during military training. It seems there's some smart bomb in our brains, that erases the images of those who have caused us pain.

"My mother's love. She was like a little dog to me. A dog that loves, who agrees with every little thing, who is content and excited just because of the fact that it is obeying its master..."[14]

No, that's certainly not my mother. That's the mother of Albert Cohen, the wonderful author and the most happy of persons. He had a mother of whose love he was certain. Afterwards, he wrote a wonderful book which was a total apology. "The book about my mother." "Le livre de ma mere." Albert's mother, who took him from the Greek island of Corfu, to Marseille, in France, and all the while she cooked for him, she wrote to him, she sang to him. Only after she died did he understand just how much she

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[14]Although *Le livre de ma mere* has been translated into English, I have not located the book. This translation from the Hebrew is my own.

did for him, and how much he was ashamed of her when she was alive, and he felt guilty. And he wrote her a book that she'll never be able to read. Oh, how difficult it is to console the dead.

My mother never did anything for my benefit. Nor for her own benefit. Nor for anyone else's. She was, as I understand it, a poor unfortunate woman. That's why I constantly tried to escape, to look for a different mother, like the little duckling in that popular children's story, "Are You My Mother?"[15] In the end, I also found a mother like Albert Cohen's mother.

And I married her, what else?!

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[15]P.D. Eastman, *Are You My Mother?* (New York: Beginner Books - A Division of Random House, Inc., 1980).

Ishah Y'qarah - Pages 43-48

A little before age 10, I discovered my sexuality. Of course, I didn't know that that was what I had discovered. In order to relieve myself, I would lie on my stomach, my ragged pillow underneath my small belly rubbing against my clothing, until ejaculation, feeling absolutely the surprising erection, the sudden wetness in my underwear, the pleasant thrill that ran all through me. Afterward, as if nothing had happened, I would go on reading or listening to music, with even greater concentration.

I wasn't embarrassed by it, but I did feel that there was something unresolved and enigmatic about it. A subject I would definitely need to clarify with someone, but with whom?

One day, in the afternoon, a time when Mother would usually be struggling for her afternoon nap (and Father, as has been said, would be trampling over things in his tank and hating Arabs in some area under gunfire far from home), while I was relieving myself on my ragged pillow, panting and breathing heavily, performing an act which only a few years later I would know was called masturbation, I saw my mother's face in the small window, twisted with disgust, behind the window with the rusty screen, stained with bird-droppings.

She looked at me as if she had seen a ghost.

"Mother," I said, trying to be pleasant.

But nothing would ever be pleasant again.

How long was she standing there? What did she see? How terrible was what I had done?

Very quickly I got up from the couch. I sat shrinking, a boy of 10, with smooth black hair, bangs down to my eyes -- a short, guilty Japanese boy.

Mother sits herself down on Grandpa's arm chair, (it, too, was beige and prickly with braids), she buries her sad and pretty white face in her hands, and cries. I want to get up and go comfort her, but if I were to get up, she would see the stain which was now spreading on my jeans.

Meanwhile, I was acting as if there were no stain, as if there were nothing, everything as usual. Maybe it would suddenly turn out to be a dream, a happening that never really happened. A.D. Gordon,[16] the New Jew, looking down on us from above, and for a moment it seemed to me that he, too, had moved to the side, and had finally begun to dig and to move his frozen image of a shovel around. Mother cried and cried, and she finally approached me and said: "How are you not ashamed?"

I didn't say anything.

"Do you have any idea what you were doing just now?"

"What did I do?"

"You don't understand what you did? I don't believe it, I don't believe it..."

"Don't cry, Mother, please don't cry."

"Don't cry, he tells me... His mother wants to die and he says..."

That was one of the first times that she used her own death as a weapon. It was

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[16]"'Our road leads to nature through the medium of physical labor.' The return to nature through labor will enable man to rediscover religion and to regain a sense of cosmic unity and holiness." *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ©1972, s.v. "Gordon, Aharon David."

also one of the first times, if not the first time, that I remember her switching from one emotional state to the exact opposite, in a split second. In my juvenile understanding, I began to understand that apparently I had done something terrible for which there was no forgiveness.

Likewise, that perhaps my mother was sick in the head.

She came very very close to me, with a sternly angry face. From a helpless situation, she moved to violent aggression.

"We will not talk about this."

"No, Mother."

"Never?"

"Never."

"Do you promise never to do this any more?"

"Yes, Mother."

"If I were to tell your father about this, do you know what he would do to you?"

"No, Mother, I don't know." Now she suddenly appeared as a distant star in heaven, I was very close to tears.

"I'll tell you what he'd do to you," she said .

"???"

"He'll kill you. If he finds out about this, he will simply kill you." I immediately saw my father's revolver in its brown wooden box, together with his British Army medals, ever the soldier. He had opened his heroes box in front of me several times, and he told me that I should never try to open it because he would know about it. The

revolver was wrapped carefully in a big flannel cloth, and at that point I also realized why he polished it at least twice a week: so that if, by chance, he would catch some boy playing with his penis, his instrument would be in good repair, and he would destroy the boy who "polished himself," without thinking twice.

Right then I really started crying, and because I was a screaming baby, I was not a crier. I would cry quietly, then quite loudly, and my mother wouldn't hold me or touch me. With my child's intuition I realized: Here, there could be no excuse. She just sat there, quiet and righteous. I knew that my life would never be like it was before. Sex and sexual organs suddenly became sinful, shameful, and superfluous abominations to me.

From the moment she caught me on the couch, every time she was angry with me, particularly when I hadn't done my homework, or at a later age, when I would do those mischievous things that would make my childhood happy, she would take me to the side and say:

"Yoti, remember that I know something that no one else knows."

"Yes, Mother."

"We don't want to tell your father, right?"

"No, Mother."

At times when she really went out of her mind, she would punish me by threatening to tell one of her friends. After Yadon Tzur and Meir Shalev and I, a pretty wild and scheming bunch, were caught putting up fake death notices on the Village announcement board, announcing the death of Feimer, the Manager of the Village Post Office (a prank we especially liked), Mother called me into the chicken coop, as if the

deafening cackling of the chickens would cover the secrecy of the infraction and emphasize the seriousness of the punishment.

"Yoti, I told someone. Do you know who? Dina Yehudai."

Dina was Yadon's mother, my best friend who was a year younger than I.

"No, Mother, you didn't..."

"She promised me that she wouldn't tell anyone, but I can't be responsible for other people's mouths."

After boyhood pranks, or some other inappropriate behavior, she said:

"Yizrella Bloch also knows about it."

"No, Mother, not Yizrella..."

"Misbehave again, and Sharik Nechamkin will know, and Sharik will surely tell Arik."

"No, Mother, please, just not that! I'll be a good boy, I'll do whatever you say. Just not Sharik, please Mother, not Sharik..."

And so began my crying years. God, how I cried. I cried so much. I didn't read, and I didn't listen to the radio, and I certainly didn't masturbate. I sat quietly, dumbfounded and growing old, on Grandpa Shmuel's couch of disgrace, thinking about my mother the punisher, across from the honored picture of the Father of the Labor Movement.

Sharik and Arik were the parents of the girl who I liked more than any other girl in my class, Emilia (who is said to have stubbornly insisted on being born at the exact same time as I). And I knew that if the story would ever reach her, that would be the end

of my life.

"I'm concerned about the boy," said Grandma D'vorah.

"Why?" asked Mother.

"Ahh, nu, look at him," Grandma said, "so young, and yet so melancholy."

A ten year old boy, exaggeratedly small, almost a dwarf, already condemned to thoughts of death and suicide. Playing off of Chekhov's most famous cliche: A revolver that hangs on the wall at age 10, is destined to fire a bullet at age 50.[17] Perhaps the book I'm writing is trying to stop that bullet.

I began to develop a fundamental lack of trust, a fear of sex, and of contact with girls, and later of contact with women. Only after my Army service, even a later age than that, in any case it was the end of the 60's, did I dare, for the first time, to establish a sexual relationship. But I masturbated, thank God, at least three times a day, among the grapefruit trees, in the young orchard, usually in the dark. And all the while, during this sad homoeroticism, beyond all sorrow or feeling of loss, a terrible anger was nesting inside me. And from then on, I also had an incessant sense that I needed something, especially from the people I loved the most.

In fact, at the age of 10 and one-half, I was already a veteran paranoiac, even though I had no word for it. I withdrew from people who were liable to already know about me, although to this day I don't know if Mother really told Dina, Yizrella, and

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[17]"Things on stage should be as complicated and yet as simple as in life. People dine, just dine, while their happiness is made and their lives are smashed. If in Act I you have a pistol hanging on the wall, then it must fire in the last act." *Anton Chekhov: A Life*, Donald Rayfeld (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998), 203.

Sharik about my disgrace, or she lied about it. If she did lie, then that was even more abusive, because it was a clever and sophisticated abuse of a small boy who believed whatever grownups said.

And so the seed of disloyalty and the sense of betrayal were planted in my heart. And I started to stutter. I could not get a whole consecutive sentence out at one time. A dwarf and a stutterer.

And the first time, when I finally did it, really with a woman, after the Army, on that same couch, as there was no other place for me to do it, I did not look into my lover's face. Rina, a beautiful green-eyed student who was studying in the Teachers' Seminar on our Moshav. I didn't look into her eyes -- I was looking at the screened window -- and there I saw my mother's face, I heard the sound of my father's polished revolver.

Even after many years, during which time that blessed activity referred to by Sigmund Freud as "repression" worked on me overtime, at the moment of orgasm, which some French call the "second death," there would usually appear (on the screen of my imagination) the "living" shovel of Aharon David Gordon, and it would threaten to crush my skull.

CHAPTER 4 - HOW A MOTHER OUGHT TO BE

Gefen describes his Aunt Ruth Dayan as "the woman whose picture deserves to be inserted next to the word 'mother' in the dictionary."[18] And, to his Aunt Ruth, Gefen says of his own mother, "She wasn't a mother at all."[19] He gives many examples of why his Aunt Ruth is the exact opposite of his own mother, and more like Bambi's mother in the movie *Bambi*.

Gefen describes how Bambi's mother died, protecting her child. The ultimate sacrifice one could make for a child is part and parcel of Gefen's definition of the ideal parent. In the movie, Bambi and his mother are running from a hunter, who is chasing them and shooting at them. Bambi escapes to freedom, but his mother is not so fortunate. As she tries, unsuccessfully, to outrun the hunter's bullets, she can be heard shouting out protective and supportive commands at her child -- "Run quickly, Bambi. Don't look back, keep running!"[20] Gefen notes that in the movie, Bambi's mother is killed by the hunter. Drawing an analogy to his perception of his own family system, he questions his mother's lack of protection for him by asking, "How come she never protected me from my father? Could it be because in our case, Bambi's mother married the hunter?"[21]

Ruth Dayan, however, was like a mother to Gefen. In fact, he calls her what Eve

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[18]Yehonatan Gefen, *Ishah Y'qarah* (Tel Aviv: Dvir Publishing House, 1999), 51.

[19]Ibid., 62.

[20]*Bambi*, supervising dir. David D. Hand, 69 min., The Walt Disney Company, 1942, videocassette.

[21]Yehonatan Gefen, *Ishah Y'qarah* (Tel Aviv: Dvir Publishing House, 1999), 110.

is called in Genesis 3:4, *Em Kol Chai*, "the mother of all living things." His own mother did not seem to care for him or for anyone, other than for her own self. Aunt Ruth, however, cared for everyone. In fact, Gefen even describes her as taking care of relatives who didn't even know that they were relatives.

In is poem, "When We Went To The City To Visit Uncle Ephraim," a boy walks along the city streets holding his mother's hand. They don't have a conversation with each other. Rather, the boy describes conversing with the toys in the store window, and imagining the shoes in the store window coming to life and looking for feet, on their own, to fill them. The one time the mother does speak to her son is when he glances at a beggar, standing on the sidewalk, leaning on a cane, with holes in his socks. The boy is curious, interested. The situation is ripe for learning about caring for others and acknowledging the needs of others. Rather than taking advantage of that most opportune teaching moment, the mother directs the boy, "Don't look."[22] The boy does look, and he describes how he carries the image of that man with him to this day.

So many of Gefen's poems address the need for parents to recognize just how influential everything they do and say is on their children. In his poem, "There's A Child Whose Father...," we read of many different parent/child relationships. Some parents are never around; some parents are around regularly. Some parents express quite openly and actively their love and care and concern for their children; others put their children's needs second to their own. It seems strange that the barber's child would not have a

[22]Yehonatan Gefen, "When We Went To The City To Visit Uncle Ephraim," in *Hakeves Hashishah-Asar* (Tel Aviv: Dvir Publishing House, 1992), 23.

decent haircut. It makes sense, however, that the child who has a parent who is a tailor, would never have a jacket with holes in it.

Based on the poor experiences with his own mother, as well as his wishes and desires as personified in his Aunt Ruth, Gefen uses his poems to teach adults how to parent. Love your children, care for your children, be attentive to their needs, respect them, protect and defend them, be willing to lay down your own life for them. Then, in return, they will do the same for you and, even more, they will do the same for their own children. Children learn behaviors through observation.

Ishah Y'qarah - Pages 50-52

The first movie I ever saw was "Bambi."

I remember the colors. The forest with the birds. The baby that was born to that animated and lovely doe. The hare named Temper, who said to the owl, "Wake up, Mr. Owl, a new prince has been born!"[23] Every baby born is a prince. In this book, I only hope I get to it - the chapter on my own short and oppressive princedom. Wherever I go, Mother, there is no land where you would be too far away for me, in order to bring me back to you. In order to infuse life into your death.

The doe looks at her baby with a complete uncompromising love, a love you can find only in children's fairy tales -- in the forests of Disney. The erect and proud doe, thinks for one cartoon moment,[24] and says in a cartoon voice, "You know what? I think I'll call him Bambi."[25]

It was in the Castle Theater in Haifa, that later became the castle in my dreams, where I saw the movies that were formative for me. And after each movie, for many hours I would masquerade as the hero I saw on the screen. I was Paul Newman, Elvis Presley, Charlie Chaplain, Marlon Brando. For two days I was Lassie, and I went home.

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[23]*Bambi*, supervising dir. David D. Hand, 69 min., The Walt Disney Company, 1942, videocassette.

[24]The Hebrew term *m'tzuyar* is repeated often throughout *Ishah Y'qarah*. Although 'cartoon,' 'animated,' and 'painted,' each seem to work better in different places, I chose to be consistent with Gefen's repetition by translating *m'tzuyar* as 'cartoon' in each case. Gefen alludes to a world created on the screen, so life-like, yet still only painted/animated/cartoon.

[25]See note 24 above.

Sometimes it took me a month to get back to myself again. Let's get back to Bambi. To his mother. To my mother.

Suddenly, the silence of the cartoon forest was broken by the sound of a gunshot. All of the children in the Castle Theater held their breath for a moment. If I shut my eyes, I can still hear that silence. The animals ran away in a panic, in the frightening darkness, seeking refuge between the trees.

"Where are you, Mother?" Bambi cried in the darkness.

"Run quickly, Bambi. Don't look back, keep running!"

Bambi ran, and I look back and I see that all of the children are crying in the darkness of the movie theater. Mother also cried at this movie. Me, too. Everyone there burst into a collective silent wail when Bambi's mother, the great and warm deer, protected the young wide-eyed deer with her own spotted body.

It was he, Walt Disney, who after some time I read that he was an anti-Semite, who put into our heads the image that that's what a mother, human or animal, is supposed to do: be prepared to die to save her child's life.

We will live. Not like in our case, where our mother died so that I would die over so many years.

After more than 20 years, I saw the movie again, with my children. I didn't get emotional, and there were scenes that actually made me nervous. I thought the movie was stupid, but Shira and Aviv cried. They, too, were beginning to build for themselves an image of a mother in the darkness of the movie theater. And undoubtedly this movie caused them, as well, to believe that indeed there are mothers like that in the human

world, and not just in the cartoon world of animals and plants. (In their case, which is very uncommon, their expectations were realized -- they got a mother who really is prepared to protect them with her own body and soul.)

But the great ideal mother, who seemed to me to be closest to the image of Bambi's perfect mother, is my Aunt Ruthie Dayan, who cared both for her own biological children and for many other children. Hapless children whose lives were damaged by the human and bureaucratic jungle. In my eyes, Aunt Ruth was the mother of all living things[26]. After my mother's death, she adopted me as a son, and I can't see myself continuing my life, realizing my high aspirations as a young artist in Tel Aviv without her, without Ruth, the woman whose picture deserves to be inserted next to the word "mother" in the dictionary. Aunt Ruth was one of the only people who were graced with the three human characteristics I most respected: integrity, courage, and kind-heartedness.

Ruth had every reason in the world, and then some, to be dissatisfied, angry, and depressed. But as much as I probed, and we shared many conversations and letters back and forth, I found only contentment and a joy for life. At 81, she is till the youngster who believes, like in Tchernichowsky's poem: "I still have faith in the fate of man, In his spirit fierce and bold."[27]

In fact, she is the exact opposite of my mother. She is everything my mother

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[26]Gefen describes Ruth Dayan as *Em Kol Chai*, likening her to Eve, who is referred to by the same term in Gen 3:4.

[27]Saul Tchernichowsky, "I Believe," in Nathan and Marynn Ausubel, *A Treasury Of Jewish Poetry* (Miami: Royale House, 1975), 75.

wanted to be and was too ashamed even to begin to realize. Aunt Ruth was and still is a career woman, independent. She cooks, drives her own beautiful car on any kind of road, travels the world, returns with fascinating stories, helps people in distress, she knows how to gather her family around her, to care for her children, her grandchildren, her relatives who don't even know that they're her relatives. In times of distress, like in the Beatles' song, Ruth is always "here, there, and everywhere."

Every little Bambi in the Dayan Family knows that if they were to stumble suddenly, Ruth will help them. She'll do everything for them, without complaining and without expecting anything in return. Like I said before, if she had only chosen to do so, she could have spent her whole life in sorrow, and tears, holding grudges. But she chose to forgive and forget, and nothing human is alien to her.[28]

Our mother, on the other hand, *everything* human was alien to her. She escaped into literature, into poetry, into theater, into sleeping, into dreams, into depression, and into pills.

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[28]"...I think it is fitting for a man to risk the belief -- for the risk is a noble one -- that this, or something like this, is true about our souls and their dwelling places, since the soul is evidently immortal, and a man should repeat this to himself as if it were an incantation...That is the reason why a man should be in good cheer about his own soul, if during life he has ignored the pleasures of the body and its ornamentation as of no concern to him and doing him more harm than good, but has seriously concerned himself with the pleasures of learning, and adorned his soul not with alien but with its own ornaments, namely, moderation, righteousness, courage, freedom and truth, and in that state awaits his journey to the underworld." John M. Cooper, ed., *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 97.

Ishah Y'qarah - Pages 60-63

In November '63, when Anat was barely a year old, we flew on an exhausting flight to Dar es Salaam, in Tanzania, when it was still called Tanganyika. Africa didn't save their marriage either. Mother would sit on the steps of our Colonial house, in the British suburb of the city that was called "Ethiopia -- Crescent," looking out at the Turkish Ocean with her dim glassy eyes, while Father uprooted majestic jungles and planted furrows of ugly vegetable gardens with the children, for the greater glory of the State of Israel.

The only day my mother was really happy in this remote land of Tanganyika was the day her brother, Moshe Dayan, arrived, who was then the Minister of Agriculture. And, apparently, he was the one who arranged for this trip of ours, like many things in our family and in other families.

I remember how we hosted the Prime Minister of Tanganyika in our house. Moshe sat across from the Prime Minister, Julius Nyerere. Nyerere spoke with him and in the middle of one of Julius' monologues, Moshe closed the one eye he had, and fell asleep in the chair. "That's how it is with Moshe," Mother said. "That's why he'll never be Prime Minister. He's not a diplomat. He has no patience. When something doesn't interest him he simply falls asleep." She didn't say it as a criticism, but rather out of great esteem, as if it were a positive personal character trait.

Toward the end of 1964, before the end of my parents' contracted time of Shlichut, they returned with a feeling of failure. Failure of the trip, failure to reconcile, failure in marriage -- an existential failure, a terminal failure. Mother found herself once

again in a place she never wanted to be, with a family she may never have wanted to establish.

"She wasn't a mother at all," I said to Ruth. "She wasn't at all. What was she?"

"Now you're beginning to make me angry," Aunt Ruth said.

"What's making you angry here?"

"You don't need to be angry with her." Ruth changed her tone, and spoke with compassion, caressing my arm quickly and stopping suddenly. "We can't judge her and it's not nice for a child to be angry at his mother."

"I'm not angry, I'm just thinking..."

"There's nothing to think about." Ruth raised her voice again to a tone close to anger. "What is there to think, I want to know? Mother was ill. Not always. But at some point in her life, she got ill. Everything she did was affected by her illness. There's no logic here for it, no logic..."

We parted without finding any reason or justice. We were sad. I looked at Shira, my wonderful daughter. If my mother had been alive, and not running away to some thick forest of depression, she would have been so happy to know her, and Aviv, and little Natasha, and Zurla and Anat's children. If she would have waited just a little bit, so many children would have had a grandmother. And, perhaps one grandmother would have had a little goodness, a little *nahat*, the kind of joy only a parent or grandparent can experience.

I hug Shira and I drive quickly down the road which runs between the tall new high-rises, and the low stormy sea. One old tear, which perhaps was still stuck in side

me, from the cartoon movie in Haifa, decided right then to run down my warm cheek. Shira and I try to recall the precise story of "Bambi." A few days after our visit to Aunt Ruth, I rented the movie and I watched it by myself, on my VCR, one warm Spring evening.

Lo and behold, this time, the movie didn't seem completely stupid to me. I was surprised how familiar each scene was to me. I remembered almost all of the dialog by heart. The years without my mother made me a Doctor for Bambi. And, so, the cute small deer became rehabilitated after his mother protected him with her own body, and the bad hunters took her away. He also had questions: "Mother, Mother, where are you?"

But he didn't hear her and he didn't see her. He heard only the soft sound of the falling snowflakes. At that moment, Bambi knew that he was alone in the world.

"Your mother," said the big deer, "can't be with you anymore."

"Why?" asked Bambi.

"Humans took her away," said the deer.

Bambi lowered his head, and swallowed his tears with great sadness.

And that was my cure, as well: a criticized swallowing of cartoon tears.

CHAPTER 5 - MATERNAL GRANDPARENTS

Gefen's mother inherited many traits from *her* mother. As indicated earlier, Gefen was conditioned to think always of others before himself. More precisely, he was to think not of other individuals, but rather of the needs of the people as a collective, the nation. He describes the prevailing attitude in Israel during his youth as always needing to attend to "some 'situation' that demands physical and spiritual mobilization for some lofty national goals... Even today, each time I write personal prose, or a children's song or poem, that doesn't directly help the national distress, I feel a little guilty."[29]

Gefen writes that he and his sisters had to love their Grandpa Shmuel clandestinely. The fun they would have together was not acceptable to Grandma D'vorah. While Grandpa Shmuel would take the time to "connect" with his grandchildren as people and enjoy the time and activities that they shared, Grandma D'vorah always would be concerned about other more important matters which needed attention.

In Gefen's poem, *A Song For Shira*, he pleads with his daughter to enjoy and appreciate being a child. Be a child, he tells her, and I'll be the grown-up for both of us. Gefen uses words to tell his daughter what Grandpa Shmuel could only try to convey through his tickling: "Yes, yes, sweetie, I know that it's burdensome and gloomy around here, but I am yours and I love you with all my heart."[30] Relative to the rest of Gefen's family members, he describes Grandpa Shmuel as being alive. Grandpa Shmuel "connected" with people and interacted with them, especially with Gefen and his sisters.

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[29]Yehonatan Gefen, *Ishah Y'qarah* (Tel Aviv: Dvir Publishing House, 1999), 85.

[30]Ibid., 99.

His grandmother and his mother taught him how to neglect himself for the good of the larger lofty goals. Although he understood his grandfather's message, it was not until a later age that he finally began to internalize the message. "To be like Grandpa Shmuel means to choose life and humanity, and not death and endless embitterment. To be like Grandpa Shmuel is to escape by the skin of your teeth from the family depression, to herring, to America, to jokes, to Tel Aviv, to cognac, to Jerusalem!"[31]

Gefen's poem *The Smell Of Chocolate* speaks to the idea of cherishing the seemingly small things in life. Grandpa Shmuel smelled the chocolate. He was able to appreciate how a smell or a souvenir or a kind word could brighten up an entire day. Tickling his grandchildren and laughing with them was Grandpa Shmuel's way of making them feel important. Rarely was Gefen made to feel important by any adult influences in his life.

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[31]Ibid., 103.

Ishah Y'qarah - Pages 84-85

I've already related that they say Grandma D'vorah was the first family member to be depressed (of those whom I knew personally of course), and she brought with her from Russia not only exalted socialist ideals, and an unclear vision of the New Jew, but also gloominess and doubts in commercial quantities.

She, like my mother, was also a lovely woman. You won't find one bad word about her in any of the writings of the period -- neither from her memoirs nor from those of her friends, some of whom are still living in our midst, nor in the family correspondence, as it was not especially branched out at that time, and was lacking any sincere or true utterance.

Grandma, like mother, wanted very much to be an author, but she at least published some of her writings here and there -- she didn't just talk about it. But that wasn't enough for her, and today it is possible to assert with certainty that we lost a great Hebrew writer and, in her stead, we received a mediocre Zionist party worker.

Grandma's stories were published in "D'var HaPo'elet," (in Russian translated into Hebrew), but she wanted to be Tolstoy, not a feature writer for some pedagogical Women's newspaper, distributed for free by a demagogic workers' party. Throughout her years living in this country, Grandma D'vorah was quite openly envious of her "wise bosom-friend, D'vorah Barron," as she defined her. D'vorah Barron, the Hebrew author, intelligent and prominent, and perhaps the first feminist writer in the Hebrew language, decided one day that she wasn't feeling well. She got into bed and began to write.

"I come to visit her," my grandmother would say, "and she doesn't even get up

out of bed to welcome me. And her daughter, a submissive soul like her, runs around in circles, arranging the pillows here and serving her tea there -- basically, the life of a queen."

Despite this ironic attitude toward D'vorah Barron, Grandma D'vorah and Mother both thought that D'vorah Barron had conquered the era, and did the right thing. Because, in this place, where there's always some "situation" that demands physical and spiritual mobilization for some lofty national goals, if you don't get into bed and appear to be sick, they'll immediately request that you get up, take a hoe, pave the road, build the land quickly, (and everyone who looks today will agree with me that this is a land that was built in haste), protect the homeland, fulfill the vision of the pioneers, die or conquer the valley.

Even today, each time I write personal prose, or a children's song or poem, that doesn't directly help the national distress, I feel a little guilty. Therefore, perhaps, I seek to go abroad to write. I know that there, they won't call me to be a standard bearer, or for a demonstration about the protest movement, the Association for Peace, the National Stray Cats Association, and so on.

Yes, yes, they also trained me to be a faithful son of my country and my homeland -- and the faithfulness to myself certainly can wait.

Ishah Y'qarah - Pages 98-99

As a girl of 12, Mother writes in a letter to a childhood friend, Narya Tzvilling, "...and today, when I boiled wheat in the brass pot, to be milled into burgul, what joy suddenly filled my heart... Father laughed and said, 'I'll bring you two stones, and each night you can grind wheat into flour...' We laughed together, and I believed him..."

I don't think Mother ever laughed with Grandma, or believed her.

We, the children, loved Grandpa Shmuel, because there was something earthy in him that said: 'Life is beautiful.' Because of the deprecating attitude of the surroundings, we had to love this fat small man clandestinely. Precisely because he was a hedonist, and the pioneering asceticism was far removed from him, and so on, it was easy for us to believe him and to laugh with him.

Grandpa Shmuel would tickle me all over my small body. I would laugh and run away. He would chase after me, fat sweaty and panting. He would hug me, roll me on the wooden floor, and laugh uproariously.

Aunt Ruth said that that was the way he used to roll around on the floor– he would kiss and hug, wet and earthy, without any shame.

I have no doubt that he was a good warm father. Just like I have no doubt that Grandma D'vorah was an indifferent and cold mother.

Us, too, her grandchildren -- Grandma D'vorah never touched. I also don't remember if Mother ever touched me. Certainly not Father. Officers in uniform never touch children.

Grandpa Shmuel's tickling was his first attempt to say to us, from the time we

were babies, "Yes, yes, my sweetie, I know that it's burdensome and gloomy around here, but I am yours and I love you with all my heart."

"Yanko, stop!" Grandma would say in her roaring-whispering voice.

"What did I do now, D'vorah dear?"

She called him Yanko. I suppose that in their first few years in love, it was a term of endearment. But later it became a term of ridicule. A nickname of contempt: "Enough, Yanko. Stop, I said. It's not healthy to tickle like that."

"But, D'vorah, the children love it."

"They don't love it. You love it."

"Look -- eh, nu, see -- see how the little chicks are laughing."

Unlike Grandma D'vorah, who was an idea, Grandpa was human. Someone you could really touch. He could give a speech and write lofty words on the national mission and the Zionist dream, but behind those words stood a man who loved to live, to hug, and be hugged.

And, perhaps, really only someone who loves him or herself knows how to love others.

If you search well in the scrolls of the exalted saints, you'll discover that behind each one of them, a depressed narcissist is hiding. Grandpa Shmuel knew well that he was not valued. He chose not to be insulted and not to be angry. Every time Mother would become angry or resentful toward him, he would look for a way out, dismissing himself with a smile: "What do you want, my dear, that's how I am, nothing less and nothing more, and it's too late to change me."

Another time he said: "I am a muzhik, that's what I am, my wife's little muzhik."

Muzhik was a nickname for the serfs of the estate owners in Czarist Russia. And, indeed, that's what Grandpa Shmuel was: a Serf, subject to the moods of a sad Lady of an estate. He was an obsessive collector of letters, especially ones of famous writers and publishers. All of those letters, despite the fact that they were written with the appropriate honor, in the spirit of the time, were negative. "Dear Sir," writes the great publisher Gershom Shocken, "we read your writing and we are not at the moment interested in publishing it..."

Shmuel Yosef Agnon, writes to him in his own unique style:

My esteemed sir, I have not had the time to leaf through your new and important book about the settlement and conquest of Israel...

And so on, and so forth...tens, maybe hundreds, letters of honor and rejection.

And our grandfather wasn't insulted. Our grandfather was alive.

Ishah Y'qarah - Pages 102-105

Later on, when we were older, and Grandma was lying in hospitals for weeks and weeks, close to her final death, I would catch Grandpa Shmuel sitting alone on the wooden table in the "chicken-bones-that-are-thrown-over-your-shoulder-room." He would set the table for himself with small plates of bread, onion, and herring. He would pour himself a glass of cheap cognac. Afterward, he would noisily drink boiling hot tea, that he would sip through a sugar cube. By the tea, a small dish of fresh butter cookies, or a small bowl of cubes of bitter chocolate.

He would sit there like that and enjoy himself. He knew that I saw him, but it was fine that it was me. He certainly wouldn't have wanted Mother to walk in suddenly and see him like that. She had already told him more than once: "Mother is suffering in the hospital, tied up to tubes and morphine, and you sit there like this... Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

And, really, is that why the Jewish people returned to their homeland after 2000 years of exile? To enjoy life? But my grandfather didn't give up. He hid himself away and he enjoyed. Often, he would look to the sides so that no one would catch him enjoying himself.

"He's an egoist, that's what he is," Mother would tell me.

"What's an egoist?"

"Someone who thinks only of himself."

Nothing was further from the truth. Grandpa thought about us all the time. There wasn't one person in the family who took an interest in me and my juvenile immature

thoughts more than Grandpa Shmuel, but we were little kids. And, like all children, I also believed that my parents knew everything better than I. But deep in my heart, there nested in me a love for, and an identification with, this Grandpa, who never gives up, who wants to live, come what may.

Grandma frightened us, Grandpa delighted us. When he was a Member of the Knesset, and came to the village only on weekends, I missed him more than I ever missed any other member of my family (except for my sisters, of course).

The deep love I developed for Grandpa was another secret I was forbidden to reveal to my mother. My mother, to whom anything human was foreign, was able to complain about Grandma D'vorah from morning till night, but as for Grandpa Shmuel, she was simply ashamed of him. When she would speak about her parents, she would say: "No, really, think about it, where is she and where is he?!"

When I made her angry - by being lazy about my studies, or evading my work in the dairy or picking fruit from the grove - she would say: "You're going to wind up just like Grandpa Shmuel!"

Only at a later age, too late, did I get it: to be like Grandpa Shmuel means to choose life and humanity, and not death and endless embitterment. To be like Grandpa Shmuel is to escape by the skin of your teeth from the family depression, to herring, to America, to jokes, to Tel Aviv, to cognac, to Jerusalem!

It really wouldn't have mattered to me to be like Grandpa Shmuel, but I was afraid, and I believed everything that my mother said. How could I tell her that to be a funny muzhik is possibly what I most would have wanted to be?

Maybe, in the end, that side of me does exist. Maybe the irreverence and the attempt to laugh and make others laugh, throughout my life, as a child and as an adult, were meant to counteract the depression my mother instilled in me. That might be what saved me from sinking and from a total lack of confidence.

Grandma D'vorah left a beloved land, and an academic family of means, for a poor and dubious land. As for Grandpa Shmuel, it was almost the opposite. Indeed he arrived to a land of swamps, tents, wars, and malaria, but he came from such a poor and religious home that he didn't have anything to lose. Any home could only be better.

Perhaps because of this, he always enjoyed giving us some coins, and bringing gifts from all over Israel and the world. Usually, they were not practical gifts, and of course they were always a little funny. Grandpa Shmuel was color blind, and he would usually bring my sister Nurit a blue shirt, and me pink pants. Once, after he was at some convention in New York, he forgot to buy us a gift, or perhaps he didn't have enough time because of so much convention, so he stopped in Afulah. That's where he bought us the clothing with the strange colors. He didn't even remove the wrapping that proved it was made in Israel, and he said: "Look, children, this is for you, from America."

Because of the severe religious education in his childhood, Grandpa Shmuel really hated all the holidays, as well as all the ceremonies of Judaism. When no one was listening, he asked me not to go up for an *aliyah* on my own Bar Mitzvah day. And I agreed. I was the only one in my class who was not called to the Torah.

Grandpa was born in a small town called Zheshkov, in the district of Kiev. He was a child of ninth generation Haredi Jews. One of his ancestors was Rabbi Pinchas of

Koritz, a student of the Baal Shem Tov. But Grandpa never made a big deal out of it. The small town of Zheshkov was known essentially because of it s horse traders. And, indeed, if you look carefully at old photographs of young Shmuel, you'll see that there's something equine about his facial expression. His brother Eliyahu lives on the neighboring farm in Nahalal, and Grandpa hasn't spoken with him for fifty years. That was apparently the beginning of the tradition of family arguments, which continues successfully to this day. Grandpa quarreled with his brother because Eliyahu "drove out his son from the farm." His brother Eliyahu's son was also called Moshe Dayan. But worse than that -- "the other Moshe Dayan."

Despite the fact that his brother and sisters lived on farms adjoining ours, Grandpa always kept his distance from them. It appears as if they did not remind him of good things, they sparked in him memories of an oppressed childhood in impoverished and violent districts.

His brother wrote in his memoirs: "our father, Rabbi Pinchas, was a butcher and a judge. Our house was teeming with people who came to be judged on their cases." Our family name, Dayan, which means judge, comes form my great-grandfather's occupation.

Grandpa Shmuel also loved it when, during his years as a public servant, and Member of the Knesset, Jews in distress would come to his house in Nahalal for advice and counsel. Usually, he had no clear advice nor practical solution, but he poured them tea and he made them laugh. He promised to help, maybe he even did help a bit, and the visitors would always leave his house with the smile of people who found something to hold on to.

Grandpa knew that it was the right decision to make *Aliyah* and move to Israel, and he always remembered that he came from a place much worse. The persecutions of Jews, the anti-Semitism, the harsh parents, and especially the intense poverty, signaled to him -- "Lekh Lekha.[32] Go ye forth, go wherever you might go. Your situation can only get better."

"Seven souls in one room," Grandpa wrote in one of his diary notations. "The food was barely enough to keep one's soul alive. Herring, cut into seven tiny pieces for breakfast, not to mention any consideration of new clothes or new shoes."

In order to bring some extra rubles to his hungry family, Rabbi Pinchas, Grandpa Shmuel's father, found for himself an additional occupation -- making inexpensive wine from raisins. I believe that whenever Grandpa would sit by himself, in his last years, secretly enjoying his cognac and his big herring spread out on a thick slice of rye bread, dripping with butter, he would recall the tiny slices of fish and his father's inferior wine. He was happy in his new land, and more than happy with his lot.

Grandpa, like all the children his age in Eastern Europe, studied in *heder*, which was an original version of restraints in a prison cell. He told us that the Rabbi who taught them would hit them with a stick without mercy. Then, at home, his father Pinchas would hit them even more with his thick belt.

All this, of course, commanded by the Jewish God, as told by the sadistic saying

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[32]Gefen borrows the words *Lekh Lekha* from God's directive to Abraham in Gen. 12:1. Grandpa Shmuel, like Abraham, was leaving his home, for his homeland, where he was tov have a better life.

of the sages: "He who spares the rod, hates his child."[33] Once, Grandpa told us that he hated Rashi personally, and that one day he was going to settle the score with him.

Grandpa's past in exile as a child and as a youth, caused him to hate and to want to forget Russia and religion and never to return to them. He said even about Tolstoy, during the loudest argument I ever remember him having with Grandma, "He was a bad person, that's what he was."

[33]Prov. 13:24.

Ishah Y'qarah - Pages 106-107

In his last years, far away from the Moshav, and from Mother, who saw him as a traitor, with one small eye and one big eye (another scary characteristic of the Dayan family, a characteristic which I'm glad passed me by), he allowed himself to be him. He loved Yonah and she cherished him, in spite of the fact that the family did not accept her.

I accepted her. She wasn't my grandmother nor was she my mother. I wasn't afraid of her and I appreciated her genuine love for my grandfather. I thought he deserved it.

Yonah and Grandpa rented out a room in their apartment to the broadcaster Emek Peri, and through him I met the television personality, Yaron London, a charming young fellow who worked at the time as a radio broadcaster in Jerusalem. He was the first bohemian I ever met, and I remember he said to me: "How helpful it would have been for me if my name were also Dayan." And I remember I said to him: "I'm Gefen." And I didn't tell him how happy I would have been if suddenly my name were London.

Grandpa died at the age of 78, from liver cancer. He was in Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem, and even there he made us laugh. His stomach, which before this was already a tall and proud hill, became swollen because of the disease, and in his last days he looked like a giant balloon. His last words, as far as I recall, were: "Have you ever seen a belly like this? Like a blimp... These smart doctors, they know how to fly to the moon, but they don't know what's going on inside the belly of a human being."

When he died, I cried and Yonah asked me to stop. "He would have wanted you to laugh," she said. "There was enough sadness around him all his life."

And to this day, if I think about him, I laugh. And when I laugh, I miss his choked laugh, his genuine simple love of life.

CHAPTER 6 - HIS MOTHER'S SECOND HUSBAND

Gefen writes that he only includes the story of his father in this book because the story of his mother would be incomplete otherwise. He feels quite strongly that his father is only his father because he spent one night in the same bed as his mother (Gefen is quick to point out that his parents' night together was not his fault).

In the poem *There's A Child Whose Father...*, Gefen describes the different kinds of jobs that fathers have and the affects that those jobs have on their relationships with their children. Some fathers are around more regularly than others; some fathers are more attentive to the needs of their children than others. I believe that the poem is actually narrated by Gefen's son Aviv. In the last line of the poem Aviv describes what Gefen does for a living. The information is not earth-shattering. However there is an indication of a connection and a feeling of warmth between the son and his father. It also gives the impression that the son is proud of his father.

Gefen likens himself to Iphigenia, sacrificed by her own father, Agamemnon, in the Greek tragedy of Aristophanes. Agamemnon's attempt to sacrifice his daughter is not successful, as she is rescued and made into a princess. Further, when Agamemnon returns from battle, his wife, Clytemnestra, avenges his actions against their daughter by killing him. In Gefen's own life, however, Clytemnestra (Gefen's mother) does not kill Agamemnon (Gefen's father). She allows him to live and even praises him in conversations with their friends. "...and no one could ever have known that in some place there sleeps an Iphigenia (Gefen), who is sacrificed again and again. For, of course, in

Nahalal, they don't really delve too deeply into Greek tragedies."[34]

Gefen also identifies with Jean Paul Sartre, who in his book *Words* thanks his father for dying before he is even born, thereby sparing him a great deal of emotional pain. That concept repulsed Gefen when he first read it. Instinctively, Gefen understood the importance of familial relationships. How he would have wanted the "ideal" immediate family. However, his father and his other relatives were not capable, for whatever reason, of having healthy familial relationships. Gefen suffered the pain of a negative relationship with his father, when he would have preferred no relationship at all.

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[34]Yehonatan Gefen, *Ishah Y'qarah* (Tel Aviv: Dvir Publishing House, 1999), 111.

Ishah Y'qarah - Pages 109-111.

"Q: Do you love Jonathan?

A: I am so angry at him that I can't answer. I loved him the way a father loves his son. Once, I saw in him the realization of all my dreams.

Q: When did you last hug him?

A: What kind of question is that? What are we, monkeys?! Monkeys who hug and pick lice off of each other? I don't hug....."[35]

This is a book about my mother, but in order to find her, the subject matter that gave birth to me and then faded away, I also need to encounter my father.

When, after a considerable amount of drinking in a dark bar in New York, I finally spit out the sentence, "I hate you, Mother," I thought: How come she never protected me from my father? Could it be because in our case, Bambi's mother married the hunter?

What was she afraid of? What power did that weak man have over her that prevented her from protecting me and my dreams and my ideas, the way my wife Nurit, for example, would protect my children when she felt that I was acting improperly toward them. And sometimes it was also the other extreme. Mother always stood there and let my father mistreat me, and mock me, and turn me into a sacrifice for his national military god.

In the Greek tragedy of Aristophanes, the Commander Agamemnon waged war,

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[35]Yisrael Gefen, interview in *Yediot Acharonot*, 17 January 1997.

and won, after he sacrificed his own daughter, Iphigenia, to the gods. But when he returned with the famous arrogant smile of a winner, his wife, Clytemnestra waited for him at home and she killed him.

My mother didn't kill my father. She didn't even try to get him to treat me like a human being. My mother killed herself and she left Agamemnon alive and well. In conversations with friends she would always sing my father's praises, and no one could ever have known that in some place there sleeps an Iphigenia, who is sacrificed again and again. For, of course, in Nahalal, they don't really delve too deeply into Greek tragedies.

Ishah Y'qarah - Pages 111-112

It goes without saying that I have many reasons to write or not to write about the wretched man who happens to be my father. We do not choose our parents. Of the Ten Commandments, the only one I'm not able to follow is "Honor your father and mother." What if your father humiliates you and abuses you? Even then you still have to honor him?

It's not my fault that I happen to be the result of my father and mother spending one night together in the same bed. I want to believe that it was a good night. But, from that point on, my father never did one good thing for me. He chose to run away from me, and to lie to me.

If there is a God, or some other Divine Judge, He knows that I have no intention or desire to humiliate or insult anyone, and certainly not my father, for no reason. If the book about my mother could have been complete without the story of my father, I wouldn't have brought it up. Would that I were able to leave him to his own sick soul, in this book and in my own life to this point.

Anyone who knows my father would say to you, without thinking twice, "Yisrael is a nice guy." "Nice guy" is even one step below "lovely woman." "Lovely woman" says: She was fine, she died, we don't want to talk about her too much. "Nice guy" is the type of guy who smiles at everyone, but then runs away to be nice only to himself.

You need to see him in order to understand the false sense of authority he imparts. The cold blue eyes. The mediocrity that parades as excellence. The military humor that always embarrassed me and put me off. For example, after eating in a restaurant, he

would say to the waiter, "What's the damage?" That kind of humor.

The book, "Words," which is almost a literary autobiography of Jean Paul Sartre, starts with the writer thanking his father. Sartre thanks his father for dying before his son is born, thereby sparing his son a great deal of emotional pain. I remember the first time I read it, I was angry with Sartre. I thought it was cruel, and that even existentialism has limits. But today I understand. As a child, as a young boy, and as a grown man, the life and behavior of my father only caused me pain.

Of course, I never wished that he would die, but there were days when I wanted revenge. I gave that up just after I came to understand that just like Sartre's father, my father also died before I was born. They simply never told me. He tried to the best of his ability to exhibit the appearance of someone alive, the face of a father, of a hero of battles, an exemplary spouse... But everyone close to him, sooner or later, saw him for who he really was, and distanced themselves from him just as he distanced himself from them.

In the last twenty years, I've seen my father five or six times. I always made sure that someone was with me, to be a kind of buffer between us. Before I married my second wife, she played that role once, and she, in her own words, was physically nauseated by his narcissistic monologues. We were, at that point, in the first stages of falling in love. After he left, she threw up. I asked her, "So, what do you think?" And she said, "Nice guy," in English, which comes out, no matter how you translate it, as "nice guy." And that was also my first lesson in the American idea of "Political Correctness."

CHAPTER 7 - PATERNAL GRANDPARENTS

"It is possible to understand how my father, when he was a young boy, could be torn between a violent egotistical father and a gentle loving mother, who was afraid of her husband. It's even possible to take pity on the boy who certainly did what he could to escape his small, unloving house... But it is inconceivable how a man, who all his life professed to be intelligent, goes and makes the same mistakes his father made."[36]

The models of behavior to which Gefen was exposed while growing up conflicted wildly. His paternal grandfather, Grandpa Zev, was the exact opposite of his maternal grandfather. Grandpa Shmuel would love him and his sisters by playing with them and tickling them and spending time with them. Grandpa Zev, however, even told Gefen once that he didn't love him. Children can sense who does or doesn't care for them, but to be told by someone that they do not love you -- that is certainly abuse.

Grandma Zahava was resourceful and gentle, but she was ruled by her husband Zev, as was Gefen's father Yisrael. As Gefen points out, his father was able to escape the horror of his childhood only to repeat similar behaviors with his own wife and children. Gefen's poem *Children, Today You Saw Your Mother And Your Father...* tells the story of a child who sees his parents fighting, but never sees them make up. The narrator reassures the boy that his parents have made up, and warns the boy not to follow in their footsteps. Children model their own behaviors and interpersonal communication skills after the role models they experience as youngsters. The narrator can only suggest while the child is sleeping that he learn from his parents' mistakes, as it is truly up to the child

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[36]Yehonatan Gefen, *Ishah Y'qarah* (Tel Aviv: Dvir Publishing House, 1992), 115.

what he will do with the information he receives. Children have the potential to believe and imitate all that grown-ups do and say, or to develop more refined and appropriate patterns of behavior than what they experience. We can tell children what's appropriate as much as we want, but it's just as if we are telling them while they are sleeping. They, themselves, need to draw their own conclusions and make choices about their own behaviors by themselves.

Gefen's father is the sleeping boy in the poem who *does not* "get" the rest of the message. He does not figure out for himself that what he is seeing is wrong and harmful, so he does not heed the warning of the last lines of the poem: "But don't pay attention to our anger, and continue to grow. More beautiful than we, wiser than we."

Gefen, on the other hand, is the sleeping boy in the poem who *does* "get" the rest of the message. And that's his hope for all children, that even the ones exposed to violence and inappropriate behavior, will somehow be able to extract from their pain and sorrow hope for a healthy future.

Of course an equally important message in both this poem and in this section of *Ishah Y'qarah* is directed toward the adults. We always need to remember that we are being watched and imitated. We owe it to the children who model their behaviors after us and to their emotional well being to teach appropriate and loving behaviors by example.

Ishah Y'qarah - Pages 114-116

When Grandma D'vorah would come back from Her involvements with "Youth Aliyah," one of us would always meet her at the main Haifa-Nazareth road, in a car or tractor, and bring her back to our house. No one picked up Grandma Zahava -- she had to walk two kilometers, with all her packages.

A good and modest woman, she was content with a little, and she never threw anything away. If she ate a prune, she would save the pit and she would make a decorative pin that would glisten on her shabby jacket. She could make jam out of anything. Once, in their house in the Borochov neighborhood, I remember that a chair broke, and I rushed to throw it away before she made it into jam.

Grandpa Zev, on the other hand, was a narcissist for no worthwhile reason. Physically and verbally violent. One of my father's stories which may actually be true, is the story about the beatings he got from his father Zev. Once, in a rare moment of honesty, he told us: "He would chase me around the house, I would get under the bed, and he would kick me with his boots. He wouldn't even see where he was kicking, in the head, in the stomach. Mother would ask him to stop, but that didn't help. She was even more afraid of him than I was. She was afraid he would beat her, too."

Grandpa Zev, balding, with hair that sprouted from his nostrils and from his ears like wild grass, was a repulsive man, almost frightening, a wolf man,[37] who explicitly did not like children, nor grandchildren, nor his wife -- nothing, nada, zilch. He loved only himself, and that was certainly enough for him.

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[37]An obvious pun in Hebrew as the word *Zev* in English means 'wolf.'

It is possible to understand how my father, when he was a young boy, could be torn between a violent egotistical father and a gentle loving mother, who was afraid of her husband. It's even possible to take pity on the boy who certainly did what he could to escape from his small, unloving house, and fall in love with his homeland, "The Big Home." But it is inconceivable how a man, who all his life professed to be intelligent, goes and makes the same mistakes his father made.

Did my father take out his anger at his own father on me? More than once, he said to me: "Just don't be like Grandpa Zev." It definitely worked on me. Unlike Grandpa Shmuel, Grandpa Zev was the last thing I wanted to be when I grew up, if I would ever grow up.

As a small boy, he was the first adult who simply didn't love me. Once, he even said to me and my sister: "Nurit, I love pretty much, and Zurla and Anat. But you, not so much." Just as a boy never forgets the first girl who ever loved him, so a child never forgets the first adult who didn't love him. Children are sure that they are the sweetest, cutest, and most beautiful people in the world. How can someone just not love them?

At about age 40, Grandpa Zev said that he didn't feel well, he stopped working, and got into bed. He was like a male version of the author D'vorah Baron, except he didn't write. He just lay there, in his pajamas, in a bed loaded with pillows, in a separated room, the one farthest away from his wife's bedroom, giving Grandma Zahava short snappy commands. It's understandable that Father did not want to stay one more second in that small strange cuckoo's nest, in an area know today as Givatayim. When he was 16, he went to study in the agricultural boarding school in Mikveh Yisrael, and after that

he had a very minor position in the Haganah, a *noter* (guard) or something like that.

Hell if I know what he meant by "guard."

After four years of "guarding," Father was sent for some training course in Cairo, and that's where he met my mother, who was an Army driver. From Father's stories when we were children, and he apparently tried here and there to stammer out something true, we understood how difficult it was for him to fit in with the Dayan family and household, which were no less snobby and egocentric, if not more so, than his own evil father, the perfect egoist.

CHAPTER 8 - HIS MOTHER'S FIRST HUSBAND

Gefen describes his mother's "running away" from her first marriage as a way "not to stay inside the *cage* that she built for herself, in the valley which threatened to close in on her and swallow her up eternally, while she was still so young, so pretty, so at the beginning of her journey..."[38]

In his poem *When I Grow Up*, a boy is describing all of the things that he can do when he grows up. He'll be a painter and paint the world more beautiful than it already is. He'll be a doctor and treat anyone who is ill. One thought the boy has is to be a carpenter. But he is quick to add that he'll build *houses* and not *cages*. The boy has dreams of building homes or places where people *want* to live and grow, not cages or places where people are *forced* to live. Feeling as if one's life is a cage to which one is confined, will surely have adverse effects on one's socialization skills.

I noted earlier that Gefen's earliest role models exhibited behavioral patterns ranging from one extreme to the other. In Dov Tchezis, Gefen's mother's first husband, both extremes were personified. Dov spent time working with the Haganah "eliminating" those who collaborated with the enemy. His job was to punish betrayers. Gefen points out the irony in this situation, as Dov cheated on Gefen's mother and became a betrayer himself. Gefen wonders if his mother knew exactly what Dov's responsibilities in the Haganah were. He also questions whether his mother felt guilty or even responsible for being involved with someone whom she may have considered to be immoral. Gefen's mother did not want to feel trapped, yet she continually made her way into situations that

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[38]Yehonatan Gefen, *Ishah Y'qarah* (Tel Aviv: Dvir Publishing House, 1992), 129-130.

wound up trapping her and causing her perception of reality to be distorted.

Ishah Y'qarah - Pages 127-136

I might have lived my entire life without ever knowing that my mother was married to someone else, before she married our father and had us...

I was thirty-five. My first wife and I were separated. I lived alone, in a big house, on a *Moshav* called *Ramot Ha-shavim*, at the end of the seventies, which we thought would go on forever. I had a big vegetable garden, surrounded by a corn-stalk fence, a huge lawn, mango and orange trees, long hair. Friends would come over and together we would smoke grass and write songs, and we thought that that was how we were going to change the world.

The world looked at us and burst out laughing.

In the middle of the vegetable garden, there stood a giant scarecrow, dressed in a Sergeant Pepper's uniform, and underneath the sergeant stripes on his arm, I hid my stash of hash. For some time, my dead mother did not come to frighten me, even in my dreams.

I smoked the scarecrow, ate the vegetables from the garden, and friends, particularly musicians, came to me each evening, with cracked guitars, and pretty women in short skirts. One evening, a dear friend of mine came over, the renowned musician Misha Segal who, currently, is writing music for movies in California. He came with a beautiful young woman with big eyes, a waif, stalk-like with cropped hair, whom I liked very much. Misha told me that she wasn't really his girlfriend, and I, being on the prowl, as it were, tried to start something going with her. In the seventies, everyone either

started something going with everyone, or else they would finish with themselves.[39] We had no middle ground, and we had no God.

The young woman, whom we'll call "R," because she does not want to be identified in this particular book, stayed after Misha left. I told her that I really liked her, and other lines that men drop on women whom they're trying to pick up.

"No," said R, "forget about it."

"Why?"

"Because you're my brother."

I laughed. I thought she was being mysterious, that perhaps the hashish and the wine made her a bit too high.

"No thanks," I told her. "I already have enough sisters."

"You don't get it," said R. "I'm serious."

"I don't know what your talking about."

"My last name is Tchezis."

"That sounds like a kind of cheese."

"My father was Dov Tchezis."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"And he was married to your mother."

"You're pulling my leg."

"What, no one ever told you about it?"

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[39]In Hebrew the verb *Ligmor*, literally 'to finish,' is also slang for ejaculating. The play on words here is between "*starting*" and "*finishing*" alone.

No, my sweet girl, no one ever told me about it. And, so, I lost another woman on account of my mother. I thought: If my parents never told me that, who knows what else they hid from me?

I want to think that at some point in time, my mother was happy, but the truth is that I have no proof or documentation of any kind. There was no one who could explain to me why she married Tchezis, and why she divorced him within a year.

Nor could anyone understand why she married our father so quickly, and why she stayed with him for so many years.

I'm inclined to believe Aunt Mimi, who said that Mother caught Dov cheating on her. I would later discover a letter of Mother's, in which she claimed that she never even loved him. Why, then, did she marry him? In order for her to have a ring on her finger, so that the British soldiers wouldn't hit on her?

It's hard for me to understand. In my opinion, it was just a youthful rebellion of hers. Her big escape from the pressures and demands imposed on her by the Founding Fathers, her family -- she complained about the people on the *Moshav* again and again in her letters.

Like Grandma D'vorah, Mother also thought that she was destined for greatness. Like when I ran away from the village, and tried unsuccessfully even to leave the country, and like the young generation who travel by the thousands to Turkey and Thailand, the British Army was a rebellion for my mother. And, like in every great escape, it's more important *from what* you are running away, than *to where* you are running away.

Mother ran away from the overwhelming work on the farm, from an agricultural future filled with hard work which seemed to her to be boring and predictable. She ran away from her depressive mother, from her communal worker of a father who said to her explicitly that "making the desert bloom" and "farm work" were more important than the Second World War. Mother, as well as many of her generation, knew that the only way out was in finding some cause even more holy than the Jewish settlement of the Land of Israel, even more holy than the protection of that State. When Mother went to Egypt, to live in the British women's Army barracks, she knew that she was killing two birds with one stone: she was protecting the world from the Nazis, who were the absolute evil destroying her people, while at the same time, she was running away from her oppressive family, a demanding society with a narrow horizon. And, as for Dov, according to what's found in her numerous letters, in which she was not afraid to reveal her true feelings, she never loved him, and the day after she married him, she realized that she had made a terrible mistake.

She decided to join the British Army, to atone for her mistake, to be Florence Nightingale, a nurse in a hospital, just not Aviva Tchezis, just not to stay inside the cage that she built for herself, in the valley which threatens to close in on her and swallow her up eternally, while she was still so young, so pretty, so at the beginning of her journey...

In the one year that she was legally married to Dov Tchezis, my mother writes to her friend Narya from the hospital, from the Egyptian desert, where at the top of the letter there is written in English:

"Private A. Dayan. Division 53 of the A.T.S."

For a single moment, she was not Tchezis, and from her letter it's clear just how much she values her own efforts that led to victory in the war against absolute evil. And so Private Dayan writes a pacifistic and evocative letter, in her fine poetic language, with a black fountain pen which perhaps stained her starched white nurses smock:

"...Perhaps only here, facing an individual struggling for the gift of his own life, facing a doctor and a nurse bent over him, night and day – the battlefield somewhere out there appears so horrific, illuminated by the meager light of the kerosene lamp in my hand, the far away battle illuminated by the eyes of this single dying man, and another one who died here yesterday, and another one who was brought here tonight, but died on the way to the hospital. There are many individuals like them, as this nightmare has been going on for four years now. This simple truth is revealed anew each time, and laughs a painful laugh at the victory flags, at the festive declarations. This truth is revealed in the white beds of the ill and wounded, revealed, crushing the heart like a vice...

"And now it's evening, I'm on night watch, finishing up a month of nights like these. I'm responsible for a platoon of thirty-five soldiers, watching over them all night, just me by myself, and the great amount of work, sometimes more than I can bear, but greatly rewarding. And true, after everything, in the end, there is nothing more interesting than the human being. A person, whether he's a boy from Ein Harod, or a wounded soldier in 53GH. A person, in whose upper body a heart beats rhythmically, and the rhythm gets faster and slower. I've met many people during these twelve months. Healthy people and especially ill people, from many different lands. Not through any high intellectual conversation or by penetrating beneath the outer surface. But this outer

surface reflects with such great clarity the seed which was planted within by a teacher or a mother or a street, or all of them together....

"You know, Narya, I always remember that once, in a First Aid course, a long time ago, the doctor told us: 'Every one of you, when you think about the work of a nurse in a hospital, sees yourself in a starched white nurse's outfit, with a big broad nurses cap, serving a glass of water to a wounded officer... I say to you, girls, that it is filthy work filled with dirt and pus. When it comes to serving water, there's no need for a "nurse." Any ordinary girl can do that.' And precisely now, when I'm here, in starched whites, and a big nurse's cap, the image of a nurse gets even farther and farther away from me, and another image is revealed, an image of a sweaty and tired laborer...sometimes it's a little difficult, and one wants to run away, but the circle is already closed, and certainly I would not want right now to be in the gardens of Nahalal..."

I read this letter and I love you more and more, Mother.

I was born to such a human and wise mother, and it's clear to me that the time she spent as a nurse in a hospital, and the gap that widened between her and the land of machismo and slogans, ingrained within her a pacifism, which she needed to hide like so many other things. And, when she returned, the last thing she wanted was to live with her instant husband, who could have been a positive man with many virtues, but he was without a doubt the complete opposite of anything that could be called pacifism or hatred of wars.

I had the intention of meeting with my mother's secret first husband, but those that knew him told me that it wouldn't be worthwhile for me, that he never speaks about

that time in his life, and he had no interest in remembering and telling stories about years long ago, that my well-known leftist political ideas would anger him. Someone also told me that he fears it might hurt his wife and family, and I don't want to hurt anyone, I just want to decipher my mother.

In any case, from stories of friends of his, and from some people who knew him back then, I learned a little about him. And the more I heard about him, the less I understood what Mother was looking for in him, and what she found in him.

Unlike my father Yisrael, who said of himself that he was an Army hero, and no one ever confirmed or denied it, Dov, according to the stories told by the people who knew him, really was a hero, and courageous. His military position in the Haganah was a brutal one: eliminating those who collaborated with the enemy. Jews who would inform the British or the Arabs about Haganah activity, would see Dov standing there suddenly, facing them, with his revolver, and then they wouldn't see anything anymore, ever.

I don't know if Mother knew what his job was, but here again is the principle theme which accompanied her all her life: Betrayal. And if "The Terminator," who killed traitors, indeed betrayed her, it's no wonder that her whole life from that point on was one of fear -- of betrayal, and of betrayal of herself, out of fear of the image that she would have in her societal circles. Despite the fact that there was nothing she wanted more than to leave the Moshav and her parents, and start a new life somewhere else, she was afraid that a step like that would turn her into a "traitor," and maybe they'd send Dov to eliminate her, too...

In a feature article in the supplements for Yom Haatzma'ut, Dov Tchezis sounded

like Philip Marlow, the detective in the unforgettable stories of Raymond Chandler – tough, minimalistic, sad, lonely, treating his job of eliminating people like any other job.

"I removed people who were a danger to the State," he recalled in an interview which was arranged for him in September, 1988, from a distance and while he was still undercover. "Basically, I got rid of the scum of the earth." Because of that work, Dov suspected all his life that someone would come to take revenge. He tells in the interview that to this day, he sleeps with a pistol under his pillow, but his conscience doesn't bother him.

No, despite the fact that he's killed not a small amount of people, he doesn't see himself as a contract killer. Rather, he sees himself as soldier, who did what he needed to do, for the National Objective.

"I was like a big bear in the forest,"[40] he said, "and after the War of Independence, they established the Secret Service. They didn't need me anymore to finish things off."

In the picture in the report, Dov really did look like a bear. Fat, a face like Fernandello, and an army hat with laces that looked ridiculous. Yisrael, my biological father, was quite a handsome man. He looked like a young Paul Newman, and I remember that Mother, in a rare affectionate remark, said: "See what a handsome father you have. Like Apollo."

My father was a blonde blue-eyed Sabra, from the Borochov neighborhood, who smiled and tried to charm at all costs. Tchezis looked and sounded like the exact opposite: Dov, with a sad wide face, was born in Russia, moved to Israel with his parents

[40]An obvious pun in Hebrew as the word *Dov* means 'bear' in English.

in the 30's, to Jerusalem. After elementary school, his family moved to Nahalal. He also had a connection to my Uncle Moshe Dayan, but he never liked Moshe, and belittled him at every opportunity. His friends say that he would argue with him on every subject, but Moshe valued him greatly as a soldier and as a commander. There was also someone who said that Dov Tchezis was jealous of Moshe and of his military career advancement. There was someone who said, anonymously, of course, that maybe Aviva was attracted to Dov because he reminded her of her brother's composure and strength.

Tchezis liked Zurik, her younger brother, more. So much so that he came to him one day and actually forced him to join him in the Battle at Ramat Yochanan, the battle over which Dov was the commander, and in which Zurik was killed.

"It's the typical example of the egoism of the Dayan family," Tchezis says. "I did not agree that Zurik should join the battle, he just got back from abroad (he was working for the Haganah, bringing Holocaust refugees from Europe), and he had no experience in battle. He forced me to take him to the military action, and he did not come back from there..."

After the battle at Ramat Yochanan, Dov moved to Kibbutz Na'an, for two years of Officer training. He volunteered to be a guard, but before that he returned to Nahalal and quickly married my mother so that I would find out about it by accident forty years later, and then wait two more months to tell my sisters.

"We were twenty years old, and together for a year already," Dov Tchezis said about our mother. "The first time, I invited her to have some watermelon with me. The second time, we sat next to each other. Only later, the third date, could we sit and hold

hands."

I try to close my eyes, to imagine my mother biting off a piece of watermelon, surely reciting some poem, laughing, then sitting next to this big indifferent sluggish man, and suddenly he gives her his hand. She takes it. Evening falls on the fields of the valley, the moon rises, like a golden watermelon. I try to dream about my mother sitting with a man, trying to be content and loved.

I can't see it.

Again and again, I only see her dimmed and tired eyes, her nondescript look. Like my father Yisrael, my mother's secret first husband also adored her:

"She was brilliant, from an intellectual perspective. A beautiful woman. She had dark hair, and dark eyes. It was pleasant to be with her. She loved poetry, she could recite half of Kipling and half of Shneuer by heart."

This is a book about my mother, but I must push myself in there again and again: The first time I met Nurit, my first wife, who put up with me for more than 20 years, I sat in my one room apartment that I rented on Dizengoff Street, and all night long I read poetry to her, especially my poems. At two o'clock in the morning, she said she had a migraine, took two pills, and went to sleep with someone else, without any poems.

"I loved Aviva Dayan," continued Dov, "but Moshe, that's a different story. I used to slug him. We could come to blows. The Dayan family was outstanding. They acted pompously. They were enlightened, they read a lot. But Moshe did not have any friends. Moshe was a public relations wizard, and Aviva adored him. Moshe was her masculine prototype because he loved poetry and because he had personal charisma.

Even after I married Aviva, we did not become close, Moshe and I. He didn't like me because I didn't want to idolize him."

My secretive mother, she knew that Dov was involved with dangerous underground work, but she didn't know exactly what he did. Even he, in his youth, didn't quite understand, but he was an obedient soldier who did whatever they demanded of him.

Years later, when they asked him what he felt when he eliminated Jews, some of whom he certainly knew personally, he answered, shivering:

"Like the Nazis said: I received orders and I carried them out. I'm embarrassed about what I've done. It's like drinking whiskey. You don't feel that you're drinking, but afterward you feel nauseous."

Could Mother have been a partner in this nausea? Did she feel, on some level, regardless of whether or not he would betray her, that she married someone immoral? Could this be what caused her to demand from me a morality not even expected of angels?

Vague questions that no one will ever be able to answer...

During their brief marriage, Mother and Dov met three or four times, including the time she apparently caught him with someone else, someone who recited poetry less. In the festive interview, Dov said that he went back to my mother in '49, but that can not be (even "Terminators," it seems, can make mistakes), because if it were true, he would have been my father and I don't resemble him at all.

"When Aviva returned from the British Army, we didn't have a home," Dov

Tchezis said. "We met at my parents' place, at her parents' place. We felt that there was no point to it. We parted on good terms. We ate lunch together at her parents' place, and then we went to the rabbi for a divorce."

Tchezis continued his military career during the time before an official Israeli Army was established, as a Regimental Commander in the Palmach. When Dayan left Troop 89, the troop of volunteers, Tchezis took his place, and then Mother got married again, to Yisrael Gefen, and she stuck with him for the rest of her life.

Dov (her first husband) says about Yisrael (her second husband): "Gefen remained with me as an inheritance from the previous commander, Dayan, as a Transportation Officer."

My father was always interested in transportation (don't forget for a moment that his father was a garage worker!). They ask Dov if he ever tried to speak with Father about the woman they shared.

"No," said Dov. "What for? I never tried to speak with him about Aviva. That was a marginal topic."

Mother, I swear to you that I will never let anyone in the world say that you are marginal.

Dov married again, and Mother continued her life on the margins, in the shadow with Yisrael and the children. One day, as an exercise in creative writing, she would return to Dov, she would tell him about herself, in a kind of epistolary novel. Father would catch her, and that would be the end of her relationship with the two most important men in her life.

I don't think that that was just a writing exercise. I think that my mother, and I get this from her, too, yearned all her life for the subject of love. She loved and was in love with poems. I also had women in my life, usually pretty and a little crazy, with whom I fell in love just so I could write them poems. Everything I've ever written was for or against some woman, and the poem was always more important than its subject.

In the book, "Jailhouse Rock," I wrote that the closest I ever got to a woman was in poems. In the same book, which is practically my life story in verse, I also wrote: "Another spiritual obstacle of the author: // it's always possible to do it, he says // Nothing will stop him // Before anything else – write poetry."[41]

So, too, my mother, in her fictional letters to Dov, and perhaps there were letters to others, which were destroyed or lost, seemed as if she gave up on love and was looking for imaginary loves, just so she could write to them and about them.

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[41]Translation from the Hebrew is my own.

CHAPTER 9 - POETS AND POETIC INFLUENCES

"If you ask me, my mother's illness, and that of many others of her poetry reading generation, was this: They didn't just write poems, they believed them."[42]

Gefen's mother, Aviva, was constantly escaping life and all the responsibilities that come with being alive. Her favorite poem was Oscar Wilde's *The Ballad Of Reading Gaol*, in which the reader is encouraged to accept the judgment of death. Aviva sought out death as a solution, a way of escaping. Her favorite poet Natan Alterman posited death as a noble ideal. Aviva Gefen felt the same way.

Aviva Gefen lived a life of poetry, yet she never published any of her own works. She idolized Alterman and his work, and would copy his poems into a special notebook of hers. Gefen describes his mother as not being afraid of death, but rather being afraid to live her life. Gefen's poem *The Closed Kindergarten* describes just that -- a closed kindergarten. The blocks are sleeping. The swings are standing still. The books are on the shelf not being read. If people would only play and swing and read, the kindergarten would come alive. So, too, Gefen's mother. Aviva was afraid to live. Had she taken advantage of what life had to offer her, and appreciated her family and relationships more, she could have enjoyed life very much.

Individuals have much more of a stake in our own quality of life than we are sometimes willing to admit. The blocks are only fun when we start playing with them. The books can only tell their stories when we read them or listen to them. The flowers can only be seen as colorful if we notice them. Our children can only be loved if we love

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[42]Yehonatan Gefen, *Ishah Y'qarah* (Tel Aviv: Dvir Publishing House, 1999), 141.

them. Our lives can only be lived if we live them, to the best of our ability. Escape as a temporary treatment can be useful. As a permanent solution, however, it becomes one's death. It kills the person and it kills all of that person's relationships with others, if there are any left at all.

Through writing *Ishah Y'qarah* Gefen reevaluates his attitudes towards his mother and his childhood. He begins to accept his Aunt Ruth's suggestion that his mother really was ill. Her illness got the best of her. She displayed the worst of her.

Ishah Y'qarah - Page 141

I've already related that the poem my mother loved more than any other poem was Oscar Wilde's "The Ballad of Reading Gaol." As a boy, this poem made me shiver: "Yet each man kills the thing he loves // By each let this be heard // Some do it with a bitter look // Some with a flattering word // The coward does it with a kiss // The brave man with a sword!"[43]

It is a poem about a man who, as he's about to be killed, philosophizes: "Everyone kills the one he loves, but not everyone accepts the judgment of death..." It's not all bad to love poetry. There's nothing that I, myself, love more than reading poems, and more than that, writing poems. I am definitely inclined to agree with the poet Ann Sexton (another prominent victim of suicide): "The beautiful feeling after writing a poem is on the whole better even than after sex, and that's saying a lot."[44]

But for my mother, her love of poetry wasn't just a temporary desire, it was almost a way life. If you ask me, my mother's illness, and that of many others of her poetry reading generation, was this: They didn't just write poems, they believed them.

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[43]Oscar Wilde, "The Ballad of Reading Gaol," in W.B. Yeats, ed., *The Oxford Book Of Modern Verse 1892-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1936), vii.

[44]Anne Sexton, "The Speaker's Electronic Reference Collection," *AApex Software*, (1994), at http://www.bemorecreative.com/one/1240.htm.

Ishah Y'qarah - Pages 145-147

Alterman was a wise poet, in a class by himself, and in my opinion the best of the twentieth century Hebrew poets. But if you live your life according to poems, like my mother, and you seek death as a solution, you'll find it in Alterman. In abundance. In his poem *Saul*, King Saul falls on his sword, a kind of half suicide. But such a death, which according to the *Tanakh* looked more like a work accident, was a lofty goal, according to Alterman: "For Saul on his soil did rest // The sword on which he lies."[45]

That is to say, if you want to, you can always find good in death. Death as a solution, especially if you believe in poems as a philosophy of life, as a way of life, as a way of death.

Uncle Moshe, whom Alterman adored and who worshiped him in return, wrote the introduction to Alterman's collection of poems, called "Maggash Ha-Kesef," published by the Ministry of Defense. In it, he expressed in his wonderful clarity of language the idea that tries to explain death as a noble ideal.

"...Death, when it is the pinnacle of warring, is not the cessation of life, but rather the most powerful expression of life. It is a death for whose price the future is acquired for the next generation."[46]

But not only was Moshe Dayan a brave soldier, and a fearless commander, even more importantly, Uncle Moshe also knew how to read poetry as a metaphor, as a hobby.

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[45]Nathan Alterman, "Saul," in Nathan and Marynn Ausubel, eds., *Treasury of Jewish Poetry* (Miami: Royale House, 1957), 81.

[46]Translation from the Hebrew is my own.

My poor mother, she found in every poem a justification for the worthlessness of her life. She had no sword on which to fall, but she did have sleeping pills. She was not in the Holocaust, but in her opinion, God chose her, of all women, to be an apologizing ghost, to declaim herself to death.

A few years after she died, I had the great honor of sitting with Alterman, at Uncle Moshe's mediation, of course, so that he could read my first poems and tell me that he actually liked them. And I'll never know if he really liked my poems, or if he received some directive from on high to honor my crude unripe and immature work, and the prophets of death never refuse a national hero.

I remember that when I sat there with Alterman, I wasn't thinking about myself. Rather I was thinking about Mother. I thought: "Oh, if Mother could only see us now, the two of us, sitting here, together, like two good friends, like two poets."

Actors and directors sat and talked in the loudest voices. Chatskel, the man who used to hang around the Kasit Café, squeezed his giant body in a chair by the cashier. Alone at a far table, there sat a handsome old man, his hair pulled back, writing feverishly on paper napkins. Outside, by a checkered table at the edge of the street, there sat the artist Tzila Binder, the not-so-secret paramour of Alterman, who was to become my close friend, and to bestow upon me some of her paintings.

In those days, she would sit and wait for Alterman to pay attention to her. Sometimes she would wait for hours, and he would pay attention neither to her nor to anyone else.

Both the poet we admired and our Uncle the hero had no patience for their fellow-

man and were famous adulterers.

My mother preached to me against infidelity, and she was afraid to be betrayed, and here, the two people she respected more than any other person on this earth were compulsive cheaters on their wives. Alterman didn't talk much. His brain numbed by cheap cognac, his fingers drumming on the inlaid red and white checkered plastic tablecloth on the Kasit Café table, and he was trying to hum a Chassidic tune. One moment I existed and I was speaking with him, and the next moment, I did not exist, I was not there, and he was completely inside his own little cognac-filled humming world, occasionally throwing a glance at Tzila, as if to say, "What are you waiting there for? It's not my fault you love me. Go home already."

I felt his impatience, and when he said, "I've got to go," I had to keep him for another moment. I had to tell him about you, Mother. I said to him, stammering out the words, as it was not a poem:

"You know, Alterman..."

"Natan, Natan..."

"My mother admired you."

"Ya-ba-bam-bam. Ya-ba-bam..."

"For my mother, just the name Alterman..."

"Please, call me Natan..."

"Natan, she would copy your poetry into a special notebook..."

"Ya-bam bam bam..."

"And every Friday, Natan, your weekly column from the newspaper, Davar..."

"Ah, yes, I once saw Aviva," Alterman said, "at Moshe's house. And she was a, uh...how should I say, a very...a lovely woman."

And, so, here you are, Mother. Even he, the poet you copied into your notebook the most and declaimed the most, the linguistic innovator, did not find a meaningful and precise sentence to describe to me the shadow of a person who gave birth to me. Just those two nondescript words that can be said about anyone who has died, about whom you do not have anything to say: Lovely woman.

Alterman got up, a worn leather bag in his hand, took his cigarette from his mouth, almost burning his lips. He didn't stop for a second, not even by Tzila Binder, who waited for him outside. After he left, Tzila invited me to have tea with her. Her coal-black eyes were moist, and she wiped away a tear.

"He likes your poems," she told me, "and not because of Dayan, because of the poems." We sat for more than an hour, we talked, and every sentence she uttered began with "Natan says..." I asked her who that tall man was, sitting alone in the corner of the cafe, and she said: "That's Alexander Pen." I asked her why he was sitting alone, and she said: "He's a communist."

I told her that he, too, was in my mother's notebook. And, again, like some nervous tic, I found myself reciting some of Pen's "Confession," which in my opinion is the most beautiful love poem in the Hebrew language.

I caught myself in time, and I stopped, stammering out to Tzila: "I'm sorry, really..." And I realized that I caught my mother's "recitation disease." To this day, without even realizing what's happening, I am sometimes stricken suddenly with this

"recitation disease." During the following two months, I met twice more with Natan Alterman, and he helped me edit my first poetry book, "*Camah Milim*." And this is the poem which he picked to be the opening poem of the book:

Mother, you gave me a gift — words.
Like the cargo of far away ships,
Wanting to be unloaded
On the shoulder of longshoremen
To be towed to the docks of silences
If you see angels there thank them in my name
For the sky, God, and beliefs
And I hope this is a good warm winter for you
After all, you never wanted more than this.

I was barely 21 when I published my first book, and today, in spite of my "recitation disease," I know my mother did indeed give me the "gift of words," and that gift was the most efficient therapy against my rages at you and my longings for you and other deaths. Thank you, Mother. Thank you, Alterman. Thank you, Tzila.

Chapter 10 - Abandonment And Betrayal

As an adult Gefen recognizes that his mother was ill. Only then does Gefen also recognize that his desires for his mother to change instantly into the perfect mother could never have been fulfilled. He wanted her to love him so much, but she wouldn't. Only as an adult does Gefen discover that in fact she couldn't.

At the boarding school Gefen can hardly wait for his mother to visit. When she does, he doesn't tell her how horrible it is for fear of upsetting her. She gets upset anyway and tells Gefen that she can't take seeing him under these conditions so she will not be coming back to visit him again. Rather than tell her what he wants, he acts in accordance with the way in which he has been conditioned. He tells her that it's hard on everyone at first, even though he really does feel particularly bad about being there. He also tells her that it's all right for her not to come visit again. He's lying.

He wants her in his life but he tells her that it's all right for her not to be in his life. He then is upset that she's not in his life. He feels betrayed and abandoned. As a child he blames her. As an adult he can begin to blame her illness. However the damage has been done. Regardless of the cause, her actions caused Gefen great pain. He tried to share private thoughts and feelings with her in his letters. She then distributed his letters to others and published his personal poems in the local newspaper. She did betray him. He needs to learn how to make sense of it all.

Finally, when he was Commander of the most important post in Israel, Aviva does come to visit her son. Yet he is not pleased with her visit despite the fact that she made a very difficult journey in order to see him. After she leaves, Gefen writes to her and tells her that it was inappropriate for her to visit in the face of his many troops whose parents

were not able to do the same. He also admits to being arrogant and boastful in his letter. Rather than welcoming her and appreciating her visiting then, he held tightly to the feelings of betrayal by her not sharing in his life until that point. He learned his mother's behaviors and patterns, simply by experiencing them. He did fulfill many of his mother's dreams for him, but he could only do it his own way. Gefen could not become the ideal person his mother wanted him to be. Rather, he needed to be his own person and to hope that his mother would be proud of him.

Gefen's poem *When I Grow Up* is about a boy who dreams of all of the wonderful things he'll do someday for himself and for the world. He'll fix problems and treat illnesses. He'll build homes and bake bread to feed hungry people. The boy in the poem lists a series of wonderful hopes and aspirations for what he'll be when he grows up. The poem ends, however, with the following verse: "First let me grow up, then we'll see."[47]

We need to be there for our children as they are growing. We can teach and mold and shape our children's ideas and ideals with every one of our own words and actions. This will happen whether we want it to or not. This will happen whether it is in a positive way or in a negative way. We owe it to our children and to our world to support and teach them when they are young and impressionable, so as not to be greeted by them with Gefen's chilling words: "...too little, too late."[48]

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[47]Yehonatan Gefen, "When I Grow Up," in *Hakeves Hashishah-Asar* (Tel Aviv: Dvir Publishing House, 1992), 24.

[48]Yehonatan Gefen, *Ishah Y'qarah* (Tel Aviv: Dvir Publishing House, 1999), 194.

Ishah Y'qarah - Pages 156-160

Today, when I meet up with childhood friends from Nahalal, they tell me that I was a very funny boy. But I was the small lonely prince, and it took me a long time until I understood: only if I were to be a prince, would my mother be a queen.

Because my mother really believed that I was a prince, she scolded me and punished me the way they punish princes. I enlisted all the meager powers I had. I wanted so much for her to love me, and, if possible, that she should show me this, that she should hug me and kiss me. But do divinely chosen princes require human contact? Or is that what they get when they sacrifice their magic and turn into regular little kids, like Betzer's kid, or Chavinsky's son, or Rachlavsky's...

One of my parents' cruel games was called "David and Yehonatan." When I was boisterous or forgot my farm chores or neglected my studies, they would call me Yehonatan. When I was diligent, and I bathed in the evening, washed my hair, went to bed early -- they would call me David. They even had a special hairdo with the part on the other side -- Father used to call that a "pilot's haircut." And Mother would do my hair like that only when I was good and "David." Today I know that that was abuse and only my imagination, my art of repression and my weapon that I developed of making myself the target of my humor, barely saved me from irreversible schizophrenia, from complete and total insanity.

At age 11, when I started to write small poems, that Mother would send to children's publications, she almost believed that here, my princedom was starting to materialize. But when I turned into a grumbling loner of a youth, at age 15 or 16, not

doing well in school (except for Literature and *Tanakh*), and spending long hours in Grandpa Shmuel's room, in the house across the way, listening intently to a singer named Elvis Presley, I think that my mother lost hope. Here and there, she would still let me feel that I was a sensitive and special child, and that someday I might be something. But on the other hand, she let me feel failure, not a stain on my head but a stain on the family, and many times I heard her say to Aunt Ruth or to Father: "Where did we go wrong?" What did we do to deserve a boy like this?"

This changing attitude of hers, sometimes three times in a day, from tenderness and listening to her princely son, to anger and embarrassment of the fruit of her womb, caused me suffering that cannot be described in words. Just in poems.

And then I started to distance myself from her. To run away from her, and she did not chase after me.

Despite the fact that I abstained from masturbating until a late age, I tried to do it one time, and on the second floor of our modest cottage in the village, no less. What a mistake! A few months before I was freed from the army, when I was an intelligence officer in the unit, and I had a permanent Jeep and a permanent erection, I decided that the time had come for me to lose my virginity. I was in love with M, the Regimental Commander's beautiful secretary. She was young and tall and laughed a lot, with full African lips, green eyes, and legs that went on forever. She was from Haifa, and for a guy like me, from a Moshav, she was from the city of lights, from the big world. M apparently didn't know that I was a prince. In her eyes, Lieutenant Gefen was a regular human creature, short but funny. She courted me without any restraint and I was very

much drawn to her.

One Friday, early in the morning, I was going home and M asked if, on the way, I would drop her off at her parents' house in Lower Haifa. On the way, we stopped in some olive grove. We sat at the foot of the Jeep, and I read her my new poems.

In the middle of one of my depressing poems, M said: "Want some Bazooka?" And I thought: I'm sharing with her my lyrical existential sadness, and she offers me gum. I said to her: "Fine, give me some Bazooka," and then, I don't know how she did this, but she moved the gum that was in her mouth, into my mouth. She pushed that sweet rubber band into my mouth with her Haifa tongue. In my first French kiss, I chewed American gum. I felt like I had to sleep with her. I took her to my parents' house in Nahalal. And because Grandpa Shmuel and his second wife had come from Jerusalem for the weekend, we had to do it, if we were to do it, on the second floor of the old house, in the small room where my sister Nurit and I spent many hours of our miserable childhood.

My father was rolling about, as he was wont to do, on some tank in the north, because of a security situation (my father was always found in a security situation), and I don't remember where my sisters were. But I remember that Mother welcomed us happily, or at least that's how it seemed. I introduced her to M, and I told her that she was a Regiment Secretary. Mother told her that she was invited to stay with us, she boiled some water for us for tea, and she even opened the sacred box of "English butter cookies that Moshe loves."

"So," Mother said, "you must be exhausted. Go rest a little." She arranged the

two beds on either side of my small childhood room for us: the bed that was mine and the bed that was my sister Nurit's, who was serving in the army then. After she left, we pushed the two beds together, and we got undressed. We kissed and we caressed each other a bit. Later, M told me that I fell right asleep, and she sat up and read her book.

And then -- I'm writing this and my heart is breaking into pieces -- without as much as a knock on the door, my mother comes in, sees me sleeping and M, sitting by my side in her underwear and bra and reading Narkiss and Goldmund by Herman Hesse.

"What are you doing to her?!" she screamed. "In our house! What are you doing?"

"I'm not doing anything..."

"Not doing anything, eh?"

"Mother, calm down. Please, Mother..."

I saw her and I thought: That's not her, that has to be somebody else. This strange woman, disguising herself as my mother, stood there in the doorway, in her faded blue robe, dumbfounded by the two of us, with a glazed look, unruly hair, and her head waving form side to side, and I didn't know then how many pills she had taken and when.

"Mother, go away," I said, "Do you want me to make you some tea?"

"No tea," she said half whispering, "You're not my son anymore."

M got dressed quickly. I think she was crying silently. Mother went outside, toward our neighbor Velvele's dairy, and screamed like a wounded animal: "Help! Yoti's raping a soldier! In our house! Yoti's raping a soldier!"

I went outside to look for her. I remember that I had an Uzi. I remember that I

thought in all seriousness, about going on automatic pilot and firing at her. The neighbors brought her home. At that point she looked sleepy and was quiet. They told me that "she doesn't feel so well, and hasn't for a few months now." M and I got into the Jeep and we ran away from there. That same night, I slept in M's house, my heart bleeding princely blood, and I cried all night.

A few times, that same night, I tried to sleep with M, but I did not succeed. I was family-wounded, angry and flacid. We fell asleep naked and hugging. In the morning, when we got back to the base in the Galil, we almost didn't speak at all. A little before they opened the gate to the base for us, M said to me: "I didn't know that your mother was crazy."

"I didn't know either," I told her. "I didn't know either."

She gave me her book by Hesse, and she wrote an inscription: "To my dear little Yehonatan, a reminder of the night of the big mess. With great love..."

And from then on, I didn't want to hear anymore about my mother. I didn't want to save her, I was afraid to see her. I would speak to her like they speak with sick people. Just what's necessary. A little and from afar. All the leaves they would give me up until my complete discharge from the army, I would either stay on base, or spend them at Yona and Grandpa's house in Jerusalem. I waited to finish the Army and to run as far away as possible from the village and from her.

And I never again let anyone, except for Aunt Ruth, call me Yoti.

Ishah Y'qarah - Pages 190-196

Oh, how I hated my transparent house, and I knew that if for one moment I were to be myself, the whole house would collapse and shards of glass would injure me and my family.

And I also ran away to the ends of the earth and tried to be at home as little as possible. But home always came with me.

It was so difficult for me to be around my mother's depression, that I practically begged that they send me to an agricultural boarding school. Mother did not want me to go, but Father said that it would forge me. It didn't forge for me, but maybe it forged him. And even from afar, I always thought about her first, then about me and my sisters, and about the rest of the people in the world. When I was at the *K'far Galim* Agricultural Boarding School (what a terrible year that was!), Mother only came to visit me once -- two weeks after I arrived at this children's prison, a shamefully small boy, individualistic and shy, insecure, reciting long poems by heart, who suddenly had to live with three learning disabled boys, in a room measuring five square meters.

"Why don't your parents ever come to visit?" asked Arzi, now on Kibbutz Gonen, and Penini, now an actor, my roommates then.

"They'll come," I said, "They'll come."

"When?"

"I don't know, maybe next weekend."

After weeks, that seemed like months and years, my mother finally came to visit one hot summer Shabbat. She was wearing sunglasses and when I told her that it was

difficult for me, a tear or two ran down from behind the dark lenses of her glasses and wet her cheek. And again, I was forgotten. Instead of thinking about myself, instead of telling my mother that it was bad for me to be there, that she should get me out of there immediately, that she should hug me tight – again, I just had pity on her.

"It'll be all right, Mother. I'll get used to it here."

"Oh, my Yoti."

"Don't cry, Mother, it's difficult here for all the kids at first."

"You're not like all the other kids."

"I am like all the other kids."

And then she said to me: "You'll forgive me, Yoti, but I don't think that I'll come to visit you here any more."

"Why?"

"It's too difficult for me to see you like this."

And I, having no alternative, told her:

"Really, you don't have to come, Mother, I'll come home for my breaks."

"Yes, I'll speak with the Principal. Father and I know him."

"Very well. You really don't have to come, you have to take care of Zurla and the farm..."

And so it was when she didn't come to my parachute jump at the end of my Paratrooper course, or to the ceremony for unveiling the stripes at the end of my Officers' course. All the parents came to see how our troop parachuted. To see their children all grown up. Mother wrote to me that she's not in a psychological state to see me jump

from an airplane. And after my Officers' course: "It's too much for me. It reminds me of Zurik, wars, and terrible things." My sister also remembers this differently! Mother was, according to her version, at my parachute jump, and then she didn't sleep for a week.

My father didn't come either, but he wrote me a letter telling me that he was proud of me.

It was only when I was on active duty that "I realized his hopes," as he depicted in that pathetic interview in the tabloid supplement .

They didn't come to the "Jump of the Parents." Like an idiot, I jumped from the heavens, from a heavy "Hercules" plane, (because of my light weight, I also landed far away from all the other paratroopers, so that no one really saw how brave I was), and down at the bottom, nothing was waiting for me. Not even Mother. The parents of all the other soldiers waited for them down there, they wiped away tears, they brought them packages of sweets and socks.

Today, I know how much I hated her then, but I behaved aristocratically and indifferently. An officer and a gentleman, and a complete idiot. I acted as if I understood her, felt for her, had compassion for.

I would spend many of the few breaks we had from the Army, especially during the first part of Basic Training, and the heavy artillery course, with my good friend from the division, Tzechi Barkai of blessed memory, Razi the broadcaster's brother, who was killed accidentally during Officers' Training Course exercises, a few days before Purim in 1969, one year before my mother's death.

Paradoxically, they sent me to this course to meet the quota of officers, despite the

fact that I was meant to be an officer like a butterfly was meant to be a fighter plane. Tzechi was the first close friend I lost in the Army. My mother, for whom death was always her friend, felt my pain, and that was the first time that she really said to my father that Yoti does not need to be in the Army, and that not every boy can be a soldier, a very bold opinion in those days, in our village of heroes.

In her box of Rose poems, I found, stained with tears and gun polish, the letter I wrote her after Tzechi died and I went back to the Officers' course.

"On my knees, I write to you a Purim letter, and it will be sad. Tzechi is dead. I've never had a friend like him, we were two peas in a pod... No one would ever ask "Where's Gefen?" Rather, it was always "Has anyone seen Tzechi and Gefen?" We would forfeit the after-hours free time they would give us, just so we could sit in the canteen and talk about everything in the world. He was someone to whom it was possible to say anything and to whom it was possible to tell everything. He was my best friend so far. The day after he died, a letter arrived for me from him: "It's rough here without you, there's no one here to talk to. Come to the course and we'll enjoy it together..." Tzechi is dead. One stray bullet, and nothing is the way it used to be. I try to cry, and I almost suffocate. I would have given my life for him, and those aren't empty words, but rather a conclusion at which I arrived with a clear mind. Suddenly you have a question for God, suddenly nothing is clear, nothing makes sense..." And so it continued. A personal letter of a soldier with a broken heart, that was written just for her, for her eyes only, and she, what did she do? Like all the other times, she showed me around to everybody!

Attached to my letter, I found a letter from Shmuel and Rina Barkai, Tzechi's

parents: "Dear Aviva, we were moved to tears by Yoti's letter. David and Yonatan's love for each other poured forth from each and every line, and it's good to know that Tzechi knew how to harbor love for a friend and comrade in arms and to acquire his love in return..."

Why didn't she safeguard my feelings? I remember I angrily asked myself and the rusty metal box, why did she have to show me around?

Despite the fact that today I know that my mother removed and sent my letter and poems, out of her pride for my expressive writing ability, she also instilled in me, while circulating my writing, that same feeling of betrayal and a basic lack of faith that were nesting in her soul from her childhood until her death. I've written already that in the later years, the connection with my mother was strictly literary. Even the absolutely last letter I wrote to her, scolding her for circulating my writing without my permission. I sent her a poem called, "He was a simple *Golani* soldier," and she sent it to be published in "The Village Bulletin," which generally included agricultural reports, and obituaries filled with pathos about the founders of the village who had passed away, and they solicited these primarily from themselves, and not from others.

"Mother," I wrote to her, "why do you do this? How many times already have I asked you, not in any way, shape, manner, or form, to send my poems to The Village Bulletin or to any one else?"

In those last few months, Mother was living only on poems and pills, and I assume that she felt my complete growing apart from her. She felt so guilty that she decided to visit me in *Hermon*, where I was the Commander of the most important post in

Israel. I remember that Chief of Staff Rabin, of blessed memory, visited me and said, in his rough harsh humor, "Lieutenant Gefen, you are now the highest Commander in the Army!" I remember that she looked bad, she had a gloomy look about her, and she was shaking from the cold. I wanted her to go. I wanted her not to be, and then I felt guilty and ashamed. Later in that same last letter, I wrote to her:

"Your visit to me was too quick, and too intense and completely unnecessary. I still haven't gotten over it. Maybe because I asked you not to come and I'm used to your honoring my requests. The issue is that many of the troops under my command have not seen their parents, because they don't have the means to get here. It's not right that the Commander's mother suddenly appears with packages..."

What an arrogant and boastful letter! I was apparently already at the level of total flight from my family, and if Mother suddenly were to have decided to show me her love, and to buy my faith, it apparently would have been too little too late. When she arrived at the Command Post in the Golan with the most enormous difficulty, two days after the end of the battles, after her omnipotent brother arranged an armored personnel carrier, I felt ridiculous, I was shell-shocked. And despite it all I remember my anger for her, the question which has haunted me since my childhood: "Why didn't she come until now?" I had so wanted her to come to the graduation ceremony from my Officers' Training Course. She said she would come, but she didn't come. Only later did I realize that she was completely addicted to her pills, to her sleeping, to her death. And when I asked my sister Nurit why Mother had not come to the Officers' Training Course graduation ceremony, she said: "Why didn't she come? You should have seen her! She could

barely make it form the bed to the shower!"

In fact, I parachuted, I became an officer, and I wrote poems, all for her, and I didn't see her.

From day to day, I repressed her in my consciousness.

My sister Nurit, the poor thing, she got out of the Army much earlier and she apparently did see her deteriorate from melancholy to delirium, from a manic state to severe depression... And a few years later, Nurit followed after her. I remember thinking then: Not only did Mother kill herself, but she took Nurit from us, too, my beloved sister.

I also started thinking I might want to die a little, to see what it's like. My mother is a serial killer. But to whom could I have told that? If I were to have said that to someone, they would have said: Look, another nut in the family, just like his mother, just like Grandma D'vorah.

Mother, I forgive you for trying to force all your dreams into my small tortured soul. You wanted me to be everything that your parents wouldn't let you be. You wanted me to be like Natan Alterman. And indeed, at least to some degree, I have achieved all that -- albeit at the price of alcoholism, by means an infinite number of pointless love affairs , and with the backing of a credible poetic talent. Had you kept yourself alive a few more years, you would have seen that I became a little like Alterman, a little like Dayan, and a little like a crazy Prince, with the operative word being "little."

Each time I publish a book, or a play, or a translation of something, I sit and cry to you for a few minutes: See, Mother, I did it. If only you had waited a little, maybe you would have been a little proud of me. I see my name waving on a banner above the

Camari Theater, I hear my songs playing on the radio, and I'd like to think you know, that you're looking down on me from up there, and maybe you're even smiling without an order from a photographer. Maybe you also see how Father continues to lie to me and is jealous of me. He's angry that I didn't do something better with my life, like become a career Army Major or even better, die for my country.

CHAPTER 11 - *HAKEVES HASHISHAH-ASAR*

Hakeves Hashishah-Asar is one of the finest anthologies of children's stories and poems that exists. Yehonatan Gefen is able to communicate with children and communicate to children in a very practical and effective way. He knows how children need to hear things in order for them to understand and appreciate the messages/lessons. He doesn't talk down to children nor does he "stoop" to their level. Rather, he reaches them wherever they are and empowers them to elevate themselves to higher levels of understanding, awareness, self-confidence and self-appreciation. He also reaches adults. But the way he reaches adults is not like just any author or poet would. Gefen has the incredible ability to take the thoughts of children, and make them not only accessible, but also comprehensible to adults. He brings together two different worlds, two different mind-sets, and facilitates a dialogue which could not otherwise effectively take place.

His children's stories and songs, are not for children alone. His works are multi-layered. As they are, each piece of his writing is fun, entertaining, captivating, interesting. He is a gifted entertainer. The genius of Gefen, however, is that when one is able to see the different layers, to decipher the different messages and lessons which are being taught in his works, his writings take on incredible new dimensions. There's something there for everyone, and if you don't get all there is to get, you still get enough to say, "Wow, that was great. He's brilliant."

The main motivation behind everything Gefen writes is twofold: kids need to know it's "okay" for them just to be themselves, and parents also need to know that it's "okay" for kids just to be themselves.

How Is A Song Born?

Hakeves Hashishah-Asar -- Page 12

How is a song born?

Like a baby.

It's painful at first.

Then it comes out

And everyone's happy,

And, suddenly --

How incredible!

It stands on its own.

How is a song born?

Like a baby.

It's' painful at first.

Then it comes out...

There's A Child Whose Daddy...

Hakeves Hashishah-Asar - - Page 14

There's a child whose daddy's a doctor,

And there are children whose daddies are ill.

There are children whose daddies are poor,

And some whose fridges they always can fill.

There's a child whose daddy's a tailor,

You'll never see holes in her coat.

And there are children whose daddies are barbers,

Of their terrible haircuts, take note!

There are children whose daddies are drivers,

By their house there is always a bus.

There's a child whose daddy's a mayor --

He is kind -- and always courteous.

There are children whose daddies are strong,

"My daddy's a hero," many say.

There are children whose daddy's clean shaven,

And some with prickly thorns in the way.

There are daddies who work nine to five,

And they always come back before long.

There are daddies who aren't around much.

My dad sits and writes poems and songs.

My Commentary...

"Don't judge a book by its cover" is only part of the message in this poem. Surely, the child of a barber ought to have a neat haircut, unlike the child here. And the tailor's child, as expected, has a jacket without any holes. The message, however, goes even deeper than that. We each have different childhood experiences. And those experiences affect each of us in very different ways. One can not necessarily tell much about another with any great amount of certainty, just by some superficial physical characteristics or by actions or preferences. There is a similarly themed poem in *"Free To Be...You And Me"* entitled *"My Dog Is a Plumber:"*

My dog is a plumber, he must be a boy.
Although I must tell you his favorite toy
Is a little play stove with pans and with pots
Which he really must like, 'cause he plays with it lots.
So perhaps he's a girl, which kind of makes sense,
Since he can't throw a ball and he can't climb a fence.
But neither can Dad, and I know *he's* a man,
And Mom is a woman, and *she* drives a van.
Maybe the problem is in trying to tell
Just what someone is by what he does well.

Dan Greenburg discusses gender roles within society, while Gefen's poem focuses more on the different types of relationships each of us has with various family members, particularly our fathers. In both cases, the circumstances described affect who we are as people and how we learn as children and how we develop as adults. The more aware we become of the differences in the kinds of experiences people have during their formative years, the more likely we all are to be a bit more understanding and accepting of differences in behaviors, attitudes, and interpersonal interactions. After all, is there really an ideal parent profile, or child profile? Is there really an ideal parent/child relationship model? No, and that's the point of these two clever pieces.

Hey, I'm Not A Baby Anymore

Hakeves Hashishah-Asar - - Page 16

Hey, I'm not a baby anymore!

I get dressed by myself

and I get undressed by myself

and I eat by myself

and I drink by myself

and I laugh by myself

and I cry by myself

and I dream by myself

about all the different things I'll do by myself

when I grow up.

Hey, I'm not a baby anymore!

Mother tells me that I need to eat a lot

because right now I'm growing all the time,

but that's not true.

When nobody's looking --

I stop

And I rest a little

And then I grow some more.

Hey, I'm not a baby anymore!

My Commentary...

This boy knows that he's still a child. It's just that others don't know that he's not still a baby. He describes all of the things that he can do on his own, fully comprehending that these are significant achievements for someone his age. He even dreams about the things he can't yet do on his own, but will when he grows up. He disagrees with his mother when she tells him that he's growing all the time, because he sees that at always looking toward what comes next, not relishing the accomplishments of the present, and really appreciating what he can do all by himself already. As true as it is that children are not grown ups, children need to be acknowledged and rewarded and appreciated for who they are every step along the way, while growing up. Adults need to be very aware of the fact that although children are still growing, they are not babies forever. They need for their independence to be validated.

The Prettiest Girl In Kindergarten

Hakeves Hashishah-Asar -- Page 20

The prettiest girl in kindergarten

has the prettiest eyes in kindergarten,

and the prettiest hair in kindergarten,

and the prettiest mouth in kindergarten.

and the more you look at her,

the more you see that there's no doubt about it...

She *is* the prettiest girl in kindergarten.

When she smiles,

I smile.

And when she's sad,

I can't understand

how it's possible to be sad,

when you're the prettiest girl in kindergarten.

When We Went To The City To Visit Uncle Ephraim

Hakeves Hashishah-Asar -- Page 22-23

When we went to the city to visit Uncle Ephraim,

We saw many, many shoe stores.

And I thought:

If, suddenly, all of the shoes decided

To leave the store window, and to look for feet for themselves,

How happy it would be here!

When we went to the city to visit Uncle Ephraim,

We saw many toy stores in Givatayim

They asked me what I wanted.

I said, "a bicycle."

They told me, "Okay, next year."

When we went to the city to visit Uncle Ephraim,

We passed by a poor man with holes in his socks.

He had a sad look on his face,

And he was leaning on a cane.

Mother told me not to look,

But I did look.

When we went to the city to visit Uncle Ephraim,

It was in the winter, two years ago.

Since then, I've grown up a bit, and I did get my bicycle.

I've almost forgotten that once I was three years old.

But the poor man, with the holes in his socks,

I never am able to forget him.

My Commentary...

This poem addresses the tension between the adult world and the child's world. Throughout the four verses, the boy in the poem has interactions and conversations with the things in the stores, with a person on the street, with the shoes in the store windows. The illustrations even depict a boy being dragged along by his mother, completely oblivious to the boy whose hand she is holding. The only interaction the boy and his mother have is when the mother warns the boy not to look at a beggar on the street, leaning on a cane. The boy wants a bicycle, and he's imagining the shoes in the shoe store walking away on their own -- he's curious about the world (what three-year-old isn't?). Rather than encourage the boy's curiosity, or even at the very least acknowledge it, the mother opts to stifle it, or at least that's the message that the boy receives. By simply telling the three-year-old to look at the beggar, she could be acting on her own fears -- fear of the unknown, fear of feeling obligated to help more than she's

comfortable. She could simply be trying to protect the boy. She could also be overprotecting the boy, sheltering him from the realities of life and of the world which he will someday face, whether prepared through experience or not.

When the boy turns five, he understands the difference between what's familiar to him and what is not. When he requested the bicycle, it was a big deal. Yet he states that he has a bicycle now as if it were unimportant. He even almost forgot that he was ever three years old! But what image sticks with him forever? The image of the man about whom no one ever spoke, with whom he never had any interaction, for whom he was led to have feelings of disdain and inferiority, and of whom he has little understanding. The boy knows that there was something significant about that man on the street, but he develops his own perceived fears -- fear of investigating it, fear of discovering some potentially harmful reality, fear of the unknown. Although children may not be able to reason fully, or comprehend complex logical arguments, they certainly comprehend much more than adults usually give them credit for comprehending.

When I Grow Up

Hakeves Hashishah-Asar -- Page 24

When I grow up, I'll be a builder,

And I'll build houses, but not cages.

When I grow up, I'll be a singer,

I'll sing happy songs to sad folks of all ages.

When I grow up, I'll be a doctor,

Who gives shots to help people in pain.

When I grow up, I'll be a baker,

I'll bake bread for the hungry from grain.

When I grow up, I'll be a painter,

I'll paint our beautiful world even more so.

When I grow up, I'll be a carpenter,

Who builds a table, a chair, a piano.

When I grow up, I'll be a sailor,

And I'll sail ships on the billowy seas.

When I grow up...

When I grow up...

First, let me grow up,

Then we'll see...

My Commentary...

The boy in this poem, as depicted in the illustration, has his head in the clouds. His head is literally blocked by a cloud, which encompasses and image of him, grown up, as a painter. All the other clouds in the illustration also show images of the boy grown up, working in various vocations. His "head is in the clouds" because he's dreaming big dreams. He'll be a painter, and he'll paint the world even more beautiful than it is now. He'll be a doctor, and treat everyone who is in pain. He'll be a baker, and he'll distribute his baked bread to anyone who is hungry. He certainly paints himself to be an idealist. However, he also "has his feet firmly planted on the ground," likewise depicted in the illustration, and described in the last verse. Sure he has dreams about what he'll be when he grows up. But, unlike the common adult perception of a child's ability to decipher the world, he is able to keep things in perspective. He knows that he must first grow up, in order to become whatever he will become. His dreams will always be there. Being a kid, before having to be grown up, won't last forever -- this kid knows to enjoy it and savor it. There will be plenty of time for him to become something great and change the world. And it will be more likely to happen, just the way he dreams, if he does some growing up first, and takes things one step at a time.

The Giraffe Has A Long Neck

Hakeves Hashishah-Asar - - Pages 26-27

The giraffe has a long neck.

He can see a bus coming before it even leaves,

and the sun before it even rises.

Everything that we see,

the giraffe sees before we do.

He also has this look on his face that seems to say:

"How beautiful it is to be such a tall animal."

The giraffe has a long neck.

He sees clouds at the edge of the world, and declares:

"Friends, in two months, it will rain here."

From the giraffe's height, we all look very small, indeed.

And to the giraffe, our biggest problems are just tiny little specs.

My Commentary...

Any animal other than human, when compared to a human, certainly looks different. Every animal has its own distinguishing physical characteristics, many of which could even be considered "strange" by human standards. One of the most noticeable of these physical differences is the long neck of the giraffe. Children are very good at recognizing differences -- physical and otherwise -- in other people and in animals and objects relative to one another. How children make sense of those differences, how children treat the people or the animals who have those differences, is entirely guided by how they are taught to view the world. It would be very easy for a child, or an ignorant or sheltered adult, to condemn another because of some physical difference -- in this case, a giraffe with a long neck. It's unfamiliar, it can be a bit uncomfortable to look at, and humans are very quick to consider strange things initially as wrong or bad.

But it seems the giraffe has a different perspective. Others' differences that we may perceive to be hardships, can turn out actually to be benefits. Having a long neck affords the giraffe all types of opportunities and insights which we could never even dream of having. Children who are different from others, can be, and need to be, taught to find ways for their differences to work for them. Individuals who are physically challenged, and those with learning disabilities, are not doomed to be unproductive members of society, unless people allow for that to happen. Which is the message for anyone who notices a difference in others -- understand how that difference is a part of

who that person is, appreciate the different skills or abilities of others. Learning about how beneficial certain differences can be, while not condemning the difference or the person with that difference, certainly makes for a more understanding and compassionate world. The greatest benefit which the giraffe derives from such a long neck, as described in the last line of the poem, is that when the giraffe looks down from way up there, it sees our biggest problems as only little tiny specs.

The Man With The Hair

Hakeves Hashishah-Asar - - Pages 28-29

Once,

a long time ago,

I saw a small man

whose hair was so long,

it covered half of San Fran.

When he crossed the street,

Buses stopped and took care,

First the small man would cross,

Followed by all his hair.

This small man had very long hair -- yes it's true.

Why it even took him three days to shampoo!

Then, on the clothes line, hanging outside,

He'd carefully hang up his wet hair to dry.

Each morning he'd braid a thousand braids nice and neat.

And then, with his hair, he'd go sweeping the street.

In the evening, when done sweeping up around town,

He would go home, and then he would let his hair down,

To find popsicle sticks, stones, and paper all mangled,

And a small little kitty, once his hair was untangled.

I saw him when I was a boy long ago.

And, since then, I haven't seen him anywhere.

Maybe he's moved. I just do not know.

Or maybe, it could be, he just cut his hair.

My Commentary...

This man's hair could very well be a metaphor for the "baggage" that each of us carries with us throughout our lives. Every experience we have, every praise and reprimand we receive, every sound we hear, every pet we've ever had -- they all shape who we are. How we process those experiences, and either deal with them or overcome them, as the case may be, directly shapes how we communicate with other and how able we are to form relationships with others.

This man with the hair had so much hair, and so many things trapped in that hair, that he didn't even know all that there was in there. Additionally, all of that "baggage" that he was carrying around behind him affected not only everything he did, but also everyone with whom he came into contact, as well as people on the periphery. When he

crosses the street, all traffic stops. It even takes him three days just to shampoo. Some of our childhood experiences are ones which we'll never forget, which will bring us joy and gladness for the rest of our lives. However, when we have difficulties in our past, it's in our best interest to try and work through those difficulties -- to process them, and make sense out of them. If we don't learn from our past experiences, but rather keep them bottled up inside, they will keep us from growing as people, and they will weigh us down with heavy thoughts and heavy tasks.

One never really knows what kind of baggage another one has. Some people, like this small man with the hair, are visibly affected by their past experiences. Some keep their "baggage" well stored away, yet it still is a heavy load. Some people avoid working through difficult issues, by just moving forward, not paying attention to the long hair dragging behind. Or perhaps paying careful attention to the hair dragging behind so as not to separate one's self from things familiar and comfortable, even if those very things are destructive in the end. Others, work through their issues. They keep cutting their hair, so to speak, so that they can keep moving forward freely and productively, without feeling dragged down by unresolved issues.

We need to encourage children to talk about things that are bothering them, to make it known when they are unhappy or confused. They need to know that it's perfectly okay to be wrong or unsure about things, and that they don't need to keep bad experiences bottled up inside of them because they're afraid that others might think that *they* are bad for making the mistake or for not knowing the right answer or solution.

The Smell Of Chocolate

Hakeves Hashishah-Asar -- Pages 30-31

On the outskirts of town, there's a real special place,

Where the sweet smell of chocolate is right in your face.

There's a building there, which stands very tall,

With three giant smokestacks, and no windows at all,

And thirty machines working all day and night

Seventy workers with aprons and gloves — what a sight!

Making all kinds of chocolate — a chocolate lover's delight!

Small chocolate, big chocolate,

Costly, cheap — just for fun.

Some with nuts, some just plain,

Something for everyone.

And I'm happy to tell, there,

That all those who dwell there,

Can, for free, stop and smell, there!

The children stop running around the suburb

The buses pull up and stop right by the curb

The cats are not chased, 'cause the dogs do not bother

The robbers and cops stand there next to each other.

Then, as everyone sees the smokestack and looks up,

With the sweet smell of chocolate, their noses fill up.

On the outskirts of town, there's a real special place,

Where the sweet smell of chocolate is right in your face.

My Commentary...

As complicated as it can be to be a child, the life and world of a child are actually very simple -- if only everyone else knew how not to spoil it. When Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, they did not suddenly discover that they were naked -- they were always naked and they knew it full well. What they discovered, is that being naked is immodest, or bad. They formed a judgment about a factual condition that had been present all along. Thinking about their condition as "good" or "bad" is a human convention. Having no clothes on was simply the objective circumstances.

Children learn how to behave and how to think about others and about the world, because they watch what others say and do. When children discover that they have a

sense of humor, they judge by the reactions of others just how funny certain things are or aren't. Sometimes they can't even believe that others see things differently than they do. The narrator of this story describes a child's perspective on the smell of chocolate. Adults don't always notice the smell of chocolate, which for a child could mean that the world needs to stop. Dogs stop chasing cats, traffic stops, people stand and breathe deeply. This chocolate lover is describing what they think ought to be the norm -- the simple things, like the smell of chocolate, mean the rest of the world has to stop. Children only discover that the rest of the world doesn't stop for those small things when they are told so by adults, or others who have accepted this frequent societal occurrence of ignoring the importance of the small things in life. The world does not necessarily need to stop for the smell of chocolate, but the world can recognize its importance to the child, and not stifle children's interest in those seemingly small things in life.

I Love

Hakeves Hashishah-Asar - - Pages 32-33

I love chocolate

And cheesecake, too.

And ices, and sucking candy

(and strawberries, ooh!).

I love birthdays

And goody bags, as "good-bye"

And the sun and the moon

And some stars in the sky.

I love the winter,

Summer, Autumn, and how!

And also the springtime,

Which is what it is now.

I love Galit,

(especially with braided hair)

And the dimple-faced girl

And the one with the freckles everywhere.

I love my daddy

(and also my mom).

And Shula, my teacher,

And Aunt Miriam.

I love Grandma and Grandpa

And my sister. But, see..

More than anyone else,

Most of all — I love ME!

Whoever Looks

Hakeves Hashishah-Asar -- Pages 34-35

Whoever looks at me from behind,

doesn't know who I am.

Whoever looks at me from behind,

can easily think

that I'm Ronnie, or Shoshana's son.

Whoever looks at me from behind,

can't come up to me and ask:

Son, whose child are you?

What are you doing here?

Why aren't you in school?

When are you going to cut your hair?

Whoever looks at me from behind,

can't ask me questions

that people ask to someone's face.

Whoever looks at me from behind,

can't pinch my cheeks

because my cheeks are in the front!

Whoever looks at me from behind,

and passes me by quietly --

I don't see them, and they don't see me.

Whoever looks at me from behind,

can't start up with me.

There are some people in our neighborhood

who have no chance of seeing me head on.

My Commentary

In *Ishah Y'qarah*, Gefen talks about his relationship with his grandfather Zev. Grandpa Zev actually told Gefen once, that he didn't really love him that much. Gefen writes that he could tell anyway -- any child could. Children know how adults feel about them, they can tell whether an adult is "child-friendly" or not. The boy in this poem knows full well who is really taking the time to look at him, and see him for who he really is, as opposed to seeing him as "a generic kid" just like all the others. He uses the example of looking at someone from behind, as opposed to looking at someone head on,

to show in a real sense how difficult it is to know someone, or to know about someone, when you're not really looking at them.

The last verse sends two messages. One possibility is that, because this child is so adept at discerning the attitude of adults toward him as a child, and so aware of how he his treated by adults, that there is no chance that anyone would have the opportunity to see him for who he really is, because he would not expose his vulnerability to those whom he could not trust to treat him well. That is to say, *he* will exercise control over who will really be able to get to know him. Another message could be that there are some who will never get to see him for who he really is because *they* don't know how to look. Those who have no chance of seeing him for who he is do not have either the patience or the understanding about how to relate to children.

Prickly Thorns

Hakeves Hashishah-Asar - - Page 36

Daddy wants me to kiss him.

(Daddies love to get kisses, I know!).

But how can I ever kiss daddy,

When, on both his cheeks, prickly thorns grow?

I quickly run over to greet him,

And I kiss his cheek two or three times,

Then I stop and yell, "Daddy, what are you?

A daddy, or a big porcupine?"

Then daddy goes into the bathroom,

And a few minutes later I see,

He comes back with smooth cheeks, all clean shaven,

Kissing *smooth* cheeks does *not* bother me!

So I say to him, "Daddy, I love you!"

(Daddies love to be loved, I know!).

But if you want to be kissed on the cheek,

Then *do not* let those prickly thorns grow!

A Song For Shira

Hakeves Hashishah-Asar -- Page 38

Speak now, my child. I hear you.

The world listens intently to you.

Speak now, my angel, for I know

That this will not always be true.

Speak unfettered lips, speak eyes,

While the milk still spills from your smile.

Embrace all my fears in your two hands.

Embrace teddy bears for the while.

I will give you a good new world,

Your wide blue-eyed gaze helps you begin to know

How important it is to see suddenly,

A crescent moon, in the darkness, winking so yellow.

Be a small child, the night will not harm you.

Your butterfly barrette in your hair.

Be a small child, the world won't elude you.

I'll be grown up for the both of us, I care.

My Commentary...

When translated into English, the beautiful Hebrew play on words in the title is lost. The Hebrew word *shir* means song or poem, and Gefen's daughter is named *Shira*, the feminine form of the noun. The parent in this poem, simply by virtue of the fact that he has become a parent, is recognizing the great potential bottled up within every living being. He realizes, as well, that the potential needs to be developed by interactions with others, and with guidance from people who are more grown up. While recognizing this, the parent also becomes cognizant of his own development past childhood, and all the societal expectations placed on adults. Adults are the ones who are supposed to be strong, and unafraid. Children are supposed to be filled with doubt and awe and wonder and fears -- not debilitatingly so, but enough to encourage them to explore and learn and develop. The father in this poem still feels like a child, in some ways, but is becoming more aware of the child's need for him to be the grown up, to be confident, to be strong and a source of support. Embrace my fears, he tells her. Embrace my fears because its easier for children to work through them than it is for adults. Embrace teddy bears, be a small child. More important than *being a grown up*, is actually *growing up*. I'll be the adult for the both of us -- it's okay to be a child. Of course it's really okay to be a child when there really are grown ups around to care and love and support them, as the parent's hopes in this poem describe.

When I Say

Hakeves Hashishah-Asar - - Page 40

When I say the word "radish,"

my tongue starts to sting.

When I say the word "onion,"

I can eat anything!

To say the word "kohlrabi,"

is like yelling real loud.

To say "pea" is like

not even making a sound.

To open wide, and say "apple,"

my mouth is put to the test.

After saying "petrozilia,"

we all need to rest.

The word "bread" makes me feel

right at home, and that's fine.

"Watermelon" brings back

summer thoughts to my mind.

Saying "grapefruit" has no effect --

never will, never did.

But when I say "banana,"

I feel like a kid.

Saying "artichoke" makes my face

wrinkled and ravaged.

But the funniest thing,

is to say the word "cabbage."

The Tight-rope Walker

Hakeves Hashishah-Asar -- Page 42

When I'm a little sad,

And I'm not quite feeling all right,

I turn and look up above me,

And he's suddenly in sight.

The man who walks on a tight-rope.

He walks from there to here.

He walks on the sky, and he walks on the clouds,

So far, and yet so near.

The man who walks within the blue sky,

On the high-wire, narrow and long,

while his wife, she hopes and she prays,

That the narrow high-wire is strong.

The man walks and the man dances,

To and fro, and so on and on,

The man flies and, just like a bird,

He sings a beautiful song.

Whenever I'm a little sad,

And I'm not quite feeling all right,

I turn and look up above me,

And he's suddenly there in my sight.

My Commentary...

I think this poem is really meant for adults. The tightrope walker is really the child. The worrying wife is really the parent. The tightrope is a metaphor for childhood and growing up. Children are very good at not thinking twice about things which would scare the most confident of adults. It is common for children to be oblivious to the potentially dangerous circumstances surrounding some child's play. Additionally, some parents are often afraid to let go, and to allow their children to be independent people, growing into their own personalities. Sometimes the best thing a parent can actually do for her or his child is simply to sit back and pray that the tightrope is strong and that their child is, as well. Having confidence in one's child and in that child's choices and judgments, can only help to increase that child's self-confidence.

Little Quarrels

Hakeves Hashishah-Asar -- Page 44

(When I'm really bored, and there's nothing to play with,

I go outside to pick a fight with Giora, the neighbor's boy.)

Yesterday, I quarreled with Giora,

We were sitting alone on the lawn.

He said that his father was tall.

And I said, "He is short, man. Come on!"

Yesterday, I quarreled with Giora,

The neighbor's son, you know.

He said that people live on the moon.

I told him it just wasn't so.

Yesterday, I quarreled with Giora,

In the park, we were being quite loud.

He said that God was up in the sky.

I told him that it was a cloud.

Later on, I captured a snake.

"It's a lizard," he told me with power.

Yesterday I quarreled with Giora.

We argued almost half an hour.

My Commentary...

Children need to be engaged and stimulated intellectually, emotionally, and physically. In this poem, the young boy picks quarrels with his friends out of boredom. He's simply looking for an excuse to have a conversation, a debate, some intellectual stimulation. After each small quarrel, they're not mad enough at each other to find someone else with whom to play. They're not really even mad. They are bored. Children are constantly growing and developing, and they need to be challenged. This young boy is finding a way to educate himself concerning speech, cognitive development, interpersonal skills. One strong message for adults is not to allow children to be too bored. The boy's initiative and creativity work well for him in this poem. However, if left to his own devices for too long without supervision, encouragement, and guidance, he can develop into a regular "quarreler," as opposed to developing his debating skills and incorporating them into his personality.

Thunder And Lightning

Hakeves Hashishah-Asar - - Pages 48-49

Thunder and lightning, on a cold winter night,

Are not always the very same sound or same sight.

Thunder and lightning, lightning and thunder.

Sometimes near, sometimes far. It always makes me wonder...

Thunder and lightning

on wet rainy nights.

The thunder makes sounds,

and the lightning makes sights.

Some thunder is very scary,

and some thunder scares just a bit.

Some thunder is weak, and some thunder is strong,

and some thunder is *so* strong, that it...

...is too scary to hear all alone,

especially when no one's around.

But every once in a while,

I meet thunder that makes a nice sound.

Thunder and lightning, on a cold winter night,
are not always the very same sound or same sight.

My Commentary...

The child in this poem notices that lightning and thunder are not always the same -- there are different degrees of severity and frightfulness. Sometimes the loud thunder is pleasing, while sometimes it can be very frightening. As children grow and develop, they begin to develop a real sense of who they are, as defined by how they interact with the world, and the effects those interactions have upon them. The terms "lightning" and "thunder" are generic -- the child senses the nuances of sight and sound which help to distinguish between the various emotional reactions to those sights and sounds.

It's possible, however, that the lightning and thunder could be a metaphor for the actions and behaviors of children, as perceived by adults. This is an example of Gefen's brilliant talent for helping parents understand what children are not quite able to articulate. Perhaps Gefen writes that thunder is not always the same, so that a parent might begin to comprehend that all children who act out in some way, may not be doing so for the same reasons, and then not in all cases. On the surface, the actions and words of our children may appear to be generic: "She's just tired. He's just hungry." However,

we need to have the wherewithal to intuit that the motivations behind a child's acting out, can come from many different places. The more we understand our children and why they act the way they do, the more effectively we can communicate with them, and the more effectively we can model for them appropriate behavior.

Children, Today You Saw Mommy And Daddy

Hakeves Hashishah-Asar - - Page 50

Children, today you saw mommy and daddy

angry with each other in the kitchen, after lunch.

Daddy said all kinds of things and mommy was silent.

Daddy left the house and slammed the door very hard.

Later, he came back, and didn't say one word to mommy, and mommy almost started to

cry.

And you went to bed, children, and I want

you to know that after you fell asleep, mommy and daddy

made up and they hugged and they kissed and they made peace,

and they were very loving to each other.

Children, today you saw mommy and daddy

angry with each other in the kitchen, after lunch.

But don't pay attention to our anger,

and continue to grow.

More beautiful than we, wiser then we.

My Commentary...

Children model our behavior, whether or not we are cognizant of the fact that our behavior really is a model for our children. Especially in today's world, with children maturing both physically and intellectually at younger and younger ages, we adults often forget that the rate of their emotional development rarely coincides. The result is that we expect children to be able to discern which of our behaviors it is acceptable to emulate, and which ones it is not acceptable to emulate. That is, of course, if we are paying any attention at all. We don't evaluate highly emotionally charged situations, and then decide, incorrectly so, that children will know not to repeat those patterns. No, instead we just act on our emotions, not even realizing just how impressionable children really are, and just how incapable they are of just such discernment. It's human nature, it's instinct.

The last paragraph is just so beautiful, and offers such sound advice. But it is offered to a sleeping child. The encouragement to be peaceful and understanding and communicative, and the making-up part of the fight (if it really happened at all), are not seen by the child. The child learns quite well how to fight and not communicate. The child learns nothing about how to discuss, and to resolve difficult issues peacefully, and effectively.

Yesterday I found a rock...

Hakeves Hashishah-Asar - - Page 66

Yesterday I found a rock, a rock so smooth and grand.

Everyone said, "Throw it back outside." They just don't understand.

Mother told me, "This rock is so small. What a shame," she said. "You know...

If you throw it back outside, that rock just might begin to grow."

In the evening, through their window, I could hear the neighbors say,

"There goes that Gefen boy, collecting rocks again today!"

But I don't care. I don't pay attention to that kind of stuff.

Because it is this very rock, that I so very really love.

And the rock is always telling me some strange and curious things.

In the language rocks use most, "rock songs" to me it sings.

Yesterday, I found a rock, a rock so smooth and grand.

And I put it with the others, in the drawer of my night stand.

My Commentary...

This poem is not about rocks. It's about not understanding just how important some things are to others. Children confront new experiences and challenges with wonder, amazement, fear, hope, creativity, and a myriad of other feelings. As those new experiences become familiar experiences, children will be good at some and not so good at others. For the Gefen boy in this poem, collecting rocks is a hobby which is quite important to him. By belittling his interest in collecting rocks, even in a cute and seemingly harmless way as does his mother, the message received by the boy is that what is important to him, isn't really important at all, in the grand scheme of things. However, for the Gefen boy, nothing could be farther from the truth. True, rock collecting may not be the most interesting activity for some, and it may not be something which he will continue into his own adult years. However, adults need to find ways to encourage children to develop their interests into even more sophisticated activities. Rock collecting could lead to great discussions with children about geology, and other sciences. In this particular boy's case, assuming that the poem is autobiographical, the fact that the rock talks to him and sings to him would be a clear indication of his creative tendencies. Encouraging children to write those kinds of stories down, or draw pictures, or decorate the rocks, or build structures -- these are all ways of teaching children about learning and growing, without discounting their interests in what some adults might consider "trivial time-wasters."

The Closed Kindergarten

Hakeves Hashishah-Asar - - Page 72

Yesterday,

at five in the afternoon,

we walked with mother to the supermarket

and, on the way, we saw

that our kindergarten was closed.

The swings stood still

between the tall trees,

and the flowers seemed so small

and colorless.

The blocks were sleeping,

arranged neatly in their basket,

and there wasn't a single children

to build a tower with them.

And there wasn't a single teacher

to say what was allowed,

and what was forbidden.

And all of the books were arranged neatly on the shelf,

because there was no one to listen to a story.

It's not so nice

to see a closed kindergarten.

My Commentary...

This kindergarten is not only closed, it is literally lifeless, at least for the moment. The swings stand still, the flowers are small and colorless. The anthropomorphized blocks are sleeping, and the books are on the shelf not because there's no one to *read* them, rather, there is no one there to *hear* the stories that they have to tell. Adults see toys as objects, or tools, which certainly aid and enhance children's growth and development. Children, however, see toys and swings and books and trees and flowers as more than just tools or objects. Children see these things as interactive playmates. Adults *watch* television, or *read* a book, or *sit* on a swing or push others on a swing. Children *play with* the blocks, they *listen to* stories, they *swing* on the swings. The flowers and trees and even the blocks become more alive with the interaction of the children.

The Sixteenth Lamb

Hakeves Hashishah-Asar -- Page 74-75

Whenever I have trouble clearing my mind and falling asleep,

I sit up in my bed and I start in counting sheep.

The flock passes over my head, and then disappears behind me.

And every sheep looks exactly the same. Of each other, they all remind me.

One sheep, and then two sheep, and then three sheep, and then four...

Balls of wool, they all look alike. Sheep eight and nine pass by...and more...

But when the sixteenth lamb arrives, he'll stop and wander around me in bed.

He has no intention of joining the rest – he'll stay in my room instead.

I whisper to him, "Hey, sheep! Move on! Just this once, let me count every one!"

But he doesn't...and, usually, it's with this sixteenth lamb that my wait time for sleeping

is done.

CHAPTER 12 - WHAT'S LEFT OF ME

"Only after I was sure that my mother was completely dead, that she was never coming back, did I begin to recreate myself... But what's left of me, is only me."[49]

Gefen finally discovered himself. He also discovered that many of his childhood beliefs about his parents and about the world were not true. He stopped blaming everyone else for just being the people they were. He realized that when his mother and father did terrible things, it was often done subconsciously. They were not aware of who they really were, and so Gefen learned well how to feel guilty for the hardships of others.

Unlike his father Yisrael, who as an adult repeated the mistakes of Grandpa Zev, Gefen learned to break the chain of repetition. As Gefen notes, "The one good thing she did, despite it all [was to make] me and my sisters better parents."[50] He learned what not to do. Despite his parents and their issues, Gefen learned the messages which he has poured into every page and every poem of *Hakeves Hashishah-Asar*. His creations for children are meant to teach them at as young an age as possible, what he did not learn until he reached adulthood.

Although there is not one poem which could accurately represent his entire body of work, the poem *I Love* has a line in it which comes quite close. The boy is listing all of the things that he loves. At first, it seems like just a list of a few of his favorite things. However the last line is incredibly powerful: "More than anyone else, most of all -- I

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[49]Ibid., 200.

[50]Ibid., 201.

love ME!"[51] The boy in this poem can really appreciate all of the things he lists -- foods and people and relationships -- because he appreciates himself. Self-respect and self-worth are the basis for healthy relationships with others. Gefen was just barely able to learn those lessons, despite the overwhelming influences to the contrary. Adults need to ensure that children appreciate their own individual self-worth with every word and every action which we model for them. It's a monumental responsibility which is of monumental importance.

The very first word in the very first "scroll" of *Ishah Y'qarah* is "Mother." The phrase is "Mother, I hate you." The very last word in the very last "scroll" is also "Mother." However the phrase there is "I love you, Mother." Gefen contends that this book, filled with autobiographical content, is really about his Mother. And so it begins and ends, quite literally, with his mother. We learn something very important from the placement of these two phrases. With enough love and support it is possible for even the deepest wounds to begin to heal. As for the rest of the book, that is to say everything in between those two phrases, it teaches us the importance of trying to prevent those wounds from forming in the first place.

We must model appropriate behaviors and attitudes for our children. We must love them and cherish them. And they must be aware of it -- that's the tricky part.

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[51]Yehonatan Gefen, "I Love," in *Hakeves Hashishah-Asar* (Tel Aviv: Dvir Publishing House, 1992), 33.

Ishah Y'qarah - Pages 200-203

Only after I was sure that my mother was completely dead, that she was never coming back, did I begin to recreate myself. But erasing Mother's grandiosity did not erase the side-effect of this grandiosity, which was in most instances, and almost always, a deep existential depression, and self-destruction that gradually worsened from year to year.

But what's left of me, is only me.

Only after I understood that my father, subconsciously (despite the fact that he would never admit to even having such a thing) wanted to kill me, did I decide to divorce myself from him, to extract him from my life completely. And again, as the educated Alice Miller writes: "Where there had only been fearful emptiness or equally frightening grandiose fantasies, there now is unfolding an unexpected wealth of vitality. This is definitely not a return home, because home was never there; it is the finding of home, the building of home anew."[52]

Only while writing this book, after I grasped with my senses and consciousness, that my mother never was, only then did she begin to be. Her sickness was a sickness of their generation, that taught the next generation not according to what's in one's heart, but rather according to the needs of the nation. My mother was simply a little more sick than most mothers.

The one good thing she did, despite it all: she made me and my sisters better

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[52]Alice Miller, "The search for the true self," in *Reclaiming the Inner Child*, ed. Jeremiah Abrams (New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 1990).

parents. I believe that our children received as much attention, as much love physically and emotionally, that a parent can possibly give their child. And they indeed grew up to be happy people. Despite my depression and the feelings of guilt that my parents implanted so deeply and firmly inside of me, I want to think that my children and my sisters' children are happy and healthy in their souls.

Therefore, Mother, you did not die in vain.

You gave your tortured soul so that I could revolt and realize my own dreams, and not the dreams of the generation that came before me, and so that I could write my own poems and song, and not copy those of other people, no matter how right and exalted they might be.

I was very afraid to write this story of mine, this book, which actually was not written *about* my mother, but rather *for* my mother. The intelligent psychologist who has been treating me for some time, accompanied me during every step of the writing of these painful chapters.

In one of our sessions, he asked me about this book:

"Tell me, would you want your mother to read it?"

"She's dead."

"Yes, but if, wherever she is, as a dead woman, she were able to sit and read it..."

"No," I said, "I would die if she were to read it..."

I'm not afraid at all of my father, the cowardly one who is alive, reading, finally, what I, and not just I, think of him. Someone should have told him all of this a long time ago. But my embittered and dead mother, she still frightens me plenty. The psychologist

smiled at me and said:

"Maybe you can look at it this way, Yonatan: There are people who donate their bodies to science. Think of your parents as donating their psyches to science, in order to prevent, perhaps, the emotional suffering of children with parents like yours, and there still are more than just a few of them around. I see them all the time."

Psychology, as we know, is not a science, but the therapist made it easier for me when he gave me permission to grasp at this quasi-moral straw, and to write my mother and to write me. Deep in my soul, I know that writing this book changed my mother, in a reverse process, from a dead woman into a living woman. After two years of living with her letters, conversations with her friends, and primarily my correspondence with Esther, that abstract angel came down to me and became a creature, a creation I could touch and to feel. Finally, I was able to embrace my mother and not relate to her the way I would to any ordinary "lovely woman."

Moshav Nahalal, December, 1998. This book could go on forever, but I decided to end it. With the stack of papers I printed out on my printer, I'm driving my friend's black Jeep, alone, through the valley of my childhood, and over the hills between Haifa and Nazareth, that as kids we used to call "The Mountains." The first rain has fallen, the cyclamen plant bulbs in the cemetery above our Moshav have already begun to sprout leaves and flowers. All around, the linden trees, aromatic *marveh* shrubs, thickets of acacia and pines. Absolute silence. Occasionally, a bird chirps, but immediately stops, as if it also understands that this is not an appropriate place for chirping.

Now that we are grown up, the mountains seem smaller. The village which once

was my whole world, is now just a small circle of people, who are trying to spend an agricultural life together. But even after I was in the parks, and in the forests and in the most spectacular canyons in America and Africa, the hill with our cemetery is, in my eyes, one of the most beautiful places in the world.

Many times, at memorial services, or when raising the family tombstones, I would ask myself why, particularly in our collective agricultural settlement, the houses of the dead are more beautiful than the houses of the living. I remember how a few years earlier I had gone to Kibbutz Mishmarot, for the funeral of the mother of a personal friend, singer/songwriter Shalom Hanoch. The graves and the tombstones appear suddenly in the middle of a blossoming orchard. That place is so tranquil, and pastoral, green and fragrant, that you find yourself excited and it becomes difficult to grieve. Another friend of mine, who was born on this Kibbutz, the poet Meir Ariel, said to me: "Look, look, Yonatan, look how healthy it is to die here..." So, too, in Nahalal, the dead get the most beautiful and blossoming area. Buried in the best place, is Uncle Moshe Dayan. Right next to the fence, and if you stand next to the grave, you can look down on the village, and on the valley, until the Carmel Mountains stop you, and kiss the blue sky until it hurts.

In memoirs and interviews later in his life, Moshe told of a recurring dream he had almost every night (if he were able to fall asleep, of course): He finds himself lying down in a burial cave, at the archaeological site of the old city of Beit She'arim. It's dark and pleasant there. At a particular point, he creeps up a hidden stairway, and comes to the hill with his cemetery, to the petrified forest above Nahalal, and attains absolute

tranquility, in eternal rest.

In conversations with me and in his books, Uncle Moshe told how he was not afraid of death. Maybe that's what made him the pre-eminent military Commander and courageous soldier, who was the first to go into battle, leading his troops, usually even without a helmet, and always victorious.

Mother's grave is in the center of the cemetery, and the view from it is basically the tombstones of the other dead people. Mother was also not afraid of death, but she was very afraid of life. I stand with my dangerous stack of papers, and a small bouquet of cyclamen flowers I picked in "The Mountains," despite the fact that it's strictly forbidden by the Society for the Protection of Nature, and here I am, seized by an attack of the hereditary recitation-disease, and I recite a line from a song by Annie Lennox: "Dying is easy, it's living that scares me to death."[53] I make a note to myself that I'll have to be weaned from this, too, like that other good friend of mine who died, Meir Ariel, said.

It's beautiful here, Mother, and you are beautiful here, as well. The two hundred pages you see under my arm -- that's you and I meeting, finally. You've been dead for 31 years, now, but you've never been more alive than during the last two years, in which I took you in and learned to know you, and to know me.

Thank you, Mother. Forgive me, Mother.

I love you, Mother.

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[53]Annie Lennox, "Cold," on *Diva*, BMG, audiocassette.

February 14, 2001
Ms. Marlo Thomas
Office Phone: 212-826-5970
Via Fax: 212-754-2193

Dear Ms. Thomas:

My name is Eric Lazar, and I will be ordained as a Rabbi on May 20, 2001. I want to thank you, in advance, for taking the time to read this letter, and also to let you know how wonderfully helpful everyone at your office and at your Foundation office, with whom I have spoken, has been. I am grateful for your willingness to address some questions I have for you.

I am writing my Rabbinic Thesis on Modern Israeli Children's literature. The main focus of my thesis is to evaluate some recent children's literature form Israel, comparing it to the extremely high "Free To Be...You and Me" standards which you and your friends set back in the early 1970's.

Having owned the book and cassette since the very day each was released (I only wish there were a way to own the video, as well), I have listened to and read your anthology more than just a few times (it's one of the few cassettes I currently keep in my car). I'm convinced that every word and phrase and title and message, were all intentionally and so cleverly well-crafted. However, there are some things I've noticed, which I suspect may be more a result of my reading too much into it, rather than an actual plan from the start.

I'm hoping that you might be able to answer some questions and/or verify the validity of some of my observations. The better I understand the thought process and the care behind your genius creation, the more critically I will be able to examine the works of Israeli authors.

Here are just some of my observations:

1 - Every time a woman and man sing together on the tape, the man sings the high harmony.

2 - Almost every time "boys" and "girls" are mentioned in any given song, "girls" are mentioned first.
- In every verse of "Glad to Have a Friend Like You," the girl tells the boy, before the boy tells the girl.
- Also in "Glad to Have a Friend Like You," the last verse says "...and the bears were their *girls* and *boys*..."
- Before Delilah Bush's Grandma comes to visit, the story *first* tells of her *mother* going away on business trips, and *only then* does it mention that her father takes an occasional business trip, as well.
- Atalanta ran across the field in three minutes, faster than anyone had run across it before. Little John ran across the field in three minutes, more quickly, *he thought*, than anyone had run across it before. (This distinction is made only on the tape, not in the book.)

3 - Rosie Greer was a perfectly brilliant choice to sing "It's All Right to Cry."

In Letty Cottin Pogrebin's "A Note to Parents, Teachers, and Other Grown-up Friends," on pages X and XI of the "two-books-in-one" edition, she defines very clearly the goals of the project. However, my interest lies more in the decisions you made as to how to shape/choose/create/present the material in order to reach those goals.

Is it fair to say that you thought of every stereotypical societal expectation of gender roles and gender related speech patterns, and then purposefully did your best to completely turn them on their head?

As I point out my own observations to my friends and colleagues, I have yet to meet anyone who has noticed all the subtleties that I have. They still get the messages, but the impact of those messages becomes even more powerful once they take note of the well-crafted presentation.

And that's the real genius of your project. I truly believe that every adult who cares for a child, and every child who is cared for by an adult, ought to be required to own "Free To Be...You And Me" (and "Free To Be...A Family"). My friends whom I have enlightened as to the careful thought behind the masterful presentation, all agree with me, even without recognizing all of the detail I have outlined. And children, as well as adults who may not quite get all of the lessons being taught, still enjoy it all, as well, because it's quality entertainment in its own right.

I hope you'll forgive me for pouring on the praise (I really could go on and on), but it all leads back to my initial purpose in writing to you – to ask you some questions:

1 - Am I reading too much into your anthology, or was every word and phrase considered as carefully as I suspect?

2 - Are there any other presentational choices/styles or production directives, which I missed, which were implemented intentionally to shape the work?

3 - Do you have any suggestions as to questions I might ask myself as I study the methods/processes behind the creation of the work of Israeli authors? (I'm focusing my thesis on the brilliant anthology called "*Hakeves Hashishah-Asar*," or "The Sixteenth Lamb," by Yehonatan Gefen.)

4 - Any other comments/remarks/suggestions you may have for me, as I finish writing the first chapter of my thesis, an analysis and evaluation of "Free To Be...You And Me," would be greatly appreciated.

Again, I am so appreciative of your willingness to help, and I am grateful for the time you are taking to read this and respond.

Thank you, in advance, for whatever insights and information you may be able to offer me.

I will gladly forward a copy of my thesis to you, if you are interested.

Sincerely,

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