THE ZERO ILLUSION

Table of Contents:

DECISION TO KILL

I was taken from the courthouse back to the Nitzan detention prison in Ramla. It was there I started to digest the significance of my sentence – life imprisonment. I realized that I would only leave prison in a coffin, and that my life was over. I had no intention of appealing the sentence because I knew that I deserved harsh punishment.

After two weeks at Nitzan, I was transferred to my permanent home, Sharon Prison near Tel-Mond. The transition from the scent of the orange groves surrounding the prison to the smell of Lysol disinfectant that greeted me upon entering the solitary confinement cell was short and bitter.

In fact, it wasn't solitary confinement, but a separation cell. Despite the similarity, solitary confinement serves as a punishment whereas the separation cell serves to keep a prisoner separated from the other inmates. When I entered the cell I could see no difference between the two. The room was about four yards long and a yard and a half wide. When I went in I felt I was suffocating. A rusty iron bed was attached to the floor near the door and in the far corner was "the bathroom" without a partition. A hole in the floor served as the toilet and as an outlet for the water from the shower. In order to avoid suicides, the shower water came straight out of a hole in the wall without a pipe. There was a small sink in the right hand corner, which had a pipe leading from under it to the toilet hole.

The walls were covered in tiles about six feet high and the upper parts of the walls were covered with drawings and expressions in Hebrew and Arabic. The walls were similar to those of public toilets, but the drawings and expressions were a bit more refined.

A heavy metal door closed the room. Its upper half was made of heavy wire-mesh and there was an opening in the lower part for food. There was a small red button near the door that served as a distress signal. When an inmate pushed the button during the night, a light went on in the prison's central control room and a guard was sent in to see what was happening.

All in all, there were eleven separation cells along one corridor that was locked with a heavy iron door. During the daytime, a guard sat in a little booth near the door and supervised the cells.

"In your case, solitary is not a punishment," the guard told me. "We put all new prisoners into separation cells for a few days, to figure them out."

In my case, as I was later told, my being locked up in the separation cell gave the prison management time to find me a cell with veteran prisoners, who were supposed to help me adapt to my new home for the next few dozen years.

The prison warden knew some details about my past, and these details quickly became known to the prison personnel and then to the inmates. Rumors had it that I had been a spy for the Mossad, turned double agent and then committed murder. They had no idea who I'd killed, how or why.

The true story is very different.

My name is Ofer Tal. I was born in a well-established kibbutz in the Bet-She'an valley and grew up as a privileged child, like most kibbutz children at the time. I left school after the tenth grade. I wasn't a bad student, but I had no patience for the kibbutz school. Since I was a strong young man and liked hard work, I started to work as a porter at the kibbutz granary. At the same time, against all kibbutz conventions, I bought myself a motorbike, which I rode to the external high school in Afula, a nearby town.

When still a teenager, I had the looks of an impressive man. I had my first sexual experience at the age of thirteen with Nurit, my brother's friend, who was twenty-two at the time. She was a slim good-looking blond with short hair, but not an amazing beauty. When she smiled two dimples gave her an aura of grace and charm. Every time she came to visit my brother, she gave me looks that I had not known so far. She glanced at me out of the corner of her eye with a combination of smile and passion. One day Nurit showed up at Erez's room, supposedly looking for him. She knew that he was on reserve duty, but acted as if she had come to see him. We began talking and she complimented me on the maturity and depth of my conversation with her. I was not naïve, but I was definitely surprised when she asked me whether I had ever slept with a girl and if she attracted me. I answered her with a measure of nerve and over-confidence: "No, you will be my first, and yes, I like you."

I was her lover for about a year, until she went away to a teachers' college and left the area. Three years later, when I was attending the external high school in Afula, the literature and bible teacher became ill. The substitute teacher – to my amazement – was none other than my old friend Nurit. Although she was already married, we had an affair for about a year.

I was one of the best students at the external high school. In addition, I was very strong and exceptionally brave. I knew no fear. Whenever the boys returned home from nightly activities, they preferred to walk along the lit

highway. I would choose a shortcut between the dark orchards. I preferred to walk in the dark, because that way I could see without being seen.

I was also an exception in my way of thinking and speaking. I never conformed to social conventions. For instance, when I joined the army, like many kibbutz youngsters at the time, I wanted to become a pilot and was even summoned for pilot training. But, because I didn't want to become enslaved by the military and sign up for five years, I gave up the course and instead volunteered for the navy commando.

I loved tense situations. They stimulated me intellectually and physically. When I was a teenager I climbed dangerous high mountains and drove cars and motorcycles over the speed limit. I felt that I had to join an army unit that involved operational and covert activity. Unfortunately, after three months in the commando-training course, only four of the original thirty remained. So, the course was postponed for a few months, and I transferred to a special paratrooper commando unit. It was there that I learned how to quietly enter secured places, sabotage, and retreat in secrecy and eliminate people in varied ways.

One of the missions I participated in was to infiltrate an army headquarters in Egypt and eliminate its inhabitants. Another mission was during the War of Attrition. The plan was to infiltrate a missile base across the Suez Canal and kill all the soldiers. The elimination team, consisting of seven soldiers, was landed by helicopter about eight miles from the target, to which we marched in the dark. We cut the fences, entered the base and killed the guards with knives or by breaking their necks. One of my teammates was called Goldfinger. He was a seven-feet tall giant, expert at breaking necks. He was always very concerned about the pets at our camp, but killed Arabs easily.

After we killed all the guards, we moved from hut to hut and from tent to tent, and quietly killed all the innocently sleeping soldiers. We left eighty corpses of Egyptian soldiers behind us, and hurried back to the helicopter that had returned to take us home.

During that time I had the weirdest experience. I surprised an Egyptian soldier, grabbed him from behind, and killed him by plunging a knife into his chest. As his blood spurted out, I had an enormous erection. I was disturbed by this and thought that I had become a pervert.

That wasn't the first time I had killed a man by shooting or knifing him, and I found it enjoyable. I was told that I would have a crisis after the first time, but I never had one. All I did was kill the enemies of my country. That, at least, was what I thought then.

Whenever I traveled from the kibbutz to Tel Aviv and saw the lights of the Geha junction, I felt that I wanted to kill all the Arabs. For me, the lights symbolized the State of Israel. I didn't hate Arabs, but I thought they had to be killed. It wasn't hatred of a different race, but hatred of the enemy. I would kill French or British, just as much, if the need arose.

I also took part in intelligence operations behind enemy lines. In one of them, I entered Syria with my team and an intelligence officer for monitoring purposes. We penetrated through the Golan Heights, near Hamat Gader, twenty miles into Syria, and linked onto the Syrian-Jordanian telephone line. After three days in enemy territory, we received an order to break into a guard tent located about fifteen miles from where we were hiding, and retrieve important documents from a safe.

The operation was performed with precision. We arrived at night, shot the guard with a pistol with a silencer, eliminated the two other soldiers, blew up the safe and took the documents.

I took part in about twenty commando operations, in each of which I killed at least one person. All in all I killed about a hundred people during my army service. Six by strangulation, about twenty by knife and I shot dozens at long and short range. It was my daily lot. It was the period. Terrorists infiltrated the country all over, aiming at destruction and panic. All means were legitimate. The security forces reacted in ways and at times they found appropriate.

One of the more famous operations I participated in was the destruction of airplanes at the Beirut airport. My job was as bodyguard of the operation commander, who later became the Chief of Staff and a minister in the Israeli government.

Towards the end of my army service, I was appointed senior instructor at the IDF School of Warfare. I taught officers of commando units how to parachute form helicopters, night sneaking and special sabotage: booby traps in pens and telephones that blow up upon use, doors that explode when opened, etc.

I was discharged from the army at the age of twenty-two, left the kibbutz and moved into a small roof-apartment in Tel Aviv. Less than two weeks after my discharge, there was a letter in the mail from the Prime Minister's office summoning me to some tests. I realized at once that I was being recruited to the Mossad. I was attracted by the aura of secret agents. At the time, James Bond movies were very popular, and I definitely wanted to resemble the glorified British agent. I loved adventure and was very excited when I read the summons. Before I even went to the interview, before I knew how much they'd pay me and what I would have to do, I was more than willing to work for the Mossad.

I completed various tests, after which I was stationed in a unit based at Gedera, a small town south of Tel Aviv. It was there I participated in the agents' course, and practiced shooting, intelligence work, disguise and make-up. I learned, for instance, that one of a person's most distinctive characteristics is his walk. One can be recognized from a great distance by their walk, an out of habit a walk is very difficult to change for long. I learned to put an object into my shoe to cause discomfort, and thus a limp. I learned to fasten a belt under my armpit and chest, which pulls on the shoulder and as a result changes the body posture. I learned how to use hard-to-detect make-up. For instance, to put cotton-wool under the lip, which fills out the cheeks and distorts the face, or to insert cotton-wool in the nose to broaden it, or to stick the ears to the head with glue, or to used colored contact lenses to change eye color.

After the course I was attached to the "cleaners" unit, the Mossad's extermination unit. Although some people in the unit worked in pairs or larger groups, I insisted on always working alone. I found it difficult to rely on others. I knew that group decisions, even in pairs, are problematic. I realized that most of the decisions I would have to make would be under pressure of time and mental stress, factors that I knew I could handle. I was afraid that the decision making process in a group would complicate, prolong and eventually reduce the quality of performance and the chance that the mission is completed.

I was pleased with my new role, to eliminate the enemies of the state: members of terrorist organizations, their arms suppliers, Nazis and others like them. I knew that I would be good at my job, and I craved the heart-warming inner glory, the outcome of a job well done.

My first job was to terminate an Arab in Switzerland. I was given a name and an address. I didn't know who the man was or about his past. I only knew his future. The flight was with an organized group by a regular El-Al flight. An elderly couple sat next to me. It was their first trip abroad after many years of having saved for it. The man was terrified and his wife tried to calm him down.

"I'm sure the plane won't take off," he told her. "Did you see how much luggage everyone brought? I'm not sure they weighed the suitcases properly."

"Calm down. Planes don't just fall out of the sky."

"Really? And what killed three hundred people last week after they took off from an airport in Spain? A bull-fight?"

“More people are killed in car accidents than airplane accidents. And that doesn’t stop you from driving. I read that more people are killed in accidents on their way to the airport than in flights.”

Her husband remained upset all the way to Zurich. Luckily I had to kill someone in Europe and not in South America. A long flight with the neurotic man and his endlessly reassuring wife would have driven me mad.

I traveled with a Canadian passport and under false identity. When the other group members continued the organized tour, I went to Bern, rented a hotel room not far from the Arab’s house, and staked him out from a coffee shop nearby. Three days later, when I was sure he was out, I broke into his apartment with some apparatus and materials, in order to install the bomb that would eliminate him.

There was an antique lamp next to his bed made of a glass cylinder open at the top with a bulb screwed into it. I filled the cylinder with fuel I had brought with me in a small bottle and drilled a little hole in the bulb. I also drilled a hole in the old-fashioned gas pipe in the room, which caused a slight gas leak.

The Arab came home, turned on the lamp and was killed in a giant explosion. Most of the apartment was ruined as a result of the gas blast. The investigators never suspected that it was deliberate sabotage.

I saw the explosion from the nearby coffee shop and even ran “to help” so that I could make sure the man was dead. I was reassured that he was completely burned. Pleased with the results of my work, I took a week’s vacation, which I spent at Baden-Baden in the hot baths. I romanced some German ladies and then returned home.

I continued to live in Tel Aviv, and occasionally, once every two weeks or two months, I would be called to duty. One of my missions almost ended in my death. I was told that an Arab that had to be terminated lived at a certain address in Rome. It was in an area of light industry and commerce. On the ground floor were a shop and a clothing factory. On the second floor was a sports-shoes shop. The Arab lived on the third floor. This was an advantage, because in the afternoons and evenings there were no neighbors around. I planned to go to his apartment, ring the doorbell, and as soon as I saw him look through the peephole, to shoot him through it.

I rang the doorbell. He asked: “Who’s there?” and put his eye to the peephole. I shot and killed him. Immediately after the shot, I kicked the door in, to make sure that the man was dead. And then I found out that he had not been alone. Our intelligence people were not aware that he habitually put up members of

Arab and European terrorist organizations, such as the Red Brigades or Bader-Meinhof, who supported Arab terror.

As soon as I entered the apartment, shots were fired at me from the living room. My jaw was injured. I shot the shooter, killed him, shot another man who tried to shoot me and killed him too. It was six PM and the place was somewhat dark. Suddenly another man burst out of the bathroom shooting at me. He hit me in the groin and ran into the other room to hide. Despite my double injury, I knew I had to kill the fourth man in fear for my life, and also out of a sense of duty. Though I am normally calm and cool-headed, I was working mainly on my instincts.

I was wearing a vest under my coat. I took it off and used it to bandage my groin. Despite the enormous pressure, I calculated how long it had been since I entered the apartment and assumed that the police would be there in a matter of minutes because of the gunshot sounds. I barely made it to my feet. I pushed the door to the room where the man had hidden open with my shoulder and caught him trying to escape through the window. I shot him in the back, confirmed his death, confirmed that the other three weren't breathing and took off. It was very difficult for me to walk. Even worse was my fear that my penis was injured.

I made a call to a number I had in case of emergency and was told to get to the amusement park. It was hard for me to get into the taxi so I pretended to be drugged. I was picked up at the amusement park and taken to the embassy doctor. He decided to send me back to Israel for treatment. A compartment was cleared on an El-Al flight, and early the next morning I was already being treated at the Hadassah hospital in Jerusalem.

On another mission in the US I also got into trouble and was almost apprehended. I flew to New York and then on to Miami. I called the local Israeli consulate, and received from my contact there a suitcase with forged documents, a weapon and other details about the man I was supposed to kill. Going by the age and picture, I assumed the man was a Nazi. The name was John Downs, not his original name, of course. I had a similar case with a Nazi called Carlos Birman, who I killed in Cali, Columbia.

On my first night in the US I stole a car and exchanged the license plates with those of a parked vehicle. That's what I used to do anywhere in the world if I had to use a car. I never used a rental car, and never drove the same vehicle for more than a day.

I drove to the man's residence in one of Miami's more opulent neighborhoods. A hedge surrounded the neighborhood and there was a guarded barrier at the entrance. The guard took down my license-plate number and greeted me. I

drove to the Nazi's street and saw that down the street lived a family by the name of Bailey. I went up to the house that said "Downs", rang the bell and asked where the Bailey's lived. The Cuban maid barely spoke English so she called someone. I asked him about the Bailey's house and whether this was his house. The man was very polite, and told me that he was the owner's secretary. After a few minutes of small talk, I said good-bye.

During this short visit I managed to find out that in addition to the maid and the secretary there was a bodyguard dressed as a chauffer, who was sitting in a fancy car parked in front of the house.

I decided to terminate the Nazi while he slept. I didn't know where his bedroom was, and I couldn't find a good place from which to survey the house. It was a residential neighborhood with protected yards. On the first night I climbed a tree across the street in a neighbor's yard. I tried to find where the man's bedroom was. I sat on the tree until two in the morning, but saw nothing. The next night I climbed the tree again, and at three AM saw the man arrive home. I detected his bedroom by the lights. I waited up the tree another hour, and then descended quietly, entered the yard, approached the bedroom window and dismantled the magnets that were part of the alarm system. I got in through the window, shot the man at a four-inch range and left through the window.

Unfortunately I touched one of the magnets that was still attached to the alarm system and set it off. A terrible up-and-down siren sounded, with flashing lights throughout the house.

I was forced to make an emergency getaway. Security patrol cars were chasing my car within the neighborhood compound. At the exit, next to the guard booth, there was a wooden barrier, like in parking lots. It was down when I came to it, but driving fast I broke through it and drove to the city center. Just like in the movies.

The security company had notified the police about the incident and I could hear the police-car sirens pursuing me. I came to an impoverished neighborhood with three- and four-story buildings, abandoned the car, changed all my clothes for clean ones I had with me, threw my old clothes into a dumpster on the street, and started walking towards the city center. On my way I crossed a lush park and again heard the police sirens. It was already seven-thirty in the morning, and from my hiding place behind a dense bush, I saw the policemen gathering for a search. I started to run, using the trees and shrubs to hide from the police, and exited onto one of the nearby streets. Because I was sweating and my clothes were dirty although I had changed them an hour ago, I went into a clothing store, bought new clothes, shaved

with my electric razor, and left the store looking completely different. I strolled to the train station, bought a ticket to New York, traveled for three stops, got off the train, and took a bus to Houston, Texas. When I got to Houston, I took a train to Flagstaff, Arizona, and as soon as I got there I got on a bus to Bullhead, a gambling town in Nevada. From there I traveled to Los Angeles, spent the night in a smelly motel on the outskirts of the city, and the next day called the Israeli consulate. Within an hour someone arrived with clothes, an airline ticket and money, and that same day I flew home.

That was my first visit to the US – four days of constant pursuit.

My last visit to the states also ended with the death of people, but this time it was criminal murder.

After I left the Mossad, I married Relli, we had a son and I found a job as chief security officer of Bank Leumi. During the Yom Kippur war in 1973 I fought with the paratroopers in the Suez Canal area. I was on reserve duty for eight months, and among other operations also in the gory battle to capture the Serapheum camp across the canal. This battle was a breaking point – it was the first time I lost my faith in the army command. Until then I had always taken part in intelligent operations, well planned to the finest detail. Serapheum was a horrible battle, exhibiting total lack of control and completely unprepared. Soldiers scuttled around in the trenches. When the first was shot and fell, another took his place, and so on. Dozens of men were killed or severely wounded. One of my friends, a bearded sergeant, took a direct hit to the chest by a bazooka. After the battle I helped collect his remains, and his head, which was severed from his body, I picked up gently by the beard and put in a sack.

After the war I returned to Tel Aviv, but not to my previous life. I was like in a state of combat stress reaction. I had no patience, was rude to my bosses and to the bank clients, and about a month after I returned I was fired, and rightly so. My relationship with Relli also deteriorated. Although I wasn't physically violent towards her, I was certainly verbally abusive. I felt she was getting sick of me, and so was I. It was less than a year after the war when we decided to divorce. I left her everything and took off for the US.

In Los Angeles I stayed with a kibbutz classmate, Sagi, an ex-officer in the Golani reconnaissance unit. Sagi was a short stocky fellow. He had a square chin, which to some signified determination and to others – stubbornness. During his military service Sagi was nicknamed "Gorilla" because of his body-build and hairiness, although no one dared call him that to his face.

Sagi received me in his home willingly and with friendliness, and after about a month I started working at all kinds of odd jobs, during which I met Robert and

Phyllis, a well-established couple with two kids. I started work as a gardener in their home. Two weeks later I moved in with them and we became good friends. The three of us went out together often. Robert and I used to drink together almost every evening. Once I even went to Hawaii with Robert for a week's vacation all expenses paid.

One evening after dinner in the luxurious restaurant of the Honolulu Hilton, Robert asked me if I knew an ex-military Israeli who would be willing to kill someone for money. I was surprised at the question, but since I felt obligated to Robert and Phyllis for their friendship and generosity, I didn't ask any questions and promised Robert that I'd make inquiries and get back to him.

When we returned to California I asked Sagi if he knew an Israeli criminal who lived in Los Angeles and would be willing to kill for money. Sagi, who knew about some of my exploits, said: "For half a million dollars I would do it, if you take part in it too."

I told Robert that for half a million dollars it could be arranged. A week later Robert told me that the most he could pay was three hundred thousand dollars. In the same conversation, when I put some pressure on him, he told me that for that price two people had to be killed. To my amazement I found out that these two people were Phyllis's' elderly parents, Stanley and Joyce Kelly, who lived in a secluded house in Big Sur, California.

I asked for a few days and consulted with Sagi. With cynical humor he said to me: "Instead of getting half a million and killing one person, the price is down to three hundred thousand for two people. We should do it quickly before the price deflates even more."

The truth is that I was a bit surprised by Sagi's determination, but I informed Robert that the operation would take place within a few weeks and asked for an advance of $50,000. I left Robert's house and moved back in with Sagi. We bought an Uzi submachine-gun for $1,800 from an ex-Israeli drug dealer. Sagi, with typical cynicism said: "This will be an all-made-in-Israel murder."

On Saturday we went to scout the area where our victims lived. We drove in Sagi's car and avoided talking about what lay ahead. We took route 101, exited at San Luis Obispo, where we had lunch at McDonald's, and moved over to route 1. The view was amazingly beautiful.

Although the mission was to reconnoiter the access routes, entry and escape to the future victims' home, Sagi suggested we visit the Hearst Castle that belonged to the newspaper magnate, which was on a hill overlooking the ocean. While viewing the treasures in the mansion, Sagi told me that Hearst's granddaughter had been kidnapped for ransom by terrorists, and that some

time later had been spotted in a video recording of a bank robbery, as a member of the organization that robbed the bank. Sagi told me the story implying that anyone could become a criminal in the right circumstances and for the right price.

We continued up the coast from there. A few miles before the Kelley's house, we spotted a sign that said "Esalen Institute, By Reservation Only". Sagi had never heard of the place, but I recognized it from stories I had heard from the kibbutz psychologist. This special place, which in the sixties was the center of the opposition to the Vietnam War, served as a campus for workshops in various areas.

The elderly couple's house was hidden in woods with a stream next to it. It was five in the afternoon and the sun was just setting. The place was peaceful and pastoral. From the road, the house and a few cabins scattered in the grounds, were visible.

After we inspected and studied all the details we needed, we agreed to return the following week and perform the killing.

And that is what we did. In cold blood. The couple was murdered in their sleep. I don't think it's important to say who did the shooting and who covered him from the doorway. We both committed murder.

Although the FBI suspected that Robert and Phyllis had commissioned the murder in order to gain a huge inheritance, the mystery was not solved for many years. Since I was known to be their good friend, the police interrogated me at length. As my alibi I claimed that I had spent that night with Sagi at his home in Los Angeles.

Sagi and I returned to Israel with the money and kept our secret.

THE PRISONER'S DILEMMA

On one of my rare visits to my parents on the kibbutz, I saw a beautiful young girl near the volunteers' quarters. She seemed about twenty-five, a tall voluptuous blond, dressed in tight shorts and a T-shirt that showed her navel, and it was obvious she wasn't Israeli. She was hanging her washing on a line strung between two trees. When she saw me she smiled pleasantly and said "Good afternoon."

It had been a long time since I picked up a girl, and I don't think I would have picked her up, although I really liked her, if she hadn't spoken so friendlily. I could have answered with a "good afternoon" of my own and continued on my way, but I mustered the courage to ask: "Are you American?"

It turned out that Barbara, that was her name, came from Monterey, a city in California not far from the home of the murdered couple. I naturally didn't tell her about the murder, and we started talking about life in the states and on the kibbutz. She invited me to her room, made me a cup of coffee, and after we talked all night long, she packed her things and moved in with me in my rented apartment in Tel Aviv.

We got married a few months later. Because Barbara wasn't Jewish, we flew to Cyprus and had a civil ceremony there. We spent the next week vacationing in the lovely Trodros Mountains.

My married life with Barbara was pleasant and calm. She worked as a waitress and I went back to my job as a security officer in a bank. Barbara was very patient with my moods, and accepted my sometimes depressive and usually silent behavior without rancor or anger. I loved her deeply, and a year after our marriage our son, Tom, was born.

Eight years after Sagi and I returned to Israel, the Los Angeles police arrested the drug dealer that had sold us the weapon. In exchange for a reduced sentence, the man told them that he had sold an Uzi submachine gun to an Israeli who lived in the city and supplied quite an accurate description of Sagi.

The Israeli police picked us up a week later. The Americans requested our extradition, but due to a law passed at the initiative of Prime Minister Menahem Begin, Israeli criminals who were expected to receive the death penalty were not extradited to foreign countries. Sagi and I were kept in separate prisons – he at "Abu Kabir" and I at "Nitzan".

Barbara came to see me in prison. Her expression was frozen and severe. Without greeting me she asked through clenched lips: "Did you do it?" When

she saw my face after her question, she didn't wait for a reply, got up and left the visitors' room. I have not seen her since. The very same day, she took Tom and returned to her parents' home in the US. A year later, after I had already been sentenced, I signed the divorce papers and relinquished any contact with my son.

I decided to deny any connection to the murder story, and to make my case stronger - I didn't hire a lawyer. The police investigators told me that Sagi had confessed and incriminated me, and that if I didn't cooperate and come clean, he would go free and I would be sentenced to life.

I ignored all their warnings. I was sure that Sagi wouldn't confess and totally convinced that he would never turn me in.

My parents, who had aged twenty years in two weeks, also didn't know about the murder, of course. I didn't confess to them because I was afraid that my telephone calls were monitored, but mainly because I didn't want to cause them pain. In their naivety, they believed me. And perhaps it wasn't naivety but self-persuasion. In their hearts they may have known that I was guilty, and only put on an act for others, the kibbutz members and myself, as if they had no doubts about my innocence.

My father and mother were both holocaust survivors. He had managed to escape from a concentration camp and join the partisans. During one of the actions against the Germans he was injured in the leg, which caused him to limp all his life. Due to his injury, he was awarded a small disability pension by the Ministry of Defense, and received about fifty dollars a month.

The kibbutz institutions were not aware of this money for many years. About two years before I was arrested, the person in charge of the mail in the kibbutz, by mistake or deliberately, opened the envelope with the check. Although most kibbutz members had an additional income, there was a great deal of resentment against my father, and an unequivocal demand was made that he transfer all of the money he had received for his disability to the kibbutz, retroactively.

My father refused, and the kibbutz secretariat threatened him with legal action. My parents stopped eating breakfast and supper in the kibbutz' dining hall. They had lunch at a corner table in the dining hall – my mother arriving from the laundry where she worked and my father arriving on his old bike from the assembly table at the electronics factory.

That was my parents' social status – outcasts in the kibbutz – when the murder affair I was involved in blew up. Despite my opinion, my parents requested that the kibbutz hire the services of a first-rate criminal lawyer.

They were asked to attend a meeting of the kibbutz secretariat, to which they came in a state of humiliation. One of the secretariat members, a young economist, strongly opposed the involvement of the kibbutz in the expenses of one who was no longer a member. Another woman said that she thought they should help my parents, on condition they give the kibbutz all of the disability pension money my father had received.

My parents sat quietly and suffered the procedure of kibbutz democracy, until Gil, a guy of about thirty, who was an Economics and Business Management student, opened his mouth.

"Our society is measured by its attitude to the weak and needy. No one around this table would want to be in their place. This is not the time for wrangling and settling accounts. We must help them with the lawyer's fee, transportation and anything else they may need."

Gil spoke quietly and amiably. The secretariat members who had spoken before him hid their faces. After so many tears of sorrow, my parents shed one tear of joy.

The kibbutz' secretary general and the other members of the secretariat supported Gil's proposal, but decided that the final decision would be brought to the forum of the kibbutz general assembly. My parents did not attend the meeting that was held in the dining hall on Saturday night. They waited fearfully and anxiously in their room in the old-timers' neighborhood. They were aware from their long years of experience, that the kibbutz could still turn its back on them.

The kibbutz secretary opened the meeting with information about an outbreak of the foot-and-mouth disease, and asked the members to refrain from inviting guests to the kibbutz. They then discussed the main item of the evening – the payment of members' fees to the United Workers Party. The secretariat's proposal that the payments be sustained passed by a slim majority of the old-timers, and against the loud opposition of the younger members. After that, Gil was asked to represent the secretariat on the item of "legal expenses for the Tal family".

When the discussion began, about ten members left the dining hall. Whoever is well versed in kibbutz democracy could tell at that moment that the proposal to cover the trial expenses would be accepted.

The members who left the meeting were opposed to the proposal, but did not want to speak up or vote publicly. They chose the path of passive abstention, which exempted them from the need to confront the "bleeding hearts" of the kibbutz, as they called them, and yet could always say that they had no part in

the decision. The proposal was accepted by a majority of forty-seven against six, and the meeting adjourned.

As soon as the meeting dispersed, the kibbutz secretary general and Gil came to my parents' home and informed them of the decision and the vast majority it received. My mother burst into tears and my father, who had been tense and nervous waiting for the first "verdict", hugged Gil and the secretary general and thanked them warmly.

The next day, Sunday, I called my parents. They told me about the outcome of the discussion and said they would hire the services of Haim Bernstein, who was considered one of the best criminal defense lawyers in Israel. I, who did not want to have a lawyer, was now happy to have a defense council, mainly because I couldn't fool myself and knew that I would need any help I could get so as not to spend the rest of my life in jail.

The major evidence against me was traces of my blood. It seems that while breaking into the elderly couple's house, I scratched one of my fingers and a spot of congealed blood was found on their bedroom doorknob. During the trial, the prosecutor claimed that based on DNA tests, there was a chance of only 0.1% that the attacker's blood found at the crime scene would not match the defendant's blood. In other words, it can be said with a certainty of ninety-nine point nine percent that the source of the blood was "the defendant before us".

I felt that it was the end of me, until my lawyer responded: "Based on the data presented to us by my learned colleague, in the state of California, that has a population of forty million people, there are about forty thousand people whose blood matches that found on the doorknob."

The prosecutor and the defending council both used the same data, but the impression left by what each of them said was completely different. My lawyer included me among forty thousand potential murderers.

But even the best of attorneys would find it hard to vindicate a defendant, when one of his partners in crime turns him in. Sagi, my childhood friend from the kibbutz, next to whom I sat on a pot in the nursery, whom I saved from drowning in the Sea of Galilee on a 9th grade school outing, turned state's evidence and testified against me.

He described the chain of events precisely and accurately, except for one "detail". He claimed that he had remained in the car while I entered the house and shot the old couple.

Subsequent to a plea bargain with the prosecution, Sagi was sentenced to ten years in jail. I, who denied all connection to the murder, was sentenced to life imprisonment.

At first I was furious with Sagi, but years later I forgave him. Or, more accurately, I let him off the hook. He was no longer a variable in my equation, which included too many unknowns.

As a result of talks I had with the prison psychologist, I internalized the awareness that I deserved heavy punishment, unrelated to Sagi's behavior. I'm convinced that I would not have acted like him, but even though it took me a few years, I have realized that I had been punished for a crime I committed, and not because I was caught or because my partner turned me in.

FIRST DAYS IN JAIL

On my second day in solitary, the door opened and the guard came to fetch me to the warden's office. He handcuffed my arms and shackled my legs, and I followed him from the solitary confinement chamber into the yard.

The bright light caused me to close my eyes, but the combination of closed eyes and manacles on my legs and arms made me fall over on the rough asphalt. I hurt both my elbows and my knee, and felt wretched and humiliated.

I surveyed my surroundings with blinking eyes. The warden's office was situated in a one-story building about 50 yards from the main prison block. Glaring whitewashed stones bordered the asphalt road that connected the buildings. On the right I saw the work area of the prison, where there were a few small factories that supplied the inmates with work. On the left, at the bottom of the old British fort that served as the prison, were the kitchen and staff dining room. At the far end of the building was the trademark of old British forts – a tall guard tower with a turret at the top. There was grass in front of the management building, and beneath one of the trees on a bench an inmate and a woman in uniform, probably a social worker, sat talking. The atmosphere was quiet and peaceful.

The warden's room was at the end of the hall.

Wardens usually fall into two categories. Those that grew in the educational-therapeutic branch of the Prison Service, and those that grew in security roles. The former, who began their way as education officers or social workers, had a pleasant way with inmates, as long as they kept to their professions. When they were appointed to senior management roles, they tried to seem tougher. There were, of course, exceptions who maintained the therapeutic approach even when they were promoted.

Those who rose in the Prison Service doing security jobs were usually tough people. Working in intelligence or security requires a degree of toughness. I knew this from my work in the Mossad. It seemed that the security guys were quite contemptuous about the value of education and psychological treatment, but they capitulated to Prison Service guidelines and cooperated, albeit somewhat unwillingly.

The warden of Sharon Prison was Yitzhak Denison. His nickname, to prison guards and inmates alike, was Itzik. Although he grew in security roles within the Prison Service, he was known as a pleasant warden, insightful of the prisoners' dignity and open to their special needs.

The Warden's office was relatively modest. There were a number of trophies and awards to commemorate sporting events with other prisons, a flag in the corner, two photographs of Air Force planes with some sort of dedication, and two paintings that looked like the work of inmates. One painting looked very optimistic and bright-colored. The other was a very gloomy rendering of an old woman.

"What can I get you?" asked an inmate who entered the room at the warden's call. I asked for a glass of tea with lots of sugar. "With mint?" he asked. "Sure," I said and smiled.

The guy left and the warden introduced himself. "My name is Itzik," he said without shaking my hand, "and I am the warden. This is Itamar, the officer who will be in charge of your block, and next to him is Micha, a veteran prisoner, who will be your cellmate with two others."

Itamar smiled slightly. He was dark-skinned and looked Yemenite. His thick, curly, black hair surrounded a well-advanced bald patch and looked like it had known better times. He listened to the warden and nodded occasionally. My first impression of him was good.

Perhaps because of films I had seen, I had a very bad image of prison officers and wardens. They always seemed mean and cruel. In the warden's office at Sharon jail I felt differently. I was happy to trust my first impressions. It's not that I imagined life in prison would be a pleasure, but I felt it would be much less awful than I feared.

I had the best feeling about Micha, my fellow inmate. As soon as I found out that Micha would be my cellmate, I felt enormous relief. He was tall, broad-shouldered and handsome, about forty-five years old. His head was shaven like army trainees' or inmates' heads, and he exuded good health and physical strength. He smiled warmly, showing teeth yellowed by nicotine, and was friendly and sympathetic to the warden, the block commander, the guard that had brought me in, and the prisoner who had served the drinks. He seemed to be liked by everyone and to like everyone.

The warden told me that he knew something of my background, and that he would try to help me the best he could, if my behavior was faultless. I promised him that I wouldn't be any trouble.

"Micha," he said to the prisoner, "take Ofer to your cell, help him get organized, and show him the ropes. OK?"

Micha smiled again amiably. "Come on, we'll make sure you're fine here." I got the impression that before I had entered the room, the warden told Micha about my past. It isn't plausible that every prisoner is treated the way I was.

When we left the warden's office, the guard wanted to put the handcuffs and chains back on. "It's OK," Micha told him, "we don't need handcuffs. I'm taking him to the cell." The guard exchanged glances with the warden and said, "Go."

I didn't understand what was going on there. It was clear that the warden had the upper hand, but I was puzzled by the special relationship between Micha and the guard and warden. The reason, I was later to learn, was the warden's extraordinary personality, but also Micha's amazing story.

CHANGING THE STATUS QUO

Micha's journey to the world of crime was different than that of most criminals. His father, Bezalel Weissadler, the son of the Chief Rabbi of Bucharest, was famous because he was involved in the two biggest scandals in the history of the city's Jewish-Orthodox community. The first happened in 1930, when he and his wife, the daughter of the Chief Rabbi of Bukovina, abandoned their faith and became Zionists-Socialists.

Bezalel was a prodigy in the *Torah* and *Talmud*. At the age of nineteen he traveled among the Jewish communities in Rumania, set rulings on *Halachic* matters, lectured on this or that Jewish issue or analyzed the weekly reading of the *Torah*.

After his marriage, whenever he arrived at a town he hadn't been to before, he told the Jews about the rabbi who went to spend the *Sabbath* in a nearby town, and told his wife he would be home on Sunday night, after he performed some errands in the district capital. To her surprise, he returned home on Saturday night, and to his surprise he found the synagogue treasurer in his bed. "What's going on here?" he asked his wife. And she answered: "Righteous ones, their work is done by others."

Although risqué humor was not widely accepted, the Jews loved Rabbi Bezalel's stories and wit, and he knew that he would not only be forgiven for mentioning sexual matters, but would be appreciated for his sincerity.

Even as a child, with his sharp senses and clear mind Bezalel observed the hypocrisy of some of the community elders. On the outside they all behaved like righteous men. They preached honesty, mutual assistance, mainly to widows and orphans, and anonymous charity. But, behind their virtuous rabbi's back, some embezzled community funds, and some had affairs with gentile maids who worked in their homes or in community institutions, and even with some of the orphans and young refugees at the Jewish orphanage. Now, older and wiser, he was repulsed by the perverse deeds of some of the so-called pillars of the community, and would insert barbed jokes into his sermons. His comments were received with joy and love, especially among the simple Jews, who waited eagerly for his next visit.

Like Bezalel, Shifra was an extraordinary person. If she hadn't been born to an orthodox family, she would have probably become a tenured professor at one of the German universities, because she was famous for her mind and originality. If she hadn't been a woman, she would have probably been appointed Chief Rabbi of one of the *Ashkenazi* communities, because she

was also very well versed in the *Torah*. But, since she wasn't a man, nor was she secular, she had to make do with marriage to one of the cleverer, more interesting and original *yeshiva* students throughout Eastern Europe.

The match between Shifra and Bezalel was self-evident. There were no other candidates who even came near. Their mid-summer wedding in 1926 was the most talked about event in the history of the community. Three thousand guests, Jewish and gentile, *Hassidic* and non-*Hassidic*, mainly men but some women, came from all over Europe. Even the King and Queen of Rumania appeared in an elegant carriage, and honored the young couple with a short meeting at the entrance to the giant tent erected in the woods not far from the rabbi's house. The seventeen-year-old Shifra looked beautiful in a white wedding gown. Bezalel looked very impressive too. He seemed happy but pensive. He saw the quantities of wine and brandy that flowed like water and the mountains of food, and said to Shifra jokingly: "In order to justify the expenses of the wedding, we will have to stay together for at least ten years, even if the match turns out to be wrong. Too much invested to quit."

Bezalel was overjoyed by his marriage to Shifra, especially following a conversation they had after the match had been arranged by their parents. Although both their mothers sat in the room, the couple was able to talk rather freely on their first meeting, and immediately detected each other's astuteness. Nevertheless, throughout the wedding Bezalel couldn't stop thinking that this decision, perhaps the most important of his life, was made for him by other people. At least in my case, he consoled himself, my parents reached the decision rationally, whereas other couples that marry for love, make emotional decisions.

Two days after the wedding, he spoke with his wife and was surprised to discover that she had similar thoughts and feelings. He was surprised, because he thought that orthodox Jewish girls accepted the rules of *Torah* and family without objection or speculation.

They lived happily for three years. There were no children, although they wanted them, but they were considered the perfect couple. Everyone expected Bezalel to be appointed Chief Rabbi of Budapest and replace the local rabbi who was very old, but that is not how things turned out.

On the eve of Yom Kippur 1929, the Jewish community of Bucharest gathered in their elegant synagogue and avidly awaited the opening prayer of *Kol Nidrei*. The rabbi and his wife were already seated in the places of honor, Bezalel and Shifra were expected, but they were late.

The astonishment was like a bolt of lightening. Being late to synagogue on Yom Kippur eve was not accidental. Most parishioners didn't take it too

seriously, but Bezalel's father, Rabbi Asher Weissadler, had a strange feeling, especially after the conversation he had had with his son a week earlier, in which Bezalel expressed his doubts about the Fast of *Gedalia* (a minor Jewish fast day). Despite his premonition, the father couldn't believe his ears on the night of Yom Kippur while they were building the *Sukkah* (a traditional structure for the Feast of Tabernacles - Sukkot).

Bezalel and Shifra struggled with themselves how to tell his father about their decision to leave religion and become pioneers. For a number of months as the decision was taking form, Shifra suggested that Bezalel tell his father gradually about the process they were going through. "Tell him we are having doubts, so that he isn't surprised when we leave." Bezalel was adamant not to let his father in on the struggle, and to tell him only about the final decision. "I don't want to extend his suffering and give him the bad news bit by bit," he told Shifra. "When I tell or give someone something good, I prefer to do so in stages and prolong the pleasure. Bad things, on the other hand, I'd rather tell in one go. I think that most people would rather suffer for a short time than prolong the agony. I also think that people prefer slight enjoyment for a long period of time to great enjoyment over a short period. Look how a Jew drinks good wine. Slowly. And how does he take bitter medicine? In one gulp. Do you remember the *Torah* portion of "*Va'Yishlach*"? Do you remember how Jacob was afraid to meet Esau, and how he tried to appease him with gifts?"

"Yes," said Shifra. "…and put a space between herd and herd." (Genesis 32:17)

"Father," Bezalel said to the rabbi, "Shifra and I decided to join one of the Zionist pioneer groups that are getting ready to immigrate to Palestine. We will always remain Jews, but we decided to be less strict about the commandments between man and God, and concentrate on the commandments between people. In the intermediate days of the Festival of *Sukkot* we intend to join a pioneer get-together, and in the spring, God willing, we will move to Palestine."

The rabbi was astonished, but did not lose his wits. Although he was anti-Zionist, he had great respect for his son and daughter-in-law, and admired them for their courage. "I know that now you have reached your decision, I cannot change it," said the father. "If one has made a decision concerning a major life change, he cannot, even if he would want to, listen to arguments that might prevent him from implementing his decision or cause him to hesitate. If you had shared your doubts with me, I might have been able to influence you. Now that your mind is made up, I bless you on your departure, and will bless you sevenfold when you return."

Bezalel wept when he heard his father. He new how hurt he was by their “betrayal”, and how the orthodox community of Bucharest would react. That was why he was so moved by his father’s words of wisdom. They embraced warmly and Bezalel returned to his home.

A week later, Bezalel and Shifra met with a few dozen pioneers, most of them ex-orthodox Jews, and fervently discussed the immigration to Palestine and the communist revolution in Russia. Bezalel’s wisdom and Shifra’s intelligence were apparent from the very first meeting with the pioneers. When they returned home, Bezalel said to Shifra with a hint of sadness in his voice: “It seems that it is the fate of new truths to begin as total heresies and to end up as superstitions.” Shifra was not sure whether he was referring to the Jewish faith that rejected idolatry, Zionism that rejected the Diaspora, communism that rejected capitalism, or any other beliefs.

The second “scandal” that involved Bezalel was no less surprising and dramatic than the first, in which he and Shifra abandoned their religion. The tale begins in faraway Manchuria.

In 1925 the King of Yugoslavia had political problems. He recruited to help him a Manchurian prince called Aliman, who arrived in Yugoslavia at the head of a regiment of mercenaries. These warriors, although fierce and brave, did not solve Yugoslavia’s problems, and the regiment, part of which was destroyed in battle, dispersed all over Europe. Prince Aliman became very friendly with the king, who presented him with the impressive castle of one of the defeated nobles.

The prince lived in the castle with some servants and concubines and with his only daughter Conicha, who was eleven years old when she came to Yugoslavia with her father. Although he was a cruel officer and fierce warrior, the prince treated his only daughter with great love and amazing tenderness.

Aliman saw to it that his daughter was well educated in the sciences, theology and art. She skillfully played a number of musical instruments, and her endearing personality captivated the hearts of all who knew her. She was a beautiful exotic child. Her eyes were slightly slanted, her skin dark, very striking in comparison to her Slavic friends. By the time she was fourteen, many young noblemen from Yugoslavia, and even from Rumania and Russia, came to see this girl, who amazed all who saw her with her beauty and all who heard her with her wisdom and music.

When Conicha’s father died, the seventeen-year-old girl was left in the castle with a handful of servants but no family and no means of support. She leased the castle lands to groups of Jewish pioneers who gathered there from all over Europe. They lived in the laborers’ quarters and cultivated the land.

Shifra and Bezalel were part of the pioneer group who came to the castle. About two weeks after they arrived, Bezalel was working alone in the vegetable garden. When evening fell and he was getting ready to leave, a tall girl riding a pitch-black stallion rode into the garden. Bezalel realized at once that she was the renowned mistress of the castle.

In his heart he very much wanted to meet the girl, but so far had avoided any situations that might have led to a meeting. He knew the power of his feelings, and noticed that his body wanted things that his mind would not allow, and that his mind aspired to things his body could not comprehend. The body sent impulses the mind could not grasp, and the mind sent instructions the body could not fulfill. He was aware of the constant struggle between the longing for permanence and stability and the desire to change and be swept away, between the mind and the heart, between the certain and the uncertain.

The previous day, Bezalel had also worked in the vegetable garden. He thought about the possible meeting with the castle mistress, and was immediately paid a visit by two old acquaintances that had accompanied every major decision of his life: disappointment and regret. The first was friendly, sad, considerate and sympathetic when he got less than he expected, and always blamed lack of luck or fate. The second was wise, judgmental and a bit cruel, and reproached him that he could have achieved more if he had acted differently. When the visits were frequent, regret usually scolded him about things he had done. When, on the other hand, the visits were rare, it was usually about things he wanted to do but hadn't. He remembered the old Jew who said before his death: "I regret almost nothing I did in my life, but I am saddened by the things I dreamt of doing and never did."

Bezalel did not fool himself. He knew that he would eventually encounter the fascinating young woman, and that major events would follow. He felt that the rational justification of this decision, long- or short-term, had already begun. But, he did not initiate anything and awaited what was to come.

Just like the righteous, the work of the slow is also done by others. Cochina heard of the new man, whose wisdom and family lineage quickly became common knowledge among the pioneers. She knew that he was married and that his wife lived with him at the castle. Although her upbringing was conservative and her nature – modest, and although she was only seventeen, she was attracted to the young man before she had even seen him. The presence of such a clever young man nearby excited her. According to the laws of evolution, young women are drawn to wisdom rather than to beauty,

whereas the priorities of young men are different. All Conicha knew was that she had to meet this man.

It seems that courage and initiative are also as much female characteristics as male. After she had made the decision, Conicha ordered one of the servants to saddle her horse. She put on one of her nicest dresses, makeup and anointed her body with fragrant oil. The inevitable meeting took place.

Though Bezalel was an impressively handsome man, whenever she later told her grandchildren on the *moshav* about their first meeting, she always noted his glowing face and his wisdom. On the other hand, when Bezalel told their grandchildren about their first encounter, he always said how moved he was by Conicha's rare beauty when she first spoke to him mounted on her horse. "When I heard her gentle words," he told his grandchildren, "I knew that my life with Shifra was over."

Although he loved and esteemed Shifra and cherished the memory of their first years, Bezalel could not control his passion for Conicha. As soon as he held her waist assisting her off her horse, his heart rejoiced that he and Shifra had not had children together. He knew that had there been children, he might not have had the courage to abandon his orthodox life style, and the separation from Shifra would have also been harder. He knew there was not much logic in the instant decision to leave Shifra, but felt that logic did not play a major role in such personal decisions. Considerations for and against did not even come up. All he thought about was how to spare Shifra and to minimize the pain he was going to inflict so soon after their move from Bucharest, a year after they broke with their parents' tradition. All this, and more, passed through Bezalel's head from the moment Conicha appeared on her horse.

EGGPLANTS, CHEMISTRY AND INTUITION

Moshav (agricultural village) Sde-Yohanan was founded in 1948 by immigrants from Kurdistan and from Rumania, which was an interesting yet problematic combination, hatched in the mind of a Jewish Agency official somewhere in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem. The members, each with their own past and their own plight, had enough of their own troubles and were not overly concerned with their friends' histories. The Rumanians were familiar with the story of Conicha and Bezalel, but the events of World War II and the Holocaust cast any story, even the most exotic, into proportion. A certain weariness, one could say apathy, characterized the *moshav* members, Kurds and Rumanians alike. They made a meager living from agriculture; some even found odd jobs in Be'er-Sheva to which they traveled wrapped in heavy woolen coats in the winter, sweaty in army-issue khaki shirts in the sweltering summer, riding in the back of the produce truck or kneeling in the back of a pick-up belonging to a member of one of the *kibbutzim* in the area on his way to an important "mission" in town.

Conicha and Bezalel, who married in Rumania after Conicha had converted, and had been through the ordeals of the period, had three children in Israel – a daughter, Rachel, and two sons: Ehud the firstborn and Micha, the youngest, my prison cellmate.

Micha's life had a very promising start. He was a good son, a good friend, a paratrooper and an A-student at the *Technion - Israel Institute of Technology*. After his military service he married Merav, moved to Haifa, went to work for "Elscint" and studied mathematics. It can easily be said that he was a success. Merav studied literature and art, and they were in love.

Two years later, Micha's mother fell ill with cancer. His father, Bezalel, had died some years earlier, and his brother and sister were married and lived away from the *moshav*. Micha decided to move back to his home in the village, take care of his mother and continue his studies at a *Technion*-extension that opened in Be'er-Sheva.

Merav took a teaching job in one of the nearby *kibbutzim*, and Micha worked his parents' farm, studying at the same time. The farm was in huge debt, due to the guarantees his parents had signed for other village members and for the regional purchasing organization, which was run ineffectively by pompous officials who had no understanding of management. In addition, the farm carried its own debt, which had grown inordinately since Micha's father's

death, and more so when his mother became ill and neglected the farm. Micha began to operate the farm vigorously, mainly developing the poultry branch. Towards the end of his studies, his mother's condition deteriorated and Micha was forced to suspend his studies and take care of her. For months he drove her three to four times a week for treatments at the *Hadassah* hospital in Jerusalem, until she died.

The village management demanded he pay all of the farm debts, including the communal association ones, on account of the "mutual guarantee" between *moshav* members, and between the village and other villages. The management members refused to extend him credit before they arrived at some form of settlement plan, and he was forced to sign an agreement to the effect that he would also pay some of the village debts to suppliers such as "Chemavir" (a crop-dusting airplane company) and other equipment and produce suppliers to whom the village owed money.

Micha began developing the farm and accepted contractor jobs installing irrigation equipment in Israel and abroad. He leased land from other farmers and became the major eggplant producer in Israel. He employed dozens of people and cultivated about 1250 acres.

Micha's main success was the quality of his eggplants. In all other fields in Israel the quality of the fruit was good for only three months. After that, the leaves turned yellow, the fruit lost its color and its quality was unfit for export. Micha decided to investigate the reason. He traveled to the Faculty of Agriculture in Rehovot, where he spent hours in the library. He learned that it was possible, with various materials, to synthetically create the pigment that colored the eggplants. He decided to spray the wilting eggplant plants with minute quantities of these materials. And indeed, two days later, the yellowing leaves turned green, the plants looked healthy, many flowers appeared, and a new cycle of high-quality eggplants was picked and sold at a very good price.

Three months later he sprayed again and the story repeated itself. As winter approached, Micha decided not to uproot the plants, as was the custom, but to prune, spray and cover them with plastic sheets. The success was huge. He hit the market three months before other eggplant growers, and made millions of pounds – an enormous sum in those days.

At the height of his activities, Micha achieved a production turnover of about five million dollars a year, mainly from vegetable exports, but also from the Israeli market and as a contractor of earthworks and irrigation systems installation. There were days when he exported two full cargo planes to Europe.

The expansion and development required large investments, and although Micha was an agricultural success, he was always financially pressed. Various creditors and court officials were frequent callers. The interest and linkage of old debts and of the huge investments forced him to pay back enormous sums of money every month.

At that time, with galloping inflation and swift currency devaluation, farmers used to purchase equipment from suppliers on one to two month credit, and sell it immediately for cash at about a quarter of the purchasing price. This activity supplied them with cash for everyday expenses. But, as is the case with credit cards, they were in trouble when time came to pay for the merchandise. Micha did the same. Then he began buying equipment and supplies from merchants without tax invoices, and ended up purchasing stolen irrigation systems from a Gaza Strip dealer.

One of Micha's *moshav* neighbors made an anonymous phone-call to the police, and told them that Micha was buying and selling stolen goods. "It was just like the joke about the farmer who had a dream," Micha told me, breaking off the flow of his story. "In his dream God appeared to him and said: 'You can ask anything you like of me and it will be granted, but on one condition, that your neighbor gets twice as much. What is your request?' The farmer answered: 'Pluck out one of my eyes!'"

During that period there were many cases of agricultural theft and of tax evasions. The prosecution, which claimed that Micha had purchased about two million *lira* worth of stolen goods, demanded a deterring punishment, to make an example.

Although Micha had no prior offenses, the judge granted the request and sentenced Micha to twelve months in jail. Micha requested that the sentence be postponed until the end of the agricultural season, but his request was denied. He appealed against the severity of the punishment, whereas the state appealed against its clemency, and he was finally sentenced to twenty months.

The fields all withered, all the property was sold to pay off debts, and the magnificent farm was in ruins. Micha turned from a successful farmer into a penniless convict.

Although he had broken the law before his arrest, the seeds of the decision to become a criminal were planted during this incarceration. Meetings with 'heavy' criminals in jail taught Micha that a lot of money could be made from crime. He was also surprised by the relative comfort of jail. Until his arrest he had thought that prison meant the loss of freedom, but he found out that the freedom in prison was greater than he had on the outside. His obligations in

prison were merely technical. On the other hand he did not have to run around paying debts to creditors, to the Internal Revenue, to national health and to social security. He was free to do sport, to read, to play chess and to study, things he had never had time for when he was “free”. His favorite subject was chemistry. He obtained dozens of books in Hebrew and in English and studied them inside out.

Micha was very desirable company for heavy criminals, some very intelligent people, who had had no organized education. In his conversations with them he felt that a life of crime had one outstanding advantage, which was the independence from the establishment and other support systems.

Micha was bitter and developed feelings of revenge against all of the systems he had dealt with. These included government offices, the justice system, the Jewish Agency, the Israel Lands Administration, the *moshav* communal society, the regional purchasing organization and others. He felt that these systems had dragged him into jail and prevented him from honorably facing his commitments.

He gradually adopted an anarchist philosophy. He loved the country but hated the state. Social-moral restraints no longer deterred him. He felt that the social establishment was hypocritical and deceitful, and took advantage of the individual. When the individual no longer served the establishment and deviated form some norm, the establishment trampled and crushed him, as he was worthless.

His chief anger was aimed at the justice system. He had no complaint against the State Attorney’s office, but against the judges. In his opinion, in his case, as in many other cases of prisoners before their first prison sentence, the State Attorney won the fight, but lost the battle. He felt that if they had listened to him and conceded the active imprisonment, he would not have been caught up in the track that led him twenty years later to the status of one of the major crime figures in Israel.

He expected the judges, as opposed to the State Attorney, to have a long-term national view, and thus refrain, as far as possible, from sending young men to prison for the first time, because if the neighborhood is the school of crime – prison is the university.

Micha perceived the law as something that protected the crimes of the state against its citizens, and not as a representative of justice and conscience. The road to crime as a way of life was short from such a perspective. Micha decided to devote all his time to the study of chemistry, and use that knowledge for the manufacture of drugs he called “semi-legal”. His intention

was not to produce addictive drugs like cocaine or heroin, but amphetamines, stimulants such as “ecstasy” and other drugs that enhance sexual activity.

One of the volunteers, who visited Micha in his cell during his first stint at “Ma’asiyahu” prison, was amazed to see the voluminous chemistry books that included formulas of medicines and drugs, legal and illegal, and how to produce them. To the volunteer’s question about the purpose of the books, Micha answered: “I intend to use science for the good of mankind and my own personal good.”

Micha was released after thirteen months. It had been a fascinating time for him. He had read many books, listened to music, held long conversations with interesting people, and more than anything – studied chemistry. His attraction to chemistry, chiefly organic chemistry, was an obsession. He had the feeling, which later on became a reality in various ways, that he could create any organic matter from the simplest ingredients.

At the beginning of his imprisonment, Micha had been sent to “Ayalon” prison in Ramla. He was placed in Cellblock F2, which was a wild block, with fourteen men per cell. Each of them listened to a different radio station at the same time and at full volume. Lights out was at nine pm. Despite all that Micha sat in his corner and studied.

He started his studies through the Open University, with a tutor who arrived once a week, and at a later stage lecturers from university came to him. After nine pm he lit a candle and used it to study by. A few months later he was transferred to Cellblock H, which was more comfortable, and the prison warden, who was an enlightened and cordial man, authorized special leave for his studies. The same warden, by the way, also allowed one of the murderers who were imprisoned there to draw paintings on the outside prison walls, and the guy used this liberty for an escape that galvanized the country.

Unlike most convicts at “Ma’asiyahu” prison, who normally look for a job during their rehabilitation period, Micha chose to become a student at Tel-Aviv University. In addition to chemistry, Micha studied philosophy and Jewish mysticism. He left the prison at five thirty am and returned at eleven pm. He spent all of his time at lectures and in the library. His specialization was something called “drug design” an area that deals with constructing molecules, which have an impact on people and other animals. Micha discovered that almost any substance, especially if it is organic, is a drug. Every chemical material had some influence on the brain. He managed to produce almost any material he wanted. He read that if one removed two atoms of oxygen from the amino acid tyrosine, it becomes tyramine, which was a hormone available in the human body. He would gaze at the formulas

of these materials in an almost sensuous way, and he had an intuitive flash of how he could produce one substance from another. Some of the syntheses that came to him intuitively were opposed to any known theory. The professors he shared his ideas with ruled them out utterly, but two days later Micha proved to them, to their total stupefaction, that his intuitions were correct. Usually, his ideas were concerned with adding a certain catalyst, such as active aluminum, with which some production stages cold be skipped, and it was possible to obtain a purer substance without traces of chloride, which could cause side-effects.

And this is exactly how, years later, he produced meta-amphetamine, a drug by all counts, from the simple ephedrine. The way published in the literature was to produce chlorite-amphetamine, and from it, by an extremely dangerous process by means of chloride phosphorous and other toxics, to produce the drug. Micha substituted the complex process with a simple one, by using active aluminum, produced by chloride and mercury. At the end of the process, a fatty substance was created in the solution, which had to be distilled in stages, at various temperatures, with the required drug produced at a temperature of 220 to 230 degrees Fahrenheit.

He could look at the structural formula of a substance in a chemistry book, and that formula activated a search program in his mind, of which the results were two substances or more, the compound of which gave the same substance. These substances were the building blocks, and all he had to do was find the “cement” to hold them together.

While studying, Micha had read almost a hundred thousand reactions. They were all stored in some databank in his brain and were intuitively retrieved when necessary. He would immediately pick up the chemical substances catalog, find the correct molecule and produce the required substance.

When he saw the formula for Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the active ingredient of hashish, he knew he could produce it without growing the plant. Hashish oil, a fluid that contained the active component, could be produced without even cooking. Two crystal organic alcohols, completely unrelated to hashish, act in mutual reaction in an organic solvent, and create, while stirring for half an hour, hashish oil with 50% effectiveness. That is to say, 100 grams of substance produce 50 grams of THC delta 9.

In order to produce hashish with a market value of a thousand dollars, fifty cents worth of substances were required. However, Micha did not produce the hashish to sell it, but only to examine his chemical ideas and for his own personal use. He would put one drop of the substance into a cigarette and smoke it with great pleasure. He also avoided producing a certain synthetic

substance, a thousand times more potent than heroin, that one kilo of was equal to the production of a ton of pure heroin, which can become ten tons of marketed heroin, although he occasionally produced minute quantities of it as an intellectual exercise. It never crossed his mind to deal in heroin or even hashish.

Micha was released from prison with theoretical, practical and intuitive knowledge in the production of organic substances, and with a decision to become a criminal. Immediately on his release he went for a trip in the US. In San Francisco he stayed with a friend, a former criminal. One day, in a wine shop, he struck up a conversation about wines with a pleasant man. The conversation was friendly, and within a few minutes Micha discovered that the man, dressed in jeans and a shabby Harvard University T-shirt, was a senior professor and head of the Organic Chemistry and Pharmaceutical Department at the University of California at Berkeley. Gordon was surprised to hear that Micha was an ex-convict, and that his area of interest was chemical synthesis of narcotic drugs. In an unusual move for many Americans, Gordon invited Micha to dinner at his magnificent home overlooking Berkeley and the entire Bay Area. After dinner, there was a merry party at Gordon's house. The professor introduced Micha to his many friends, and they all took ecstasy manufactured in the labs of the illustrious university. It was Micha's first experience with this drug.

The professor and the ex-convict became close friends. Gordon told Micha that in addition to his university job, he was also a consultant to a large pharmaceutical company based in San Francisco. He told Micha about his specialization areas, and that he, his wife and his professor friends had experimented with all the drugs.

On their second meeting at a barbeque in Gordon's back yard, he told Micha about one of the problems at the pharmaceutical company – production of a certain substance that the company was unsuccessful with. Ten teams of chemists and pharmacists had been working on the problem for months and were unable to overcome it. The substance was similar to ecstasy, and scientists anticipated a promising future in the treatment of certain mental illnesses.

Micha came to Gordon's lab and managed to produce the substance within three days. He also suggested to Gordon that they replace one of the methyl groups in the formula with an ethyl group, which ended up producing a gentler yet more effective substance than ecstasy.

Obviously, Micha and Gordon were the first to try out the results. The substance caused a sort of increased internal, emotional, volume. It wasn't

intoxicating or blinding, it just increased sensitivity. Music sounded better, colors were sharper, scents stronger, sex better and food tastier. The entire sensory system became more sensitive for a few hours. Unlike alcohol, which affects motoric functions, and unlike heroin, which is addictive and ruinous of humanity, the new substance they created enhanced sensitivity and the ability to learn.

Gordon was excited about Micha's abilities, and in addition to a bonus of ten thousand dollars that Micha received for producing the product for the company, he also organized a consulting job with the pharmaceutical firm.

Micha was summoned for an interview with the management, and asked about his education and prior experience. He told them about his partial studies at the university and about Ramla prison. If it were not for the recommendation from Gordon, who was one of the world's top ten scientists in the field of organic drugs, they would have sent Micha packing. But he was hired for a two-weeks trial period.

During those two weeks Micha solved some problems that had been unsolved for years. At the end of the two weeks Micha was offered a contract for sixteen hours per week at half a million dollars annually. On top of that, the company paid his rent in a luxury house in Sausalito, rented a car for him and gave him an unlimited expense account that included a monthly first-class flight to Israel.

Micha's success at the company was unparalleled. He came to the labs, listened to the scientists' problems and came up with solutions, about which they were skeptical. To their surprise, Micha's suggestions worked. From then on, they regarded him as a magician. Scientists with doctorates from respectable universities, such as Harvard, Stanford and Berkeley, called his beeper and asked for advice.

Micha and Gordon were a winning team. Gordon had the uncanny ability to identify the effect of a certain molecule on the body, whereas Micha knew how to produce it as soon as he saw it. Gordon would draw the molecule for Micha, and Micha brought him the substance within three days.

Six months after he had taken the job with the pharmaceutical company, Micha decided to quit. He felt that the beeper on his belt was more restraining than handcuffs, and refused to stay even when he was offered two million dollars per year. His need for freedom overcame any financial logic. He just couldn't work as an employee.

With the money he had earned, Micha bought a large plot of land in Utah for a farm. He brought a trailer and a large quantity of food, and moved in. He lived

in the trailer for a month and half and didn't see a living soul. His only friend was mescaline, the Mexicans' favorite drug, which he sucked from the peyote plants that grew all over the ranch. Micha dug a well, installed electricity, built a carpentry shop and a garage, and at a later stage bought some cattle and sheep and hired some Mexican workers, who moved into a house they built. He lived on the ranch for a few more months, and after he completed all of his preparations, he appointed one of the workers foreman and left for a vacation in New York.

When he arrived in New York, Micha met a friend from jail, who suggested that instead of importing marijuana from all over the world, Micha should grow it on his isolated ranch, and sell the man in New York thirty tons of marijuana for five million dollars.

In addition to the huge profit from the sale of the marijuana flowers, Micha meant to extract hashish oil from the one hundred tons of cannabis leaves to the value of twenty million dollars more.

Micha returned to the ranch, and just like the eggplant business in Israel, his cannabis plants were a success. The yield was high and of good quality.

Micha went to California and bought a truck with a giant tank, like the trucks that transport milk from large dairy farms.

He harvested the crop, dried it and packed it for the long journey to New York.

The arrangement with his contact in New York was that Micha bring the tanker to the small town of Ridgewood, New Jersey, park it at a pre-arranged spot, where he would find the Cadillac, in the trunk of which he would find the five million dollars in fifty and a hundred dollar bills.

Micha got into the cabin of the truck, drove to the closest gas station, filled the tank and took to the road.

But the road was shorter than he thought. Less than ten miles along, ten police cars flashing red and blue lights stopped the tanker. Micha stopped the truck and dozens of Federal agents surrounded him, handcuffed him, confiscated the truck, and jailed Micha in the Salt Lake City Federal Prison.

Micha was charged with growing and producing drugs. During the preliminary hearing in the presence of a judge and a local jury, he claimed that his arrest was contradictory to the US constitution. He quoted the phrase "In God we trust" from the constitution and also from Genesis 1:11: "And God said: Let the earth put forth grass, herb yielding seed…" If someone has to be put on trial it is God and not me," he claimed. "All I did was grow what nature itself had created."

The prosecutor, who was afraid that Micha's arguments would be accepted by the jury and thus become a precedent, decided to drop the charges. Micha got off the whole thing with a 650-dollar fine, for some breach of transportation laws, but he was forced to leave the United States.

Micha sold the ranch and returned to Israel. He established and registered a company that produced chemical products and began producing various amino acids for the food industry as well as ointments for sportsmen, which not only alleviated the pain but also strengthened the injured muscle.

One day he received a request from a big drug dealer to purchase millions of dollars worth of ecstasy pills. Micha accepted the order. He refused the dealer's request to produce cocaine too, but drugs such as marijuana, hashish and ecstasy seemed no less harmful to him than coffee, alcohol, nicotine and even sugar and salt.

He acquired a million dollars worth of equipment, and within a few weeks managed to develop a very cheap and efficient production process. The price of the raw materials was less than the packaging costs. The ratio of direct production costs and the product price was one to a hundred thousand.

The production rate was about one hundred thousand pills an hour. If we multiply this amount by the minimal end price of two dollars per pill, we reach a net income of two hundred thousand dollars per hour, which is eighty thousand times the minimum wage.

One day Ofir Bloch, an ex-convict, was arrested for heroin trafficking. Ofir had been in jail with Micha, where they had come up with the idea of producing cocaine from eggplants after they were released. When the police pressured Ofir, he offered them a deal. They would let him off the hook, and he would give the name of someone who was producing cocaine in a lab in Israel.

Ofir did not have any solid information, and relied only on his conversations with Micha and rumors he had heard about him through the criminal grapevine. Ofir was not aware that Micha had decided, as a matter of principle, not to produce cocaine or heroin, but the random shot he fired into the air landed an unexpected bird in the police's hands. The police raided the lab, caught big quantities of drugs, and held Micha and one of his assistants in custody at Abu Kabir jail.

Micha was forty-two years old and was afraid he would spend the rest of his life in jail. He was very angry at the state that had arrested him for producing a drug that he considered harmless, and that in many countries was not considered illegal. In Israel it had only been added to the list of dangerous drugs a short time before Micha's arrest.

After a few days in custody, Micha started thinking about escape. He identified a number of ways to escape, and examined them thoroughly. He noticed that removable grids protected the windows, and that the bars were old and easy to saw through. Micha's and his cellmate's cell was on the third floor, so he decided that after they had sawed the bars they would climb up to the roof by means of an anchor made of the leg of a bed and a rolled-up sheet.

Through conversations with guards and with work-prisoners, Micha discovered that the electricity box that controlled the peripheral lighting system was on the roof. He also managed to find out which guard towers were manned on different days.

They needed hacksaws for the bars. These were smuggled into the jailhouse by the wife of an Arab prisoner, Micha's cellmate. Micha saw to it that she received a thousand dollars, and she came to visit her husband wearing big clogs. The hacksaws were inserted into the soles of the clogs. While she was sitting and talking to her husband in the presence of a guard, and as soon as his attention was distracted for a moment, the husband and wife switched clogs

In the evening Micha sawed through the bars of the toilet booth inside the cell. There were five men held there. Two intended to escape. Two others were drugged most of the time and uninterested in what was going on around them, but Micha was anxious about the fifth man, who he suspected was cooperating with the jail management. Micha used to play dominoes with him every night, an as was customary among the prisoners, the loser made the winner something to drink. Micha lost, and into the cocoa he made the winner he dissolved a few sleeping tablets.

The white bars were sawed through for three nights, and Micha filled the grooves with toothpaste. There was a strong light immediately above the window, on the outside wall. Micha and Yaniv, his escape partner, pushed a broomstick out of the window and shattered the lamp.

A week earlier, from a room in an adjacent building, another prisoner saw hands sticking out of Micha's and Yaniv's cell window, and he also thought he saw a stick. Micha noticed that the light in that room went out suddenly, and decided to postpone the escape date. He and Yaniv undressed quickly and got into bed. And indeed, three minutes later, five guards burst into the room and to the two next to it, to inspect the cells and windows. To Micha's and Yaniv's luck, they had not broken the bars before they pushed the broomstick out to break the lamp, and neither the grooves in the bars nor the broken leg of the bed were discovered by the guards.

A week later there was a rainstorm. At two am Micha easily broke the bars over the window and threw the sheet that had the anchor tied to it up to the roof. It didn't catch the first time but made a loud noise hitting the wall, which was swallowed by the storm. The second throw was successful. The anchor caught on the roof-ledge, and Micha and Yaniv quickly climbed to the roof. They crawled to the electricity main box and disconnected the fence lights. As there was a lightening storm that night, which caused frequent electricity cuts, this didn't raise any undue suspicion. They used the sheet to climb down to the roof of the women and youth block, from which they threw the anchor onto the fence, climbed over it, and landed outside the jail perimeter. Micha and Yaniv took clean dry clothes out of the rucksack that Micha carried, dressed and each went his own way.

Yaniv, a big good-natured fellow, but not very smart, walked a hundred feet, stopped the first taxi he saw and asked to be taken to their safe house in Beit Shemesh, a small town not far from Jerusalem. He was apprehended at nine am, after six and a half hours of freedom. The taxi driver, who heard about the prison break on the radio, reported the strange passenger he had picked up in the middle of the night to the police.

"I knew you would catch me," Yaniv, hand and feet handcuffed, told the officer in the police car. "I don't understand why I needed this whole escape business."

"I don't understand either," the police officer said. "It's a shame that you criminals don't think before you commit a crime, only after you are caught. Many crimes could have been prevented with your hindsight."

Micha did not behave as stupidly as Yaniv. He walked for three hours, until he saw the first early morning workers. He then took a bus in the direction of Be'er Sheva, and then another bus to Jerusalem, and finally a bus to Beit Shemesh. He walked from the bus stop to the safe house and was stopped by a police stakeout near the entrance to the house, following Yaniv's arrest.

After he was caught, Micha was locked in solitary confinement and chained to a ring set in the floor of the cell. The chain allowed him to move in a circle, like a dog leashed to a peg, reach the rickety bed, sit on the stinking toilet and reach out to the door to accept the two daily portions of food brought him by the guards.

The last person to occupy that cell was Kozo Okamoto, the Japanese terrorist who participated in the murder of twenty-six people at the Ben Gurion airport, near Tel Aviv, in 1972. The infamous terrorist, who was released in 1985 in a prisoners' exchange deal, spent a great deal of his thirteen years in jail in that stinking, fetid and isolated cell, that remained empty for a few years until

Micha was put there. There was a certain absurd in the comparison between the terrorist who had cold-bloodedly murdered tens of people and someone who had manufactured “soft” drugs. Micha, who got through his imprisonment with relative calm, understood the message involved in the choice of this particular cell for him. The police wanted to punish him for outsmarting them and escaping, to take revenge for exposing them. Choosing the secure cell, usually kept for the meanest of criminals, also showed the police’s appreciation of Micha’s intellectual abilities and daring spirit.

Micha remained in solitary confinement for three months, with occasional trips to the court. He was finally sentenced to thirteen years in prison, which again ironically enough, was exactly the amount of time Okamoto had spent in jail.

After a few years of good behavior at Ramla prison, Micha was transferred to Sharon prison, where we met.

CERTAINTY AND UNCERTAINTY

There were two other prisoners in the cell with Micha and me: David Biton from Jerusalem and Asaf Grooper from Petah Tikva, an ex-reconnaissance soldier.

David Biton, like Micha, was tall and handsome. He was about thirty years old with thick dark well-groomed hair. He was always closely shaved and smelled of expensive aftershave. David stood very straight and tall, and had an authoritative and powerful aura. He generally looked severe and solemn. But unlike Micha, he grew up in the criminal world, which was manifested by his manner that was much stiffer and by a small scar near his right eye. Although he hadn't completed elementary school, David was a highly intelligent and very perceptive man. At the age of twenty-two he was tried for the murder of two criminals and sentenced to eighteen years.

Asaf Grooper, although of European descent, had especially dark skin. He had a handsome face, his curly hair was black going gray at the temples. His chubby build revealed his age, over forty, which Micha did not show because he exercised regularly and lifted weights. After Micha, who took me under his wing, Asaf was the friendliest of my three cellmates when I joined the cell after my trial. Whenever he smoked he offered a cigarette to anyone he was with, as he did when he made coffee or rolled a joint.

Asaf, a cocaine dealer, was caught when a famous singer, who was a regular client of his, was apprehended by the police for the possession and use of drugs. She made a bargain with the police, who waived pressing charges if she turned in the dealer who sold her the drugs. Asaf was sentenced to four years.

When Asaf was released, Yiftah Levi, a cynical cool-headed guy, who moved in with us from cell number 11 next door, quickly took his place. Yiftah, who at first glance seemed cruel and heartless, was sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder of his employer. When he was transferred to another prison, the Argentinean Hugo Margulies, who was renowned for his daring break-ins, joined us. The youngest of my cellmates was Shimon Azulai from Kiryat Gat, who got David Biton's bed after the latter was released.

This varied group, to which I had the doubtful honor of belonging, occupied cell number 12 at the north end of the "meshing" or "X" block, as the inmates of Sharon Prison called it. The block included twenty-four cells and was on the second floor of the old British fort, on its west side. Twelve small cells lined a

narrow dark corridor that smelled of Lysol, mould, urine, sour sweat, cigarette smoke and coffee with cardamom.

Besides the twelve prisoners' cells on each side, the block also housed the block officer's office, the social worker's office and a room that served as a synagogue. Sometimes, when a cell became vacant, it was turned into a gym: a few weights made of big tins of sour pickles filled with concrete and a rubber mattress thrown on the floor.

Cell 12, like the others in the block, was two yards wide and about two and a half yards long. There were two double-decker beds each 25 inches wide with a passage of about 35 inches between them. The cell was on the west side of the long corridor. Through the bars set in the door one could see the cell that served as the block synagogue. There were prayer books and some religious books there, and occasionally a rabbi came to talk to the prisoners about the bible section of the week or other religious matters. Over the door, a color TV worked soundlessly for most part of the day. We turned the volume up only for news broadcasts or interview shows.

In the winter we sealed the barred window with thin semi-transparent plastic sheeting to keep the rain and wind out. The view through the window was of orange groves and cultivated fields that belonged to farmers of Even Yehuda and villages in the area.

Unlike most other prison cells, there were no posters of naked models in our cell. Micha, the senior resident, despite being a confirmed womanizer, claimed that it demeaned women and demeaned those who put up such pictures. Any new prisoner who joined our cell was obliged to agree to this.

For all that, we had metal lockers on the walls and under the beds, in which we hid our private belongings and the endless paperwork of requests for leave, appeals concerning the severity of the sentence, appeals to the Supreme Court and entreaties for a leave of two hours for a son's or brother's Bar Mitzvah. The pile of papers of all life prisoners, including myself, also included many letters to the president or to one of his aides, to a tough official at the Ministry of Justice, or to members of parliament, who might agree after numerous pleas to meet the tormented mother of her murderer son. The letters dealt with requests to measure the years of life prisoners, so that they would at least know when they could expect to be released.

Yiftah, the cynic among us, who was doing life for the murder of his boss, never wrote letters to the president requesting clemency. He claimed that he preferred not to know how many years he had to be in prison. "Where bad thing are concerned," he said, "it's better not to know than to know. If I ever get married, which I doubt, and my wife is unfaithful to me, which I don't

doubt, I'd prefer not to know anything. If I did know, it would only anger and upset me. What you don't know can't hurt you. I sometimes even prefer a lie to the truth."

"If there was a phone number you could call," he asked us, "and they would give you the date of your death, would you call?" The three of us agreed that we wouldn't, but Micha, who came from a long line of Talmudic scholars and hair-splitting was in his blood, answered Yiftah: "That's a good example, but it's out of place. I agree that most people would rather not know the day of their death, and I can also understand why some women don't go to have their breasts examined for cancer, although early detection could improve their chances of recovery. But in the case of life prisoners, I think most would want to know the date of their release. Before, we mentioned bad things like death, but this is about something good, the date of your release, and who wouldn't want to hear about good things?"

"It depends how you look at it. If it is about the date of your release, then that is truly a good thing. But if it is about how many years you still have to stay in jail, then that is a bad thing."

If a stranger had happened upon one of our nightly discussions, when we weren't under the influence of drugs or sometimes when we were, he would not have believed that we were criminals. Before I was put there, I always thought that prisoners were ignorant and unintelligent. My greatest fear was how I would get along with the animals in my cell, who would I talk to, who would I make friends with?

Over the years I learned that most prisoners were indeed uneducated, but nevertheless quite a few were blessed with common sense and depth of thought. Sometimes, reading articles in the paper written by certain professors, I would think that despite their wide formal education, they had no true meaningful understanding of the issue at hand. It seemed that the sum of their contact with society was reading and writing learned papers, without any personal first-hand experience.

An outstanding example is a paper by Professor Ariel Amor of the Hebrew University, who wrote an article in "Ma'ariv" daily newspaper called "Murder is murder is murder". The distinguished professor claimed that there was no difference between the case of a woman who murdered her husband after he had severely abused her for years, and the murder of a lonely old woman during a robbery.

Reading the article, I felt that the writer had never experienced the pain and humiliation of a battered wife. He perceived the act of murder as a technical

action with a dead body at its end, rather than the result of a long and complex emotional process of helplessness.

I, who had committed murder for money, knew very well the difference between what I had done and what that desperate woman who killed her husband had done. There was no doubt in my mind that my punishment should be harsher than hers.

Most outstanding were the debates between Micha and Yiftah, who argued about risk-taking in various issues, such as escape from prison, committing certain crimes, courting women, physical risks like parachuting or driving a motorcycle, and even stock market investments.

“Tell me,” Micha once asked Yiftah, “if you were offered to gamble your remaining nine years in prison on the flip of a coin. ‘Heads” – you are released at once, ‘tails’ – you do eighteen more years, would you gamble or prefer your nine certain years?”

“I prefer my nine years. If I were sentenced to twenty years, and could gamble on forty years in jail or immediate release, I would flip the coin, because to me twenty or forty years are almost the same.”

“At my first trial,” said Micha, “I was sentenced to one year. My lawyer told me that if we appeal the severity of the sentence, the state would appeal its clemency. My estimate was that if both parties appealed, the odds were equal that the one-year sentence could be converted to public service work, and on the other hand – doubled to two years. I told my lawyer, without hesitation, to appeal. Eventually, I got twenty months in jail.”

“That’s exactly what I mean,” said Yiftah. “If you got a year in jail, you have nothing to lose. What can happen? You do two years? If it’s your first arrest, there is almost no difference between one and two years.”

“Imagine someone sentenced to thirteen months in jail,” said Micha, “and after one month he is offered to gamble to convert the year he has left – immediate release or two years. Which would he prefer?”

“It’s not the same,” answered Yiftah. “If you are not in jail yet, you would prefer to gamble. If you’re already in jail, you won’t take the risk. If he hasn’t digested the jail sentence yet, his choice is between one year for certain and a draw that will determine if he is released or spends two years in jail. But if he has already digested the one-year he was sentenced to, his choice is between the existing situation and a draw that will add or decrease one year. Mathematically it’s the same thing, but psychologically it’s very different. I think that most people suffer when they lose more than they enjoy their gain.”

At this point David Biton yelled at them to be quiet. He was busy doing homework for an Open University course, and his two cellmates' philosophical debates were getting on his nerves. He loved his cellmates and even participated in various arguments about political or social issues. But at times he said that he would have preferred a cell with three quiet drug addicts over three intelligent cellmates, who had an endless capacity of bullshitting. When Hugo replaced Yiftah in the cell, David greeted him with: "Welcome to the Talkers Monastery".

"Which reminds me of the joke about the Trappists Monastery," Hugo told him, and started telling the joke without being asked: "A *kibbutznik*, Yoske, decided to join the Trappists Monastery. He knocked on the heavy iron door and introduced himself to Father Francesco. The priest informed him of the acceptance conditions that allowed the monks to say only one sentence every ten years. The *kibbutznik* agreed, and started working as a gardener in the monastery grounds. Ten years later, Father Francesco called him and said, 'You may say one sentence now, preferably short.'

'The food sucks,' said Yoske.

"Ten year later Father Francesco summoned him again. 'The mattress is hard,' said Yoske. Another ten years went by. Father Francesco was very old by now, and again summoned Yoske for his utterance of the decade.

'I am leaving the monastery,' said Yoske.

'I knew you'd leave,' Father Francesco told him. 'You complain all the time!"

The fact that David chose to stay in cell number 12 with the three talkers goes to show that it was indeed a very untypical cell for "Sharon" prison, although here and there others like it could be found in other jails.

Our bunch, of four murderers, robbers drug dealers and addicts, lived in constant stress, and yet in a considerate and fair, at times even supportive and caring, social and human framework. The friendships forged over the years of communal living in a six square yards cell were stronger and more loyal than family ties. One of the volunteers, who visited us weekly, told us more than once that he would rather have had us as neighbors and friends than some of his own neighbors, who included famous and respected public figures.

I am sure that I would not want many of the prisoners I encountered in jail as my neighbors. I knew of quite a few cases of rape and abuse of weak prisoners by stronger ones, I saw drug addicts lose their humanity and willing to do anything for a fix, and I witnessed cruel and humiliating acts performed inside the prison walls. Nevertheless, I found that some of the prisoners I met,

including most of my cellmates, were special, interesting and friendly people, whose company I would seek even after my release.

There is no doubt that we, the inhabitants of cell number 12 of the “meshing” block at “Sharon” prison, were not a representative sample of prisoners or criminals in Israel. All the same, it would be wrong to think that every prisoner is a ruthless criminal or a nasty drug addict.

A CAMEL IS A DONKEY DESIGNED BY A COMMITTEE

The youngest of the prisoners who stayed in cell 12 during the years 1988-1995 was Shimon Azulai, a charming young man from Kiryat Gat, who had been a drug addict at the age of eighteen, and had ended up in jail following a series of break-ins into private homes and businesses, after he had sold all his poor family's property to buy heroin.

Shimon was alarmingly thin. The use of heroin, besides causing the teeth to fall out, adds neither health nor weight. One day Shimon became ill, his face turned gray, he had constant diarrhea and he had trouble breathing. When he was sent to "Meir" hospital we were sure he had AIDS, due to the use of a contaminated needle, and that he wouldn't be back. For a few days we were worried whether he had rubbed against us or we had scratched ourselves with one of his belongings. When he returned, as thin as ever, but healthy and smiling, he told us that he it had been a severe case of stomach poisoning, which was cured at the hospital with no difficulty.

Hugo, Micha and I liked Shimon very much, but when he had just moved in we had a hard time getting used to him. We were a bunch of relatively mature prisoners, and we had a strong and special connection with David Biton. When he was released, we were depressed for quite a while. Shimon, who was a nice boy but not as intelligent as David and certainly not as charismatic, was hurt by our lack of interest in him at the beginning.

Unlike many prisoners in jail, he decided to kick his drug habit on his own without institutionalized help. The process was extremely painful, and often the target of ridicule and contempt by fellow prisoners. We, his cellmates, although we used soft drugs such as marijuana and hashish and some cocaine, supported him during the crises of the rehabilitation process.

On Tuesday, July 5th 1993, the parole board met to discuss the matter of Shimon Azulai. The parole board, also called the "third board" is authorized to deduct up to one third of a prisoner's sentence for good behavior. The chairperson of the committee is a retired judge and the other members are a representative of the Prison Service and a representative of the public. Also present at meetings are a representative of the prosecution (the State Attorney) and the prisoner's lawyer, if the prisoner has the money to hire one's services.

Unlike his cellmates, Shimon was a relatively naïve young man with a meager criminal record. This was his second incarceration, and he had been

sentenced to six years for breaking and entering and the possession of dangerous drugs. He was certain he would get a third reduced and that he would be released that very day. Azulai woke up early, after spending a nightmare-ridden night, packed his belongings, gave Micha his radio-transistor, showered, dressed and went out to appear before the committee. Although he had managed to kick his heroin habit all by himself, and was a good worker at the toy factory in the prison grounds, and although he had a rehabilitation program that included work offered by a kindhearted farmer on an agricultural farm near Kiryat Gat, and despite a family disaster he had suffered, the committee decided not to authorize his early release.

Whereas the retired judge and the other board members were very humane towards Shimon, even kind, the behavior of the prosecutor and the advocate was mechanical and completely unfeeling. The wise old judge looked at the two young lawyers and wondered whether their behavior was not the result of the student acceptance policy to law school (as well as to psychology departments and medical schools), in which the sole criterion was intelligence. Kindness, willingness to help others, sensitivity, honesty, integrity, and devotion are not part of the acceptance criteria, particularly in the areas where they are most needed. If they were to weight one year of voluntary work in a hospital or prison or old-age home as 100 points of the psychometric test, the judge thought to himself, I might have met less brilliant lawyers but much more humane ones.

The prosecutor acted as if programmed to object to any improvement or alleviation of the prisoner's punishment. It seemed that he didn't represent the public's interests, but played part in a competition he had to win and with maximum points in his favor.

The advocate also seemed to recite from a trite play, which had been acted out innumerable times. He quoted precedents and rulings that seemed to have been written by a young intern at his office an hour before his court appearance. He did not arouse any feeling or interest in the committee members. Who would listen to a man trying to help another only for money?

Unfortunately for Shimon, and following the prosecutor's pressure and the advocate's anemic presentation, the parole board decided to reject Shimon's request for an early release, because he had once been late back from one of his prison leaves.

Apparently, another reason for the committee's negative response was the fact that four prisoners who had appeared before Shimon had all been granted an early pardon. When Shimon entered the meeting room, he knew the committee's decisions about the previous requests, and his heart

forebode ill. He remembered something Micha had told him before he left for the meeting: “Try to get in after prisoners who have no chance of being pardoned. There is a better chance that the committee decide in your favor after they refused to release a few prisoners, than if they pardoned a few.”

When I asked Micha why that was his recommendation, he told me that when he had been a student at the *Technion*, his psychology professor gave them a multiple choice test, in which they had to choose the correct answer out of five possibilities *A* to *E*. The correct answers to all the questions in that test were *B*. The good students lost their nerve after four or five consecutive *B*’s, and for the fifth or sixth question they all chose different answers.

“Farmers fear that after four consecutive rainy years there will be a drought year,” continued Micha, “and the parole board members feel more natural and reasonable when they don’t have a continuum of uniform results. Just like fate never casts a continuum of ‘heads’, fate never sends the committee a continuum of innocents.”

Shimon, who did not manage to fit himself in between some “bad” guys and his appeal for a reduced sentence was denied, returned to us sad and disappointed. Hugo suggested he drown his sorrows in some hashish we had in the cell, but Shimon decided to overcome his dejection with deep sleep. He took two sips of the homemade vodka we had produced from two pints of water, a pound of sugar and some yeast, cried a little, turned his face to the wall and fell asleep.

Half a year later, Shimon had another “appointment” with the parole board, which this time decided to grant his request. We, his cellmates, despite our experience in the criminal world, thought that Shimon had a good chance not to return to jail. But two months after his release, he resumed his drug habit, started stealing, and was apprehended by the police not much later.

Like Shimon, David Biton was also of Moroccan descent, but that was about all they had in common. David had been living in a small cell for many years with three *Ashkenazi* guys: a moshav member, a kibbutz member and a town guy, who had all been in elite units in the army and had come to a life of crime out of choice and rather late in life. David Biton's background was totally different.

He was born in Morocco and immigrated to Israel with his parents when he was three. The family of eleven lived in a tiny apartment in the Katamon district in Jerusalem. Although the neighborhood was a hotbed of crime, and despite the cramped living conditions and harsh circumstances, David was the only one of his brothers to become a criminal. Years later when he was studying psychology and anthropology at the Open University, David wrote a paper about the relatively high incidence of crime in underprivileged neighborhoods in Israel. His paper, which was chosen as the best paper submitted to the Social Studies faculty, described the problematic position of the patriarchs of the families who emigrated from Morocco and the relative advantage of the mothers.

"The fathers in Moroccan families," David wrote, "were less dominant than the mothers. The change from omnipotence in Morocco to a situation in which they could not support their families was very traumatic for the men. In Morocco the woman was dependent on the man. In Israel, the women had an easier time earning money, because they were prepared to demean themselves and work as cleaners and other menial tasks. As a result, their position improved, whereas the father's position declined. Some of the men turned to drink and cards. Others turned to crime."

"Eventually," he used to say, "everything in this country boils down to the relationship between *Ashkenazim* and *Sephardim*. To this day there is socio-economic, race and class discrimination in all areas. For petty theft committed by my friends from Katamon and myself, we got criminal records. Whereas rich kids from good neighborhoods or *kibbutzim*, who committed similar crimes, were treated much better and criminal records were not opened for them."

"The civil rights movement is only concerned with the Palestinians or other "darlings" of the press, like homosexuals, soldiers who refuse to serve in the occupied territories, and others like that. They don't take care of criminal prisoners and don't fight for their rights.

David carried a knife from the age of ten, and a firearm from the age of sixteen. At seventeen he was tried for the first time for using hashish, and sentenced to two months in Tel Mond juvenile prison. He used to say with cynical humor: “Like Herzel said ‘In Basel I founded the Jewish state’, in Tel Mond I turned from an amateur into a professional.”

After his release he started dealing in drugs and participated in break-ins and robberies. He became the leader of a group of young criminals, and very soon took part in the killing of two other criminals “due to power struggles in the underworld” as the newspapers call it.

He was sentenced to eighteen years in jail, but was released for good behavior after twelve years, despite the police’s fears and strenuous objections.

The police didn’t know David like we, his cellmates for so many years, did. We had no doubt that David, the boy who went into jail, was not the adult, educated family man who left it. And indeed, after his release, David returned to his family, started working as a building contractor, and with the help of friends from his old neighborhood and others was very successful. Simultaneously with his personal rehabilitation, David spent time on crime prevention through meetings with youth gangs in the poorer districts of Jerusalem.

One day, while still in jail, David was given permission to go for a full study day on the outside. The last lecture that day was by Dr. Ehud Harduf on the subject of “Risk Taking”. David, who had taken many risks in his life, was very interested in the topic. The lecturer claimed that risk taking is measured by dividing the second derivative of some utility function by its first derivative. David did not quite understand the mathematics, but was certain that although the teacher understood the theory, he had never taken any risks.

At the end of the lesson in which the lecturer quoted various studies, and after most of the students had left, David approached Dr. Harduf, introduced himself and his past, and said: “An academic debate on the topic of risk taking reminds me of the quibbling of rabbis, smart as they may be, but about a totally irrelevant issue, like how long one has to wait after eating meat before it is alright to drink milk.”

Dr. Harduf smiled: “We’ll continue the conversation next month, after four more lessons.”

David came back from his second meeting with Dr. Harduf very excited. This time, unlike the previous one, he had enjoyed the lecture that dealt with the psychology of decision making. After the lecture, the teacher invited David for

coffee in the cafeteria. David had black coffee with three teaspoons of sugar, and the lecturer had decaf instant coffee with milk and sweetener.

"What do you have to do to become a professor?" David asked. Dr. Harduf sighed, "I have to publish at least twenty different papers in professional journals and maybe also a book or two."

"So you're like reporters. It's more important that you write than that you read new studies?"

"It takes me an hour to read a brilliant article, and half a year to write a mediocre one. But they measure what is easily measurable; how many new papers you wrote and not how many new studies you read." He mentioned the two Israeli professors, Amos Tversky and Danny Kahneman, who developed new theories in the area of the psychology of decision-making, and who were nominated for the Nobel Prize. "Those two are true scholars. Most doctors and professors rehash and reconstruct their own papers, change data in the original study, quote all their own previous work, and publish new papers about it with slightly different titles. That is the accepted way to become a professor."

David was impressed by Dr. Harduf's sincerity and candor, and the teacher had enjoyed David's company too. Dr. Harduf found it more interesting to talk with David than with a regular student, because the killer seemed like someone who had made some remarkable decisions and taken risks, whereas the everyday student is, in most cases, predictable, in search of comfort, bored and boring.

To be sure, the relationship between the two became very close. The teacher helped David with his studies, and their wives also became friends. After David had been released and Dr. Harduf was a respected professor, the professor would invite David to lecture to his students at the university.

One Saturday Dr. Harduf and his wife Tami (she was Professor Harduf too by now) went to visit David Biton and his wife Hagit in Jerusalem, to celebrate the housewarming of the Bitons' new home. The four sat on the shaded balcony overlooking the Desert of Judea and the Arab villages east of Jerusalem. The sweet black coffee with tarragon was a fitting ending to an excellent meal. Ehud didn't object to smoking some 'grass' from the beautiful hookah pipe, although the last time he had smoked marijuana was during his army service over twenty years earlier. He felt that he was becoming enthralled by David's free behavior. Some sort of bond had been forged. David was intrigued by Ehud's mind and way of thinking, while Ehud was captivated by David's heart and passions. Tami, on the other hand, declined the offer to smoke an illegal substance for the first time. Although she was a

heavy smoker, a devout coffee drinker, and indulged occasionally in alcohol, she had an aversion to drugs. As a biochemistry professor, she always claimed that the deadliest and most addictive drug was sugar. But like many people who are ignorant about drugs, she claimed: “It is a fact that anyone who ends up as heroin addict started out with soft drugs like marijuana or hash.” This claim is true, of course, but totally irrelevant. It suits members of parliament, who have their own agenda, but not a serious researcher like Tami. “Anyone who ends up an addict also drank breast milk. Is that reason enough to stop breastfeeding?” David asked her. Ehud responded in kind, especially after the drug’s influence reached his brain. “The interesting question is not which percentage of heroin users started with hashish, but which percentage of hashish users graduated to heroin. The first number is one hundred percent, but the second is less than one percent.”

The discussion about drugs moved on to the terrorist bombing at the vegetable market in Jerusalem, the chances for peace and Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu, about which there was no dispute, and finally they spoke about the financial situation and money.

David bragged to his professor friend about a tender he had won to renovate schools in Jerusalem. He said that he had won fair and square, although he had bid against 67 other contractors, some well known and respected. Ehud was not overly impressed. “Then there are 67 contractors out there who think you are a sucker, and they are probably right.”

David felt that Ehud was making sense, but didn’t give in, like a chess player who knows that within a few moves he would be checkmated. “My policy is to win every contract I bid for, as long as the reward is higher than my current expenses.”

“It’s no big deal to win all bids at low prices. As a rule, if someone tells me he is successful at everything he does, I know he is not serious. If a lawyer or a doctor succeed with every case they take, they probably do not take the risk of trying difficult cases. A basketball player who scores fifty points in every game is either Michael Jordan or a player in a minor league. A girl who has luck with every man she is interested in, is either Michelle Pfeiffer or only interested in ugly men.”

David started to wonder whether his business’ low profits were not the result of treading water, although he had a large turnover. Nevertheless, David’s financial situation was definitely sound, especially considering the fact that he had just been released from twelve years in prison, and in comparison to other released inmates.

The connection between Micha and David continued after David was released. The police, who felt that any relationship between ex-convicts was a conspiracy, were convinced that they were plotting all kinds of illegal deals. As a result, Micha was denied vacations for over a year.

Micha did not take it personally. His ability to remain calm, even when punished for mishaps he had not committed, was amazing. He understood that the police, like any other organization, and like most people, were selective about processing information. Any data that suggests that an ex-inmate is returning to a life of crime is quickly absorbed and meticulously filed. On the other hand, information that an ex-inmate is working towards rehabilitation, such as information about not using drugs or attending school or holding a permanent job, is accepted slowly and with suspicion. Micha knew that in every organization, especially those based on intelligence, there is an asymmetry between information that confirms the existing evaluation and information that refutes it. As someone who had decided to forsake crime, he was afraid that this fact would give him a hard time when his time came to appear before the parole board.

THE PROBLEM IS – WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

Hugo Margulies, who was put into cell 12 after Yiftah had been transferred to another jail, brought an exotic flavor into the crowded cell. He was an interesting yet dangerous combination of socialist, anarchist and religious convert. Hugo's father was a rich food merchant in Mendoza, Argentina. He was religious but not fanatically so. Hugo's mother, a strong and persuasive woman, was a lecturer at the local university. She grew up in a socialist family, and that was how she raised Hugo. At the age of seventeen he came to Israel as a cadet of the "Dror" youth movement ready to become a kibbutz member. For various reasons he didn't make it to the kibbutz, so because of his anarchist ideology, but also because he liked the easy money, he chose a wanted and profitable profession – burglar. Until his arrest, Hugo had broken into over two hundred synagogues, churches, mosques, museums and other places that kept works of art. On principle, Hugo never broke into private homes or businesses that were privately owned. In addition to his sophisticated burglaries, Hugo was an expert smuggler. His expertise included connections with a number of customs officials, who for a sum equal to their annual salary made sure that certain containers were not examined. They were not always aware of the content of these containers. Sometimes it was videos, sometimes refrigerators, and once – cans of pineapple preserves filled with condoms full of cocaine.

Hugo was a sophisticated and highly intelligent man. If one of his partners had not turned him in, he would never have been caught. Of all the inmates of cell 12, Micha was considered the brightest and most learned, and Hugo was considered the intellectual. With volunteers at the prison he discussed the latest books of Amos Oz, A.B. Yehoshua, Steven Hawking and Richard Dawkins, and with the prison rabbi – the *Torah* section of the week. He listened constantly to a Walkman with earphones, always to the classical music station. He preferred Baroque music, but also liked relatively modern composers such as Benjamin Britten or Stravinsky. Sounds such as these were very rare in prison. The more popular music was that of the Egyptian singer Um Kultum. The only classical music Hugo detested was modern music. When one of the prison volunteers, during a lecture in a music class, told the story of the protests that erupted when the "Rites of Spring" was first played, Hugo asked him whether he thought that what had happened to Stravinsky, who was at one time banned and was now admired, could happen to modern day composers. He disagreed with the lecturer that music was a

matter of fashion, like clothes or hair length, and argued passionately that no one would ever like modern classical music.

Both inmates and guards admired Hugo. His famous exploits, like the break-in to the Santa Katerina monastery or the Byzantine Museum in Acre, as well as other legends of imaginary deeds, created an aura of a sophisticated, brave and original criminal.

Hugo's first offence was breaking into the synagogue at Zichron Ya'akov. During his army service Hugo met Kobi, the son of an Iraqi-born family, which dealt in art, antiques and mainly Judaica. Kobi was the black sheep of his family, and he and Hugo became partners in crime. Hugo was in charge of planning the burglaries and Kobi – of selling the merchandise.

The Zichron Ya'akov synagogue had gold and silver artifacts including a pure gold *Menorah* set with precious stones. One *Shabbat* Kobi showed up for Morning Prayer. The next day Hugo came by and discovered that there was no alarm system in the synagogue and that its only protection was a few rusty bars and old locks.

On the night between Monday and Tuesday Hugo and Kobi entered the synagogue through a second-floor window, took everything of value and were gone with their loot within fifteen minutes. They melted the newer silver pieces, and sold the art and Judaica pieces to art dealers. Hugo's share of the profit was about ten thousand dollars. Quick arithmetic showed him that he had made forty thousand dollars an hour, which pleased him.

While Hugo was inside the synagogue he remembered his father, who had died a year earlier in the Argentine, and thought that if his father had still been alive, and especially if he lived in Israel, he would not have committed the crime. It would have hurt his father deeply. But the thought about his father was brief. The slight moral hesitation lasted no more than a few seconds. In fact, Hugo felt no pangs of conscience breaking into any public, Jewish, Christian or Moslem institution. According to the anarchistic philosophy he had adopted, a synagogue, a museum or a bank were public institutions the robbing of which caused no one any suffering, and there was even a certain value to "cleaning" them.

Yael, Hugo's wife, knew about the burglary of the synagogue in Zichron Ya'akov, and even supported his deeds. When Kobi tired of the criminal life and decided to terminate his partnership with Hugo, Yael served as Hugo's right hand in many of his operations, that became more and more sophisticated and daring.

Hugo saw his activities as any other line of work. Just like other people prepare sandwiches in the morning, pack them and leave for work, so would Hugo tour for his next burglary target. When he identified it, he would come home, shower and shave, pack the bag with all the equipment he needed, and leave for his “job” in the evening.

His only guiding rule was, as mentioned earlier, not to harm people, only institutions. He perceived himself as the representative of the private workingman, whereas the state and its institutions robbed him of the fruits of his labor. His motto was “he who steals from thieves should not be punished.” If it were in his power to steal the entire state treasury and sell it to Saudi Arabia, he would have gladly done so, so long as he didn’t steal from individuals.

Before they even received the money for the loot of their first operation, Hugo and Kobi scouted for potential locations for the next operations. They toured synagogues, churches, mosques and official institutions that kept expensive paintings of Israeli artists from the early period of the State of Israel and before.

The second burglary was at an ancient synagogue in Jerusalem. Hugo entered the synagogue, while Kobi remained outside to guard his partner. The synagogue was equipped with a simple alarm system. A siren above the entrance was activated when the security circle was breached. Hugo, who with his customary thoroughness had started specializing in neutralizing various security systems, overcame the synagogue’s alarm system very simply. He used a ladder to climb up and pull out the alarm with the siren and put them in a bucket of water. The alarm made a small noise and buzzed quietly in the bucket until it stopped completely.

They broke the lock easily. Hugo had a set of burglary tools that included a drill, a chisel, hammers and other tools, with which he could break any door or even a reasonably thick steel cabinet.

Hugo, as mentioned, was very thorough. He did everything after meticulous study of the problem. He was also very original when it came to solving problems he faced. You see, he said to Micha, David Biton and me, you must change your way of thinking. Let’s take a case of two cars traveling a certain road. In both there was a man at the wheel and his wife beside him. Suddenly they had a flat tire. The driver got out of the car, and when he wanted to change the tire, he was surprised to find that he didn’t have a jack.

“Shit!” he exclaimed.

“What’s the problem?” asked his wife from the car.

“We have a flat tire and no jack.”

“That’s OK,” said the wife. “I saw a gas station a couple of miles back. I’m sure you can get a jack there.”

The man took off on foot for the gas station, while his wife stayed in the car listening to the radio.

In the other car, traveling in the opposite direction, the same thing happened and the wife heard her husband’s exclamation.

“What’s the problem?”

“We have a flat tire and no jack.”

The wife saw a farmer driving by on his tractor, and told her husband: “Ask the farmer if he can help us lift the car and change the wheel.”

The farmer was happy to help. He carefully lifted the car with the forklift attached to the back of his tractor. The man changed the tire quickly, and after thanking the farmer warmly, they continued on their happy way. On the way they picked up the driver of the first car, who was annoyed, irritated, breathing heavily and sweating, and took him to the nearby gas station.

“The moral of the story is,” Hugo used to say proudly, “that the problem is defining the problem. If you define your problem as not having a jack, then you will look for a jack. If you define the problem as not being able to lift the car, you will look for ways to lift the car. If all you have in your hand is a hammer, then you see every problem as a nail,” concluded Hugo with a quote by Maslow.

And indeed, Hugo found original and creative solutions for problems he encountered, namely breaking into public institutions and museums. In addition to his originality and creativity, Hugo was blessed with excellent learning powers. Before he broke into the *Haggana* Museum in Tel Aviv, he saw a sign outside that said*: This location is protected* by ‘Abir’ Alarm Systems. Inside the entrance, next to the alarm box he read “Abir system - 235”. He called the Abir Company and told them that he wanted to install an alarm system at his company’s offices. He asked them to send him a prospectus, and after he learned the operating principles of the system, he had no trouble neutralizing it. He read, for instance, that a certain system was based on a movement detector. Such a system reacts to movement, but is programmed to discount the movements of mice or bugs; otherwise it would cause many false alarms. Therefore, it is programmed to react only to movement above a certain speed and height. Consequently, wherever he identified a movement detector, he moved very slowly to the alarm system,

and then disconnected the wires or circuits that led to the bell, the system identified the intruder, but remained silent.

Sometimes, when he was unable to crack the system with the aid of the prospectus they sent him, he called the company and asked: “How do you overcome the problem of mice and bugs?” If the answer was: “We have a infra-red ray eight inches above the floor for backup”, he knew that he had to come equipped with special goggles to detect the rays. Other systems were based on heat detectors, so Hugo purchased a fire-department asbestos suit that prevented body heat from emanating to the surroundings.

Additionally, Hugo always tried to give the impression that the break in was spontaneous and unplanned. He would break something that needn’t have been broken, or leave misleading clues for the detectives.

His infiltrating, entering and departing skills improved with time. Some nights he broke into ten different places, and there were places he checked ten times before he broke into them.

Until the police arrested him, Hugo had executed about one thousand and two hundred burglaries. The income from each was at least ten thousand dollars, and from some – over three million dollars. The most expensive item he stole was a Louis Seize clock, which was proudly kept in the Monaco Museum. For this clock alone he received one and a half million dollars. At the same time he also took six “cheap” clocks that were worth about a quarter of a million dollars each. On the whole, in all of his burglaries during five years, Hugo made about twenty million dollars.

During the first year of his criminal activities Hugo did not contribute to the country’s balance of payments; all his activities were in Israel. During the four consecutive years he worked mainly by special order of art and antiquity dealers all over the world.

His last robbery in Israel was at a monastery in the Sinai, which was then occupied by Israel. This was an inactive monastery, operated by only one monk. Every evening the monk walked to the Santa Katerina Monastery three miles away. In the “abandoned” monastery there was a priceless ancient tapestry, as well as gold and diamond crowns, two icons worth one hundred thousand dollars each and many more valuable Christian artifacts.

One of Hugo’s acquaintances told him that he had a buyer who was looking for a twelfth or thirteenth century tapestry in good condition, for which he would be willing to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars. For weeks Hugo visited all of the churches in Israel, in the occupied territories, in Sinai and even in Egypt, until he found what he was looking for. It was a tapestry in

excellent condition, one yard by two in size. Hugo observed the monk who guarded the isolated museum, and found out that the man arrived at the monastery in the late morning and left in the early evening. Hugo, who spent two weeks as a guest at the Santa Katerina Monastery, also discovered that the monk drank frequently, and that after wine-laden nights he neglected going to the monastery altogether.

The monastery was hundreds of years old. It was surrounded by a high wall, and outside of the guard-monk and several dozen dogs, there was not a soul in sight. The bored monk was happy to show Hugo his treasures, was very hospitable, and they even had a few glasses of wine together.

At that time Hugo had a partner called Amir. Amir was a clean-cut guy without a “record”, who liked to rub shoulders with the criminal world. His connection with Hugo fulfilled half of his passion. The other half was met by contact with two forgers of German Marks, who sold Amir the money that he distributed.

Six weeks after Hugo’s first visit to the monastery, he returned to Santa Katerina with Amir. They parked their rented car on a hill about a mile away, and used long-range binoculars to observe the monastery until they saw the monk leave. At dusk Amir drove Hugo to the monastery, and immediately returned to a distant *wadi*. Hugo climbed the monastery wall, which set the dogs barking. He threw them some pieces of meat “enriched” with a sleeping drug, waited for fifteen minutes, and then threw some more meat for the weaker dogs who hadn’t managed to enjoy the previous round. About half an hour later it was totally silent. Night had fallen, and with the aid of an anchor and rope, Hugo climbed the wall and slid down into the yard, where about thirty dogs were fast asleep.

Hugo used a bent screwdriver to unlock the giant old lock, which hung on the heavy wood door, and entered a hall that was unprotected by an alarm system. He sprayed the tapestry with a special spray supplied by the client, to prevent the tapestry’s disintegration, cut it out of its heavy wood frame, which was nailed to the wall, with a Japanese knife, rolled it up and placed it into a cylinder he had brought with him. When had completed his “obligatory exercise” he moved on to “optional exercises”. He cut out three smaller tapestries, 2 by 3 feet in size, took a few gold crowns studded with precious stones, a gold scepter and some gold goblets. He placed all of the booty into bags he had brought along, and then radioed Amir to come and pick him up.

As the monastery was located not far from an Air Force facility, there was danger that a vehicle moving at night would be spotted by the soldiers and raise suspicions. For the same reason, using infrared light was equally dangerous, because the IDF used similar instruments to detect suspicious

movements. Hugo's solution was to use night-sight goggles that utilized starlight.

Amir arrived. They tied the bags underneath the chassis, and were on their way to Eilat, where they stopped for a few minutes. It was only in Be'er Sheba that they stopped for a hearty breakfast. At one PM they handed the tapestries over to the buyer, who was surprised to get more than he had bargained for. He took the tapestries and returned with the money, nine hundred and thirty thousand dollars in cash, within a few hours. That evening they sold the gold items to an antiques dealer in Jaffa. At the end of the day they had one million and two hundred thousand dollars, which they shared equally.

Although Hugo's investment and risk were much greater than that of his partners, he always meticulously split the take equally, so as not to arouse jealousy.

Hugo deposited the cash in a bank account in Vaduz and in other banks in Europe. He had a contact, Monsieur Schweitzer, who worked in a hotel in Vaduz. Hugo mailed him registered envelopes of ten thousand dollars each, which included instructions where to deposit the money. In this way Hugo smuggled close to ten million dollars out of the country over a few years.

The two following stories bear witness to Hugo's degree of sophistication and ingenuity. At the Zionists of America House in Tel Aviv there was a storeroom with expensive jewelry and art, which had been donated to the State of Israel by wealthy Jews. The storeroom was a security chamber protected by all known means, including shock detectors in the walls. The entire protection system was connected by telephone and wireless to the control room of a security company. Hugo received information about the treasure concealed in the storeroom, and realized after a few overtures that a regular burglary would not succeed.

One Friday night, Hugo and his then partner, Gafni, went there with a heavy hammer and a number of bags. Gafni stayed in the car that was parked nearby. Hugo went up to the outer wall of the storeroom and banged on it with the hammer and returned to the car. He knew that the shock detectors would activate the alarm in the security company offices. And indeed, within minutes, two security jeeps drove up, circled the place, checked it and found nothing. After ten minutes they left. Half an hour later Hugo repeated his maneuver. This time only one jeep showed up. The security guards did a superficial examination and left. Hugo repeated his stunt twenty minutes later and banged on the wall. Every twenty minutes or so he went up to the wall, hit it hard with the heavy hammer and hid. The security guards reacted to the first

four alarms. Hugo activated the alarm six or seven times more, until he was certain that the security guards had had enough, and that they wouldn't give up their late-night meal for a false alarm. And they did indeed think that the alarm mechanism was malfunctioning, and left a note for the technical unit to fix it as soon as possible, feeling that they had done their duty.

After more than ten futile exercises, Hugo took the hammer again, and with ten heavy blows split open the wall, and with Gafni's help emptied the storeroom of all its treasures, the most outstanding of which were two Chagall paintings that now reside in a private home in New York.

Hugo's expertise was evident in the break in at the Bahai Museum in Haifa. This was one of the last burglaries he committed before Gafni turned him in to the police. By then Hugo had executed tens of burglaries of various museums in Europe and Egypt, and he possessed the most sophisticated equipment, worth around one hundred thousand dollars, including a Swiss instrument that could open any lock. The device could be put over any lock and within five seconds could unlock it using an electronic mechanism.

The Bahai Museum had a collection of gold utensils embossed with precious gems, a very rare and holy collection to Bahai priests. The place was protected by an alarm system connected to the control center of the "Nassaraldin" security company, founded by retired Druse officers.

The robbery took place on a rainy and windy winter day. Burglars love days like this, because they supply them with ideal conditions. Noises are covered up by the sounds of the wind and thunder. During one of his preliminary tours, which he called "study tours", Hugo tried to open one of the museum windows. As expected, that activated a silent alarm system. By means of a sensitive radio-frequency detector, purchased in Rome, Hugo identified the frequency by which the alarm had been transferred from the museum to the security company as 99.2 megahertz.

Hugo arrived at the museum at midnight, and in pouring rain disconnected the telephone lines in the nearby relay box. Then, using a transmitter he had, he transmitted "quiet" on 99.2 megahertz. To us, his prison cellmates who knew little about electronics, he explained that it was similar to army field radios. When one of the parties presses a switch, he silences the entire system.

From here onwards everything went smoothly.

The police were frustrated. Hugo's nickname by the police and the press was the "synagogue burglar". Although he tried to cover up characteristic traits in his operations, the police detectives could not fail but to notice that one person was involved in hundreds of robberies of various synagogues,

churches, mosques and museums all over the country. The Police Commissioner appointed a special task force of the Central Police Unit to crack the mystery, but they were unsuccessful for over three years.

One night, Hugo was almost caught while breaking into a synagogue in Givata'im, a town near Tel Aviv. After opening the window and entering the synagogue, he noticed one of the neighbors looking towards the synagogue from a third-floor window of a nearby apartment building. The man suddenly turned and disappeared into his apartment.

Hugo left the synagogue, carefully closed the window and prepared to cross over the hedge that surrounded the place, jump over the fence and disappear. But before he could reach the fence he noticed a number of white cars braking in front of the synagogue, and saw undercover cops using sign language not six yards from him, with only the hedge between them and him.

The policemen, who had arrived so quickly, were sure they were going to capture the "synagogue burglar". About ten policemen surrounded the building, while two others cut the gate-lock of the synagogue fence and entered.

Hugo just about managed to hide under the bushes as the policemen passed half a yard from him. The policemen reached the synagogue door to find it locked from the outside, as were the windows. They found no signs of forced entry. They located the caretaker by means of their radios, and he arrived fifteen minutes later. He unlocked the synagogue doors and entered with the policemen.

After making sure that nothing had been taken, they spoke with the neighbor who had called the police. He swore by his mother's and daughter's lives that he had seen someone climbing in through the window. The senior officer at the spot decided that it had been a false alarm, and after a few more minutes of consultations with the commander of the central unit, the vehicles departed.

Hugo remained hidden under the bushes for a full hour. When the area was completely calm, he reentered the synagogue, stripped the *Torah* scrolls of all their ornaments, and that very same evening was one hundred thousand dollars richer.

When he had executed hundreds of burglaries in Israel, Hugo started working abroad. His first operation was in a small town near Nantes in France. An art dealer to whom Hugo sold stolen merchandise told him that once a year, every last week of March, the town hosted an art fair. The art dealer participated in the fair as a buyer and as a seller. All the money from the first

day’s sales was transferred to an old couple that lived in town, and they kept it in an office in the cellar of their apartment building.

Hugo flew to France with the art dealer. The dealer registered at a hotel in town, and Hugo sneaked into his room and hid there until nightfall. The dealer came back to the room and told Hugo that the first day of the fair had ended, and that all the money had been transferred to its hiding place. An hour later Hugo easily broke into the cellar, which was not secured in any way, except for some heavy but easily breakable locks. He left with property in the value of two and a half million French francs (approximately three hundred and thirty thousand dollars), traveled to Paris, met with the dealer and split the loot with him. “While you are here,” the dealer said to Hugo, “why don’t you break into a museum in Normandy and bring me a few Louis Seize goblets for a hundred and fifty thousand dollars?”

Hugo traveled to Normandy and returned a day later. For the four gold goblets that Louis supposedly drank from, the dealer paid Hugo the promised sum.

With over three hundred thousand dollars in his pocket Hugo decided to spend time at the casino in Monte Carlo. He entered the casino with thirty thousand dollars, bought chips, and that night made fifty six thousand dollars playing the roulette and baccarat. He felt like a basketball player with a “hot hand”, one that shoots the basket from every spot and in every situation.

Hugo’s method was unique. He put a thousand dollars on the red. If he won, he put a thousand dollars on the red again. If he lost, he put two thousand dollars on the red, and if he lost again he doubled the amount and put four thousand on the red. He doubled his bet every time he lost, and started again with one thousand dollars every time he won. At most roulette tables in the casino the maximum bet was limited to five thousand dollars, but Hugo played at the inner tables, where the limit was twenty five thousand. At the end of the evening he cashed in his chips, went to his room, showered and left for Paris.

At the first traffic light Hugo spotted a car driven by a beautiful young woman about eighteen years old, and an older fifty-year-old woman next to her. Hugo winked at the girl, who winked back. He blew her a kiss, and she rolled down her window and said something in French. “Speak English,” he told her, and signaled her to pull over after the light. She stopped, and it took Hugo ten minutes to convince her to join him on his way to Paris. Hugo rented a large room at the splendid Hotel George V. They lived together for a month. During that month Hugo spent around one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. He fulfilled every whim of hers and his own. He ordered a special dinner prepared in Thailand and flown to the hotel for the price of three and a half thousand

dollars. They ate their regular dinners at the “Rasputin” Restaurant for the modest price of a thousand dollars a meal.

After one crazy month, during which Hugo informed her that he was married, he gave her another hundred and fifty thousand dollars as a gift, deposited forty thousand in his bank account in Vaduz, and returned to his wife Yael in Israel with only thirty thousand dollars. “Crime pays,” Hugo thought to himself as he flew home in first-class on an Air France flight.

Hugo also knew how to have a good time with Yael. About six months after his return from France, they went on a six-week trip to Europe. In London he rented a Rolls Royce with a chauffer. They stayed in the finest hotels, in which he paid three thousand dollars a night for suites and another thousand for the chauffeur’s room.

“Easy come, easy go,” he would say to Yael. One day he saw a white convertible Mercedes 460 on Dizengof Street in Tel Aviv. He flew to Italy the next day and purchased a convertible Mercedes 560. He brought it to Israel, drove it for three days, hated the car, hated himself more, and sold it immediately at a loss of fifty thousand dollars. He bought everything he desired. If he wanted something and didn’t have enough money that day, he always said to himself “I’ll buy it tomorrow,” because he knew that he would have the money he needed the same night.

Years later Hugo agreed with Illy, the social worker who devotedly took care of him in jail, who said that he had actually been suffering from a mental disease, because he neither cared about nor enjoyed anything.

One day in Vienna he received nine hundred and seventy thousand dollars for burglaries he had executed in Rumania and Hungary. The money was in a leather briefcase he carried. He drove a car with the briefcase from Vienna to Rome. The view revealed to him at dusk, passing through the Alps near Trieste, was breathtaking. He stepped out of the new Audi he had bought in Vienna, and suddenly felt a terrible sadness.

He was a young handsome man; there were nearly a million dollars in the trunk of his luxury car; the view was magnificent, and he suddenly realized that he was unhappy. He had no idea what might have made him happy, but the sense of unhappiness was fierce. He remembered the beautiful girl he had spent a month in Paris with, he remembered the fortune he had given her without hesitation, remembered the good times all over the world and his fancy cars, and felt that something was missing. This might have been the moment that the first seeds of his religious repentance were sown.

Much later, at the “Or Ganuz” *Yeshiva* in Jerusalem, he told his story to his fellow converts, among them two ex-criminals, three artists, one fighter pilot and three teachers. The pilot, Gera, who eventually resumed his secular existence away from the yeshiva, asked Hugo: “Tell me, wouldn’t you like to meet that French girl fifteen years later?”

“No,” replied Hugo, “but I’m sure that in the town of Rouen in Normandy a thirty-five year old lady tells her friends about the English tourist she spent a crazy month with in Paris in 1980, who gave her one hundred thousand dollars as a parting gift, and whom she was dying to meet again.”

The road from the Alps to the “Or Ganuz” *Yeshiva* was a long one. Until Hugo turned to religion he managed to break into dozens more museums and churches, and spend some years in jail.

Twenty percent of Hugo’s burglaries were requested by the owners of the places he broke into. For instance, he broke into a jewelry shop in Zurich after his contact had passed on to him full details of the alarm system and the safe code. He entered through a neighboring apartment, during the lunch hour. His partner on this job was a beautiful blond named Natasha, a twenty-four-year-old Russian, a Moscow University graduate in literature and history, married and mother of a two-year-old boy.

He accepted her as a partner through his contact, after having rejected a few Israeli candidates he had suggested. He liked Natasha from the minute he met her in Munich, and she indeed justified the first impression.

“It seems that there is something in emotions and intuition that causes us to make the right decisions without understanding why,” thought Hugo. Years later in jail, when he had a lot of time on his hands, he read Damasio’s interesting book “Descartes’ Error”. The book, which was written by a physician who examined how people with brain damage make decisions, fascinated Hugo, who sometimes read me and other inmates selected portions of it. The sentence that reminded Hugo of his choice of Natasha, as well as others of his behaviors, was: “While biological drives and emotion may give rise to irrationality in some circumstances, they are indispensable in others, especially in the personal and social domains.”

Hugo was extremely coolheaded and rational, and on the other hand acted on intuitions, neither them nor their significance he understood or wished to understand.

On that job Hugo and Natasha robbed diamonds in the value of a million and eight hundred thousand dollars. Hugo and Natasha each received thirty percent of the take, as did the shop owner, in addition, of course, to the

insurance money. The go-between, the contact, received the remaining ten percent. Hugo relied completely on the mediator. He brought him the two bags of diamonds, and after he had them evaluated by an appraiser, he paid each partner his share.

All the participants in the operation were criminals, but they did not cheat each other. The only one of the group who was “dishonest” was the shop owner, who deceived the insurance company and his partner, who was also his brother-in-law.

Whenever Hugo told his stories to people outside the criminal world, he always emphasized that the criminal world was populated by people who had decided not to accept the rules of the state, but were nevertheless very moral and conscientious. Betrayal of a friend, which is considered everyday behavior in the normative world, is perceived as a very serious crime in the criminal world. “The system of rules in the criminal world is like a non-Euclid geometrical system,” Hugo said whenever there was someone intelligent around.

Hugo’s last job in Europe was in Czechoslovakia, then still a communist state. His contact, the same man who had organized the jewelry shop break-in in Zurich, met him in Munich. From there they traveled to Prague. After they had local beer and stayed the night in the old town, they continued to a rural area about 150 miles from Prague. In one of the fields, behind a small fence, there stood a very old building of large red bricks. The dark oak door was huge, about nine yards wide. The place served as a warehouse of art items that had been confiscated from the citizens in various periods, and a bored, sleepy and amiable guard watched it.

The target was three gold and silver goblets embossed with precious stones. Hugo was supposed to receive two hundred thousand dollars for them. The mediator and Hugo befriended the guard. He opened the building for them and showed them the treasures. Three days later, they visited him again, brought him a bottle of excellent Russian vodka, and drank with him.

Hugo returned to the spot a week later. The guard was happy to see him, and even happier to see the bottles of “Absolut” vodka that Hugo had brought from Prague. They sat and drank, Hugo a little and the guard – a lot. Hugo then said good-bye to the guard and supposedly left, leaving behind two full bottles of vodka. When darkness fell Hugo returned. The guard was drunk as a lord and snoring loudly.

Hugo took the keys hanging on the wall, opened the heavy wood door, and put the three goblets in his rucksack. On his way out he noticed a beautifully

decorated silver bowl. As he by now had an extensive knowledge of art, he estimated its value at over a hundred thousand dollars, so he took it too.

He handed over the goblets to his contact in Rome. Before that, in Prague, he purchased a dark-pink color spray and sprayed the bowl. He then filled it with assorted sweets, wrapped it in pink cellophane, and carried with him through all the border crossings until he arrived in Israel. Here he put the bowl into a basin of color-solvent, and five minutes later he had a wonderful art-nouveau bowl, which he sold to David Cantor, an art dealer, for a hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

During the Lebanon War, later renamed “Peace of Galilee War”, in 1982 Hugo fled to Europe to avoid being drafted. He met Natasha in Munich, and they went on a two-month trip in Europe. Among other places, they spent two weeks in Paris at the Hotel George V, Hugo’s favorite from the days of the girl from Normandy and his previous stay with Natasha.

When he returned to Israel, Hugo managed to execute one more burglary – at the Byzantine Museum in Acre. He did the job on the night between Thursday and Friday, and at noon on Saturday the police detectives entered his home, arrested him, and started the legal process that ended with his conviction and sentence of fifteen years in prison.

At first Hugo denied all connection to the robberies. But after his good friend and sometime partner in crime, Hagai Sar, turned state’s evidence, and after David Cantor, the dealer in stolen art, testified against him too, Hugo cooperated with the police and confessed to seventy-one of the hundreds of burglaries he had committed.

THE GAMBLER'S FALLACY

Asaf Grooper, who stayed in cell number 12 for about a year, was also a character. He was born in Poland, and immigrated with his parents, holocaust survivors, to Israel at the age of six. He was not circumcised until the age of eleven because his mother was afraid that the Nazis would gain power in Germany again and come to Israel in the third world war. Asaf's most outstanding qualities were kindness and loyalty to his friends.

In February 1993, almost two years after he was released from prison, Asaf was summoned to the Internal Revenue offices in Tiberias. Immediately following his discharge from the army and before he became chief security officer of El Al airlines in Paris, Asaf owned a fish restaurant on the shore of the Sea of Galilee in Tiberias. He was informed by letter that he owed the Internal Revenue taxes in the sum of three hundred and fifty thousand Israeli *shekels* for 1977-1978. This sum included mainly interest, linkage and fines. Also, he was required to pay an additional half of that sum to Social Security.

At the meeting in the Internal Revenue offices Asaf explained that he had spent most of the years between 1977 and 1991 in jail in Israel and in France, and that he had only recently been released. "I work as an assistant lifeguard at the Ashkelon beach," he explained, "and barely support my wife and two young daughters. I want to open a new leaf." The officials hardened their hearts. When Asaf told them that he had not received any request for payment in the last ten years, their answer was that it is the citizen's duty to report any change of address within a month of the move. Their claim probably referred to the move from "Ma'asiyahu" prison to "HaSharon" prison, which the inmate had not reported to the tax authorities.

Pleading and begging were to no avail, nor was logical reasoning. The tax officials were tough and uncompromising. Asaf left their office, once more realizing the difficulty of again becoming part of society. The tax people's behavior was a sequence to the rejection of his request to become a certified lifeguard, which involved obtaining an "honesty certificate" from the Israeli police. A lawyer he had hired, Mazor, who had promised to obtain the certificate for two thousand dollars, did not fulfill his promise, but of course demanded full payment. When payment was delayed, he sued Asaf – another fine example of a lawyer trying to help an ex-convict on the road to rehabilitation. And indeed, it did not take long and Asaf was behind bars again, charged with dealing in stolen property.

During our conversations in jail, Asaf emphasized his inner struggles. Dealing in cocaine provided him with easy cash, but also with many scruples and years of imprisonment. “I feel as if my personality is split into two. One part, settled and earnest, tells me to think about the long run and not give in to my impulses. Whereas the other part, flippant and fun-loving, pushes me to do things that give instant gratification, but that I eventually regret.” He quoted someone who said: “if I could live my life all over again, I would take more risks, make more mistakes, live the moment, and not plan my life so many years ahead.”

Years later I tried to impress Hugo during one of our arguments, and quoted the words I had heard from Asaf. To my chagrin, Hugo recited and in its original language, Spanish, the entire paragraph by Jorge Luis Borges.

Despite his frequent incarcerations, Asaf always returned to crime. For some reason, he was not deterred by lengthy periods in jail. He always said that of his imprisonment in France he remembered two things: the first night when two Algerian inmates raped him, and the relatively comfortable period at the end of his sentence. He seemed to have forgotten the four long years in between.

“That reminds me of the dental treatments I receive in prison,” Micha said. “All I remember are the most painful moment and the last moment. I don’t recall, and I don’t care, if the treatment took half an hour or two hours. It is possible that for you,” he said to Asaf, “it would be better if your prison term started off easily with vacations and outside work, and ended badly – with solitary confinement. You would have a better chance of remembering the experience badly, which would help your settled part overcome the forgetful and flippant part.”

Asaf’s naivety and optimism were his downfall. He just plainly interpreted reality wrongly. If there was a chance of one to one hundred that something would work, he convinced himself that it would. He used examples of obscure incidents to make his arguments. One day, Micha’s daughter came to visit him in jail. Asaf saw her and was greatly taken by her beauty. He started telephoning her, hoping she would agree to see him when he went on leave. David Biton told him that he had no chance with the girl, because he was forty-seven and she was twenty. In reaction, Asaf brought him newspaper cuttings about an eighty-year-old man who had married a seventeen-year-old in Mexico. David, in his wisdom, told him: “Any example you bring from the newspapers is against you. If it were common, it wouldn’t be in the paper.” But Asaf didn’t listen. It seems that most people don’t listen when you quote them statistical data that opposes their views.

David Biton used to say: “Every time there is a terrorist attack, Peace Now members say ‘You see, we have to make peace, otherwise terrorism will continue’, but members of the Victims of Terror organization say ‘We have no partners for peace. All Arabs are murderers.’ How is it that the very same event causes different people to justify such opposed viewpoints? We all stick to our own prejudices, adopt the information that supports them and ignore the information that could refute them.”

Asaf listened and said: “When I get out, I am going to open a restaurant in Tiberias again. I have lots of friends there, and I can make them my fish, which are still famous in the entire Jordan Valley. I even have a name for the restaurant: The Prisoner’s Choice”

We badgered him and asked: “Have you checked the market? Do you know how many fish restaurants were opened in Tiberias in recent years and how many were successful?” “I don’t care,” Asaf answered, “my restaurant will be something special!” We asked him: “Do you want to read what it says in the paper about the tourism slump in Tiberias?” “I don’t care, slump or no slump. I am going to open my restaurant. Besides, what’s wrong with a slump in tourism now? I get out in a year, and the deeper the slump is now, the stronger the recovery will be.”

Logic and sense were not Asaf’s strong suit. This might have been why he was addicted to gambling. Not like he was addicted to cocaine – a thousand dollars use a day – but once a week, when he wasn’t in jail, he visited the illegal casinos near the Diamond Burse area in Tel Aviv. Given his character and way of thinking, he immediately began developing theories how he could win. He would arrive with a thousand dollars, stand next to the roulette table and wait for it to fall five consecutive times on red. When this rare (Micha said it was a three percent chance) occurred, Asaf took 500 dollars and gambled on the black. He claimed that the odds that the ball would fall six consecutive times on the red were minute. This is, of course, erroneous thinking. The chances of six consecutive reds are slim, but after five times red, the chance that the sixth time would be red is equal to it being black.

What characterized Asaf, and many other recurring criminals, was a lack of self-control. Some people enter a casino with only fifty dollars, and thus prevent themselves from getting carried away and losing big sums of money. Some people, who know they have a hot temper, avoid keeping a gun in their car in case they lose their temper and use the gun on a driver who overtook them wildly. Some people, who want to lose weight, avoid passing by bakeries and their smell of fresh cakes. The most outstanding example of self-control I ever encountered was Shlomi, an inmate sentenced to two years for

attempted murder. He informed the prison authorities that he would relinquish vacations, because he feared he would not have the will and power to return to prison when his leave was up.

Asaf had no self-control. He was always swept away by his passions and impulses. He never calculated the long run and always lived the moment. When he came to the casino, it was never with little money, but with thousands of dollars. Unfortunately, Asaf won frequently, and he was sure he had discovered a method to beat the casino. When he told us in our cell about his successes, David told him that his method was known as the “gambler’s fallacy”, and that it had no statistical logic.

“The roulette has no memory,” he told Asaf. “You remind me of the story about the woman who became pregnant, after she had already had three children, and asked her gynecologist to perform an abortion, because she had read somewhere that every fourth child born was Chinese.”

Asaf did not understand the joke, and continued to win at the roulette almost fifty percent of the times he played. That seemed to him a high percentage.

RATIONALITY AND EMOTIONALITY

Yiftah, who studied economics at the Open University, scoffed at Asaf and his statistical theories. Before he moved in to our cell, Yiftah was next door with Bjorn Sorenson. Bjorn, tall, blue-eyed and blond, was an outstanding figure in prison. He was a Norwegian soldier in the UN forces in Lebanon, who had smuggled half a kilo of heroin into Israel. He was sentenced to three years, but was deported from Israel after a year and two months, following the intervention of the Norwegian embassy. Every time I passed by cell number 11 and saw Bjorn, I thought that he probably felt here like I would have felt if I were in prison in Teheran or Afghanistan.

Thanks to Dina, the volunteer who helped him learn Hebrew, Bjorn managed to speak stumblingly with Yiftah, a cold-blooded murderer, who had killed his employer because he thought he had treated him unfairly. Bjorn was not a criminal. Smuggling the drugs into Israel was also done innocently. He believed that he was helping a Lebanese villager send a package to his cousin in Haifa. In his conversations with Yiftah, Bjorn tried to understand how a person could kill his boss. As a matter of fact, Bjorn was afraid Yiftah might kill him too.

“What are the odds you would kill someone today? One to ten, one to a hundred, one to a thousand?”

“One to a hundred, I think,” answered Yiftah. “Not because I am afraid of doing the deed, only because I am afraid of being caught. I am not enjoying myself in jail, as you see. If I knew for certain that I would not be caught, I would be indifferent to another murder. Murder in itself does not seem meaningful to me. Its significance is in reward and punishment. I don’t kill out of revenge, like in Turkish movies. It’s simple for me. Whoever hurts me will cease to exist.”

“You’re not human,” Bjorn told him. “You sound like a robot with speech abilities.”

“What is human? People have accepted all sorts of rules and decided that that’s human. People do it. We are, in fact, the only creatures that do it to each other.”

“Do you know what it is to love?” Bjorn asked. “Have you ever loved anyone or anything?”

“I want to love and I even long for it. But, it’s short for me. I can make that switch. The longing doesn’t continue. It lasts for a few seconds and that’s it. I don’t dwell on it. Anything to protect myself, of course.”

“I heard there is a hunger in Pakistan. I don’t know the people there. If I hadn’t heard there was a hunger there, I could have thought they were having the time of their lives. The fact that I know about the hunger doesn’t make their situation worse. If someone I care about has cancer, and I don’t know about it, it doesn’t bother me. It bothers him. As soon as I know, it will start bothering me, but his degree of suffering will not change. If I killed him, or if he died naturally of the disease, my problem would be solved. The killing in itself is not the problem.”

Yiftah seemed to me the epitome of rationality. To some extent I wanted to be like him, because after a few years in prison I felt that I was being carried away by my emotions and passions. On the other hand, I rather liked myself for giving in to my emotions and passions instead of always taking the cold rational path. I couldn’t understand how a person like Yiftah could love anyone. Like me, he killed a man in cold blood, but I felt that I had softened during my incarceration, and felt an overwhelming need to love and be loved. Yiftah seemed to not have changed. He remained the same hardened and callous criminal as when he entered prison.

LUCK AND SKILL

Asaf, Bjorn and Yiftah worked, with other inmates, at the Kibbutz Ga'ash lighting elements factory, which had a branch at HaSharon Prison. The work was monotonous and tedious, and only the conversations among the inmates alleviated the boredom to some extent.

The arguments between Asaf, the intuitive emotional type, and the rational, cold and calculating Yiftah about the chances to win great sums of money in the casino fueled most of the conversations. Yiftah had in his favor, or at least to his mind, academic studies at the Open University. After he received 87 in a statistics exam, Yiftah felt he had the scientific tools to refute all of Asaf's claims to success at the casino.

One day Yiftah and Aasf argued about the expedience of purchasing lottery tickets. Asaf said that someone on the outside bought him a weekly lottery ticket with the numbers of his own and his daughter's birthdays.

"Whoever buys a lottery ticket, loses," Yiftah said. "If the lottery company gains, that means that the buyers lose."

"My learned friend," Asaf answered, "on Wednesday afternoon I buy a ticket that costs me ten *shekels*. That same evening I fantasize about what I'll do with the millions I win. I fantasize like that until Tuesday, and then I see in the newspapers that my numbers didn't win. I buy a new ticket the very next day. So, I ask you, isn't it worth paying ten *shekels* to fantasize an entire week about being a millionaire?"

Emotional arguments such as fantasies and thrills did not interest Yiftah. He told Asaf: "if you must buy a lottery ticket, it would be better not to use your family's birth dates. Most lottery buyers do that, so more people pick numbers between one and twelve because of the month, and one to thirty because of the day. If these numbers are drawn, they have many more partners in the prize money and they get less. I suggest you pick numbers over thirty-one. Your chances of winning won't change, but the sum of money you'd win, if you do win, would be higher."

Asaf knew that Yiftah was right, but decided to continue using the birth dates to fill in the forms. He was afraid that the first week he would change his lottery numbers, those same numbers would be drawn. "You prefer disappointment over regret," Yiftah told him. And Asaf answered: "I prefer luck over skill."

AN INTRODUCTION TO ASYMMETRIC LOVE

Yiftah was straight as an arrow, but also hard to the point of cruelty, to himself and others. One day, while doing his job assembling lighting elements, he got into an argument with his boss, the *kibbutz* representative in the prison industrial area. The man claimed that Yiftah's work was inaccurate, and demanded that he dismantle a package of one hundred lighting elements and reassemble them. Yiftah got very angry and started shouting: "I will show you," and "you don't want to fool with me."

The foreman called the guard at once. Yiftah was placed in solitary confinement, and a few days later was transferred to Ayalon Prison, which is tougher. Except for my first two days in jail, I had not spent one day in all my years in prison in either solitary confinement or a holding cell. Whereas holding cells are intended to separate problematic inmates from others for a certain period of time, solitary is a punishment cell. The conditions in solitary are much harsher than in the holding cells, which are harsh enough.

I asked the block commander whether I could accompany him when he went to visit Yiftah. At this stage of my prison sentence, it was well known that I was a model prisoner and that I could be relied upon. With the commander's authorization I took Yiftah some clean clothes and we went down to the solitary confinement cells. It was the first time after quite a few years in jail that I had the opportunity to see them. When the guard opened the door, I was amazed at the tiny size of the room. A concrete bed covered by a bare mattress and two army-issue wool blankets occupied most of its area. A bucket for urinating stood in the corner. When the inmate felt the need to move his bowels, he called the guard who let him use the communal toilet. Because the solitary confinement cell was a punishment, it was forbidden to have a radio, TV or even books, except for religious books. The prisoner was allowed out once a day to shower, and then returned immediately to the cell. I did not envy Yiftah in his sorry situation, and was pleased for him when he was transferred.

For two weeks we enjoyed relative relief in our narrow cell, until Hugo joined us from Be'er Sheva Prison. When I heard Hugo's stories about Be'er Sheva, I was glad that I had not been sent there. It is one of the harshest prisons in Israel. Eight to ten men, most of them violent, drug addicts and with highly developed male egos, live together in horrible physical and mental proximity.

Hugo, who had never used hard drugs, requested a transfer to DF (drug-free) Block, and his request was granted within a few weeks. DF block was quieter. Most of the inmates were murderers or criminals who had not grown up into that world but had committed one crime. There were also a number of rapists and a drug smuggler, a new immigrant from Mexico, who immediately adopted Hugo and made him welcome in the block.

Hugo started working in the prison kitchen. His ex-wife Yael, who came to see him a month after he was imprisoned, couldn't believe her ears or eyes. The guy who had ordered meals flown in from Thailand to a hotel in Paris now had to peel potatoes and carrots for eight hours a day.

Hugo worked the morning shift with seven other inmates, supervised by Maimon, the local cook. He did not take his change of circumstance too badly. He got up in the mornings, showered and shaved, splashed on some aftershave, placed a classical music tape in his walk-man, and went to work in the kitchen. After work he showered, put on reasonably clean clothes, lay down on his bed and read one of the books he had borrowed from the prison library.

One day, about two years after he was incarcerated, while bending over a pot full of potatoes with Mozart's Requiem playing in his ears, Hugo saw a beautiful young girl, dressed in a long-sleeved long dress, enter the kitchen escorted by the cook. "Please meet Ilanit," the cook said to him, "she is our new *kashrut* (Jewish dietary regulations) supervisor."

Hugo, who at soul was a socialist and anarchist, and was not fond of religious people in general and of *kashrut* supervisors in specific, was filled with joy when he heard Maimon. He felt that a significant change was about to occur in his work in the kitchen and in his life as a prisoner in general. He wanted to shake Ilanit's hand, but she retreated with a slight smile before his hand was all the way out, thus saving them both unnecessary distress.

Hugo went back to his cell that day feeling wonderful. He took a long shower, mainly because he masturbated thinking of Ilanit, after which he put on a recording of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, whistling and singing with the music. Hugo did not tell his cellmates, who were surprised by his sudden outburst of joy, the reason for his good mood. He went to sleep tensely expecting the next day.

Hugo was a bit disappointed when he saw Ilanit the next morning, wearing the same dress as the previous day. It made him think that she wasn't clean. He pushed the thought to a corner of his mind, which was full of annoying subjects that had to be dealt with later, and greeted her. She greeted him back, and he noticed her pretty blue eyes when she smiled at him.

Hugo was usually fairly aggressive when he picked up girls. In Ilanit's case he acted differently. Maybe because he was in jail under constant supervision, maybe because she was religious, or maybe because he had grown up and his age was twice her age. Hugo treated Ilanit gently and respectfully. He desired her, but didn't dare speak to her of intimate matters.

On the second day of her job, in the break between cleaning up breakfast and serving lunch, Ilanit sat down for a cup of coffee with the cook and the inmates. Hugo thought that it wasn't accidental that Ilanit chose to sit next to him. Despite the noise and racket around the table, he managed to learn that she came from a Moroccan family in Ofakim, and now resided in the home of a rabbi in Be'er Sheva. He also found out that she was born on the same date as his oldest brother. He knew that the odds that that could happen were one to three hundred and sixty-five, so he saw it as a sign of the special relationship that would develop between them.

With time, the relationship between Hugo and Ilanit became stronger and stronger. Ilanit found in him a warm and open man, highly intelligent and knowledgeable in many areas she had not been acquainted with earlier. Hugo found an attractive young woman possessing a great deal of common sense, although only twenty years old.

Hugo fell in love with Ilanit long before she returned his love. He told her about all his crimes. Ilanit was especially hurt by his preference for stealing religious utensils from synagogues. This seemed to her worse than stealing from a private home. Hugo tried, with some success, to convince her that an institution had no personality that could be offended by the burglary, whereas breaking into a private home was a form of rape of the people who live there, which was against his philosophy that abhorred violence. Their conversations continued, and Hugo gradually began speaking to Ilanit of his love for her. She replied with a great deal of friendliness and attentiveness. These soul-to-soul conversations revealed her terrible and sad story to Hugo.

THREE FATHERS

Ilanit was born to a family of seven, and was the eldest of the children. Her beauty was apparent at a young age, a fact that did not escape her father, who started touching her body when she was eight years old and reached full sexual relations four years later. The mother found out when Ilanit was eleven, but the mother, who was afraid of the violent husband who beat her often and even threatened to kill her, did not do anything to put an end to the abuse.

One Friday the father got drunk, approached to Ilanit who was sitting with her mother in the living room, and tried forcefully to undress her. Ilanit resisted and cried, and the mother started screaming. The father hit the mother with the whiskey bottle he had in his hand, and when it broke he cut her face and chest. The mother was badly injured. Ilanit escaped to a neighbors' apartment, and they called the police and an ambulance.

The mother was hospitalized and the father was sentenced to one year in jail. Ilanit's mother was afraid that her husband would pick up where he had left off when he was released from jail, so she decided to send Ilanit to a home for religious-orthodox girls, "Bet Rachel", in Jerusalem.

And so, at the age of fifteen, Ilanit left her home and friends, and moved to a very different environment. On one hand the move was for the best – it stopped the sick relationship with her father. On the other hand, the orthodox community was very uptight and did not suit Ilanit's open temperament and her interest in many varied subjects.

At the same time, and as commonly happens to many inmates, Amos, Ilanit's father, who was a traditional man before entering prison, decided to return to the faith. The prison rabbi referred him to Rabbi Epstein in Jerusalem. The rabbi, who had become a Hassidic leader at the age of thirty-six, was involved with people returning to the Jewish faith and was renowned for his wit and wisdom. His court was always full of people seeking his blessing and his advice.

The convict, Amos, became very attached to Rabbi Epstein and was completely infatuated with him. When he was released, he met the rabbi at least once a week. He stopped working and started studying the *Torah* daily at a *yeshiva* in Ofakim.

About a year after his release, a year in which he had not attacked his wife nor touched Ilanit, who came home for a visit despite many misgivings, the

three of them went to spend the Sabbath in the rabbi's big house in Jerusalem.

At seventeen, Ilanit's beauty attracted everyone's attention, mainly that of men. Rabbi Epstein was no exception. The young rabbi desired Ilanit from the minute he laid eyes on her, but of course refrained from showing it.

The rabbi encouraged Amos to repeat the visit, and so, once a month and then every two weeks, Ilanit and her parents spent the Sabbath at the rabbi's house. Like her parents, Ilanit was very impressed by the rabbi. He was an impressive man by all counts: tall, with a thick black beard, well dressed, and above all – very clever. Ilanit was surprised by the personal attention the rabbi paid her family, in face of the hundreds that clamored for his attention every day. She did not suspect even for a moment that the main reason for the rabbi's warm attitude to her family was his strong sexual attraction to her.

Ilanit had an appointment with the rabbi in the lobby of the Kings' Hotel in Jerusalem. The rabbi's secretary called the management of "Bet Rachel" and told them that the rabbi was concerned with Ilanit's family, and that she should be allowed to go out to any appointment with him on her request.

Ilanit, who had never been to a luxurious hotel, was amazed at its beauty. The rabbi was waiting for her in a corner of the lobby and ordered her a cold drink. He was having an alcoholic drink, and his behavior seemed a bit different to Ilanit, but she couldn't fathom it. They spoke about the importance of family, and the rabbi, who was more excited than usual, talked about his life and shared personal issues, which he said he had never shared with anyone.

An hour later he asked Ilanit to come up to his hotel room. He continued drinking and spoke to Ilanit about intimate matters. He knew, of course, that her father had raped her as a child, and asked her if she had had sex with other men. Ilanit answered that on one of her visits home, she had kissed a neighborhood boy, who had been to school with her before she moved to Jerusalem. When he heard the answer, the rabbi asked her if she would like to kiss him too. Ilanit was astonished, but as the question was asked in a soft voice and the rabbi, whom she had liked before, beseeched her, she consented.

The kiss was pleasing, but she did not let the rabbi undress her, despite his recurring efforts. He had to make do with feeling her breasts through her clothing, which also pleased Ilanit, as it was nothing like her father's offensive touch. To the rabbi's question whether she would agree to meet him again for a conversation, she replied affirmatively.

The second meeting, which took place in the same hotel but in a different room, was in the daytime. This meeting ended with consummation of the rabbi's passion. Ilanit, who had looked forward to this meeting all week and had in fact fallen in love with the rabbi, accepted his kisses passionately as soon as they entered the room. It wasn't long before she was lying naked beneath him.

The rabbi had never seen such beauty. His pious wife never kissed him the way Ilanit did and never let him see her naked. Sometimes, when she was undressing, he peeked at her, and although her breasts were flaccid after eight births, he was very attracted to her.

"Stolen waters are sweet and hidden bread is pleasing." And indeed, Ilanit's large firm breasts, she was not quite eighteen years old, stimulated him enormously, and her kisses were sweeter than honey.

The assignations with the rabbi continued for a number of years, even after Amos, Ilanit's father reverted to type. Although he remained religious, he resumed beating his wife and tried to sleep with Ilanit, who fled from him to the rabbi's house. In face of Amos' behavior, the rabbi decided to have Ilanit adopted in the home of one of the Be'er Sheva rabbis, who was also among his followers.

Rabbi Greenbaum and his wife received Ilanit very warmly. The *rebbetzin* gave her a room and bought her new clothes. Ilanit, who was grateful to the rabbi and his wife, assisted with the housework and looked after the children. She occasionally accompanied the *rebbetzin* when she gave lectures to religious women in Be'er Sheva, and was happy with the change. The contact with Rabbi Epstein continued, but less frequently.

Two months after she arrived at the rabbi's home, the story repeated itself, only this time it wasn't with someone to whom she had turned for help and advice, but someone who had adopted her into his home and family.

Rabbi Greenbaum also could not resist Ilanit's beauty. He was drawn into a whirlpool that seemed to be dragging him down into an abyss. One evening he almost lost his mind, when he opened the bathroom door by mistake, or maybe not by mistake, and saw Ilanit completely naked under the shower. He saw her slim figure, her big, firm breasts, and her long hair that flowed wetly down her back. Heat flooded his loins. Ilanit did not notice him, and he closed the door quietly.

The main beneficiary of the stolen glance was the rabbi's wife, who was surprised by the rabbi's short, rare and unexplained passion. She was not aware, of course, that while he was making love to her, in his imagination he

was in bed with Ilanit. The *rebbetzin* loved her husband and was glad about his renewed interest in sex. The rabbi also loved his wife, and therefore felt like a lowlife cheat when he slept with her. All the same, he felt that no force in the world could erase Ilanit's nude image from his mind.

It took the rabbi two whole weeks to overcome his doubts and his inhibitions. Fourteen days, and mainly nights, he searched for excuses, reasons and justifications for a decision he had already made the evening he saw Ilanit naked. He needed three hundred and thirty-six hours to translate his passion into a verbal sentence, i.e. a decision. Passion's journey from the body to the brain took about twenty thousand minutes.

At the first opportunity he had, and with cunning similar to that of Rabbi Epstein, Rabbi Greenbaum found his way into Ilanit's bed. And so, for over a year, the girl spent once a week in bed with her adoptive father and once a month with her spiritual father in Jerusalem. At Passover, during the reading of the *Haggada*, Ilanit thought to herself with newfound cynicism that she had already been with the three fathers.

The rabbi's children had no idea that their father's warm attitude towards Ilanit had anything to do with sex. His wife, on the other hand, sensed that the rabbi was attracted to the girl, and at a certain stage suspected that he was making love to her in his study when she went out shopping. She chose not to delve into the issue of her husband's relationship with Ilanit, and said nothing to the rabbi about her suspicions.

As opposed to the coerced sexual relations with her father, Ilanit's relationships with both rabbis pleased her. She did not see in it any element of exploitation of their lofty positions and of her inferior position and dependence on them.

About a year after she moved in with the rabbi's family, the rabbi, and mainly his wife, searched for an appropriate match for her. Ilanit did not want to marry by matchmaking. In her imagination she dreamed of falling in love with the man of her dreams, but her adoptive parents, the rabbi and *rebbetzin,* convinced her that if one had no opportunity to choose, one was often better off than if able to choose. "If you do not make a choice, you cannot regret your choice," they told her. "If you marry for love, assuming such a thing exists before wedlock, you may regret it for the rest of your life."

At first two young men were presented to Ilanit: Asaf, a former *kibbutznik* who had returned to the faith, a relatively bright man but penniless, and Baruch from Bnei Brak, the son of a well-to-do family but not very bright. Ilanit, who was not born with a silver spoon in her mouth, was well aware of the importance of money, but found it difficult to choose between the two. When

Gershon, who was less wealthy than Baruch but much more stupid, was introduced to her, she informed the *rebbetzin* that she picked Baruch. Gershon's appearance made Baruch look more attractive.

She married him, and divorced him two months later. The marriage was simply insufferable. Compared to her two lovers, she told Hugo, the groom was too young, too stupid, ugly and spineless. She slept with him twice during the first week of their marriage, and five weeks later returned to the rabbi, who received her with mixed feelings.

Apart from the immoral exploitation of Ilanit, Rabbi Greenbaum was a modest, clever and honest man. He never accepted money for services he performed, such as marriages or *Bar Mitzvahs*. When people put money in his pocket at the end of the ceremony, he would return it to them and ask them to give it to charity. That was also how he dealt with anonymous donations that were sent to his synagogue. He never took what was not his to take. Moreover, whenever he came across a widow or orphans that needed help, or a sick person who required an expensive operation overseas, he gave from his own pocket and generously.

Rabbi Greenbaum's financial situation was, hence, difficult. He had nine children aged one to twenty years old, and many expenses. Therefore, to help support the family, when asked for a suitable candidate for the job of *kashrut* supervisor at Be'er Sheva Prison, he suggested Ilanit, although he feared, and justifiably so, that her presence would arouse the prisoners.

Ilanit saw a great deal of resemblance between Hugo and the two rabbis. He was older, wise, very handsome and kind. Though, of the three, he was the only one born abroad, his behavior, language and dress were not as old-fashioned as those of the other two. Another significant difference was Hugo's indifference to money. Although he had various bank accounts in Europe with over a million dollars, he could live in abject poverty or in sumptuous wealth with the same nonchalance.

Ilanit was attracted to Hugo from the second day of her work in the kitchen, but was deterred by the fact that he was a criminal sentenced to many years in prison. She was glad about this, in a way, knowing that it would prevent her from becoming caught up in a relationship with him. The opportunities to meet intimately in jail were rare, although not impossible, as she later learned.

Hugo spent every free moment talking to Ilanit. She told him her history and he told her about his exploits, even about deeds that no one realized he had committed. Their first physical contact occurred when Hugo was arranging the pantry, putting away cans of preserves. The pantry was at the back of the kitchen. Ilanit came in to get a big can of pickles, and asked Hugo to hand it to her from the top shelf. Hugo gave her the can and asked if he could hold her hand for a second. She blushingly held out her hand, and then without warning, Hugo pulled her gently towards him and hugged her. She did not evade him, and only the approaching footsteps of another prisoner caused them to pull away quickly, and freed them from the need to decide how to continue or to end what had started between them.

Although Hugo supposedly had a more mature, molded and independent personality, he was the one to cross the lines in Ilanit's direction. On his first prison leave, after he had slept with Ilanit for the first time at a friend's home in Be'er Sheva, he asked her, as he had done many times before, to marry him. Until then Ilanit had always put him off, claiming that she did not want to be married to a convict who still had many years of his sentence to serve. After their first meeting outside prison, when he repeated his proposal, she said that if he returned to the Jewish faith, she would wait for him until he was released and marry him.

Hugo was overjoyed. Even though he had been sure that Ilanit would agree to marry him, her full consent filled him with hitherto unknown satisfaction.

The man who had eaten garlic-flavored shrimps fried in pork fat at the Rasputin Restaurant in Paris became strict about kosher food. He began

observing the Sabbath and participated in all the prison rabbi's lessons. He did not wear a yarmulke or grow a beard, but definitely took his mission seriously. And every day, in the kitchen, he proudly told Ilanit about his newest achievements and about the commandments he fulfilled. Ilanit, for her part, broke her ties with both of her rabbis.

And then, totally by surprise, Hugo was transferred to HaSharon Prison. One of his workmates in the kitchen overheard Maimon speaking to Gafni, Hugo's block commander, who said: "Rabbi Greenbaum suspects something is going on between Hugo and Ilanit, and I'm not sure he's mistaken." Hugo petitioned the prison commander, asking him to prevent his transfer, without, of course, telling him the real reason for his request, but it did no good.

Hugo and Ilanit's relationship continued during his leaves and by phone calls from HaSharon to the kitchen in Be'er Sheva. Ilanit remained faithful to Hugo. Despite many matchmaking attempts and a succession of tireless suitors, Ilanit was not intimate with any man except Hugo.

About a year after he was transferred to HaSharon prison, Ilanit decided to tell Rabbi Greenbaum about the relationship. The rabbi, who had suspected something, was dumbfounded when she told him that she had slept with Hugo and that she meant to marry him. He expelled her from his home and saw to it that she lost her job as *kashrut* supervisor in the prison. Ilanit moved to Tel Aviv, got a job as a secretary and waited.

Because of his good behavior and following the intervention of one of the prison volunteers who appealed to the Israeli President on his behalf, Hugo was released after seven years in jail. He spent the last year and a half, as part of his rehabilitation process, at the "Or Ganuz" yeshiva, to where he went every day from prison.

After their marriage, thanks to his money and connections, Hugo became a successful art dealer. Ilanit, who was still offered modeling jobs at the age of thirty, raised their two sweet daughters, Maya and Noga. When they started school, she began working as a volunteer at a hospice for terminally ill patients at Tel HaShomer hospital.

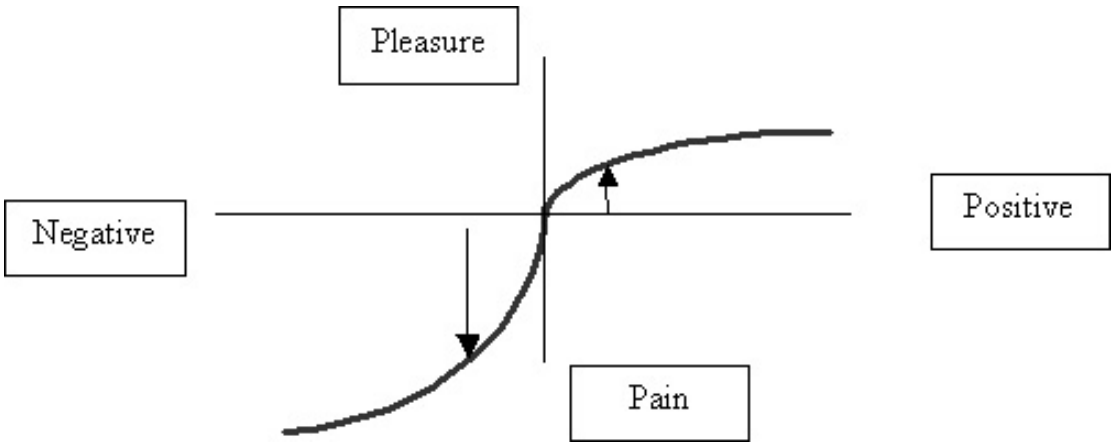
Hugo is considered, to this day, a rare case of successful rehabilitation. It is not clear whether this success is due to great love, religion, his relatively mature age, or the financial resources at his disposal when he was released.

Hugo was not the only convict I knew who had become an observant Jew. Being in jail causes many prisoners to think about their life, where they came from and where they were headed. In addition to the official rabbis employed by the Prison Authorities, there were other rabbis involved in religious education and treatment of convicts. Despite my socialist upbringing and my rebellious character, I was almost tempted to join one of the classes taught by Rabbi Ivgi in prison. Eventually, I decided to choose correspondence studies through the Open University instead of religious studies. I cynically thought that my place in hell was assured, because of all ten commandments, the only one I had not broken was “Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image…” and that only for lack of talent, not out of faith.

Micha was the one who convinced me to study at the Open University. He helped me mainly with math, which had atrophied in my rusty brain during the years of killing people. Micha was nicknamed “the brain” by the other convicts, because of his vast knowledge, mainly in chemistry, but also in mathematics and philosophy, and he helped me a great deal.

On one hand, Micha taught the prisoners how to hide a small quantity of lemon acid under a fingernail, and add it to the surprise urine tests, in order to neutralize traces of drugs in the urine. On the other hand, he ran workshops for groups of prisoners on subjects of self-awareness and eastern philosophies.

One day David Biton returned from an Open University class and told us about another research conducted by the psychologists Kahneman and Tversky. He sketched a mathematical graph, something like this:



David asked Micha to help him analyze the graph mathematically, and Micha's explanations were fascinating. I couldn't believe that so much could be learned from a mathematical graph that seemed simple and boring.

The first thing Micha noticed was that on both the positive and negative side the curves became more and more moderate. "This means," he said, "that people become accustomed to both good and bad things. Things that make us very happy or very sad at first, lose their power with time, like love for a woman, which is very exciting and fascinating at first and can then fade."

Micha used our prison sentence as an opposite example. At first it is a terrible ordeal and after a few years one gets used to it. He then pointed out the flat part of the curve descending to the left and showed us something interesting.

"At a certain stage, even if the pain is extended, it is almost not felt psychologically. This explains, for instance, why people become indifferent to the number of soldiers killed in Lebanon. Seven hundred dead seems exactly like seven hundred and fifty dead. However, a new prime minister will not continue the count, but will start from zero and count the dead from when he took office. It also explains the behavior of people who think they have nothing to lose, because they feel they are already on the flat side of the curve, meaning they have already reached the height of suffering. For instance, for people who have lost millions in business, the loss of another million makes no difference. The same applies to life prisoners, who feel there is no hope. Such people may commit desperate acts, such as escaping from prison or killing a prison guard, because they feel they have nothing to lose."

It was astonishing to hear Micha's explanations, mainly about issues that had implications for us. I thought he had finished when he said: "I can see another interesting topic here. There is asymmetry between the positive side and the negative side. The positive graph rises slower than the negative graph descends. This means that we suffer from bad things more than we enjoy good things. Look at the curves how much me suffer from a small loss in comparison to how much we enjoy a small gain."

David, who enjoyed Micha's analysis, joined the conversation and said that the lecturer also spoke about our attitudes to small gains and small losses. "The phenomenon," David said, "is called the 'The Zero Illusion'. We assign the number zero too much importance, as if to its left we lose and to its right we gain. The pain caused by a small loss is disproportional to the size of the loss."

"Dr. Harduf," continued David, "told us that he had been invited to give a lecture to a large business company for a considerable sum of money. When he arrived there he found out that it would cost him money to park his car. He

cruised the streets around the offices until he found a free parking spot about 300 yards away. Walking back to the offices he thought to himself that he would have preferred to have given the lecture for ten shekels less, and still the parking fee seemed high to him."

And then Micha said something that really opened my eyes. "Bad things seem worse than good things seem good. This disparity explains why people are afraid of change. When one considers resigning his job or divorcing his wife, he requires that the change for the better be twice as big than the change for the worse, otherwise he will not execute the change."

That statement was so true about me. Every bad thing that happened to me caused me anguish and long lasting suffering, whereas good things were accepted easily and I enjoyed them only for a short time. I was extremely upset whenever someone did something bad to me, but only mildly esteemed those who did good things for me.

It is hard to believe how that conversation is engraved on my mind. Apart from my admiration of Micha's analytical skills, I was thrilled to understand. I had a feeling of enlightenment, a determination to enjoy the good things, and not to embrace the bad feelings caused by small and meaningless negative events. I began to thank people who did good things for me, and to ignore bad things that were usually not intentionally harmful. I remembered Micha's definition of the difference between being magnanimous and being a sucker. "Magnanimity is easily giving something up, that if it is taken from you, you feel a sucker."

Before my jail sentence, whenever I drove a car, I felt magnanimous if I let other drivers integrate in traffic in front of me, waving them in generously. On the other hand, on other days I felt like a sucker if someone cut me off with his car. I used to chase him and overtake him, and when I caught up with him I overtook in a way that endangered us both.

In jail, I received a letter from an ex-girlfriend in the US, who included the words of the poem "The Rose" in her letter. I especially liked the stanza:

It's the one who won't be taken

Who cannot seem to give,

And the soul afraid of dying

That never learns to live.

I think that any university professor would have been proud of students like us. We had a thirst for knowledge, and we had life experience and critical and judgmental abilities. And indeed, papers submitted by David and later on by myself were always highly evaluated by our teachers.

At one stage in our cell we were three students and Micha, who had previously studied and continued to do so constantly. Yiftah studied economics. David, who started before me, studied psychology and sociology. I studied psychology and criminology. I wanted to know what had made me what I was, to understand how I had turned from a happy-go-lucky kibbutz child into a hired killer.

The years went by. Prisoners came and went. And I was the only one in cell 12 who stayed and stayed and stayed. Asaf, the greatest cocaine dealer of the 80's, was released, got married, had two children, and became a lifeguard at Ashkelon beach. Yiftah, who had murdered his boss, also got married and moved to Hatzor Ha'Glilit, where no one knew him or his past. Shimon Azulai returned to Kiryat Gat, but was soon back to drugs and crime. David Biton became a successful and respected contractor in Jerusalem. And Micha, my closest friend, was released, but returned a few months later to Ayalon Prison, after a drug lab he had operated was caught.

The long years in prison had left their mark on me. My hair turned white, my face was lined and wrinkled, and I began to feel that I was losing my sanity. I had been in jail for eight years without a vacation. I had gone to my father's funeral shackled and accompanied by a prison guard and was back in prison two hours later.

Cell number 12 became a normal prison cell. All sorts of criminals, some murderers and even rapists, were put in, and the special atmosphere that we had in the past had disappeared.

But there was a positive side to the change. I got a chance to meet people whose company I would normally not seek. One of these people was William Huri, who had murdered his wife because she was "unfaithful". Through him I learned a bit about Arab nature concerning family honor, or more accurately, the imaginary honor of the Arab man and the real humiliation of the Arab woman.

At that time there must have been a slump in crime, and for two months William and I were alone in a cell that was supposed to house four.

William was about fifty, short, slender and morose. He rarely spoke. One day I asked him the required question, how a man gets up one day and murders his beloved wife.

"It's a long and sad tale," he answered in his quiet voice, "I will tell you in the evening."

In the evening I made William supper. During lunch I saw to it that one of the prisoners brought me six eggs, some onions and olive oil. I took my improvised frying pan and small toaster out of hiding, opened a tin of sardines I had bought at the canteen, and with some soft tomatoes and cheese supplied by the "food commando", I prepared a commendable meal.

After eating, we drank sweet black coffee. William washed the dishes.

“Would you like to smoke some hashish before we start?” he asked me.

“Why not?” I remembered that I had read in some book that the rational person asks “why?” whereas the intuitive person asks “why not?”

The most common way to smoke hashish in jail was with a “bung”. This is an improvised implement, made of a small plastic bottle in which a cigarette hole is burned. A rubber tube is forcefully inserted into the opening. One end of the tube is in the water that half fills the bottle, and a silver foil mouthpiece is attached to the other end of the tube. You put some hashish into the mouthpiece and light it, drawing strongly on the mouth of the bottle. Like a *nargilah*, the smoke is filtered through the water on its way to the lungs. The advantage of the “bung” is that a small amount of drug is highly effective.

William took a few puffs, and passed it to me. And so, for five minutes we passed the “bung” back and forth, until there was no hashish left in the mouthpiece. William dismantled the “bung”, threw out the water and hid each part in a different hiding place. We then turned out the lights, got into our beds, and William started telling me his story.

“I was born in Bethlehem in 1944. I went to high school and when I graduated I got a job as a clerk in an institution for retarded children in town. I intended to save enough money to study at Beirut University, but the Six Day War foiled my plans, among other reasons because we were expelled from our home after the war, on the pretext that it had belonged to Jews before 1948.

My father was very ill. He had four operations, and when his condition deteriorated I had to quit my job to be with him in the hospital. My father couldn’t move or speak, and I, his only single son, sat by his side constantly. He died two months after his last operation.

I stayed living with my mother. She was also ill and I had to help her. I forgot all about my studies and plans, and had to get a job. In 1969 the military government advertised that they were looking for agricultural trainers in the occupied territories, people who could bring modern agriculture to the Arab villages. I was accepted for the job, and after a training course I started my work as an agricultural instructor. My first week at work was the week the El-Aqsa Mosque burned down.

One day I went to visit my family in Ramallah, and met a girl from my family, Nabilla, who was on a visit from Jordan. She was eighteen years old and very beautiful. Her face showed that she had been crying all day, and I asked her why. I was not shy with girls. I was quite a Don Juan.

She told me that her family wanted her to marry her cousin, a shoemaker in Ramallah. I knew her cousin and knew that he was a simple and primitive man. I asked my aunt to make me coffee so Nabilla and I could talk privately. When my aunt left, I told her that I would meet her in the market at a certain hour and promised to assist her. She knew that I worked for the government, and hoped that I could indeed help her.

We met near the market and she told me that she didn't want to marry the man they intended for her, and that if they forced her she would commit suicide before the wedding. I couldn't talk to her on the street because people knew us both. I took a taxi and we drove to Bethlehem.

During the ride I decided to kidnap her from her family, and I proposed marriage to her. I told her that I had no money, but that I had a good job as an agricultural instructor, and promised her that we would manage. If you don't want me, you can get out of the taxi and return to your uncle, I told her.

She agreed to my proposal. I wanted to have sex with her immediately, so that she would no longer be a virgin and could not marry anyone else. I was afraid that my mother and the girl's relatives would not agree to the marriage, but I also knew that if they found out she had slept with me, they would be obliged to give their consent. It is relatively easy to prevent something before it happens, but it is impossible to undo something that has already been done.

I took the girl to a cave in the area and told her: So that you don't have problems and can withstand your family's pressure, I want you to have sex with me. She hugged me and started to cry. She was afraid that I would have sex with her and then abandon her, but I promised her I would marry her. I explained that if I didn't marry her, I would be charged with kidnapping and rape. She calmed down.

After we slept together, I removed my white undershirt and dipped it in her virginity blood, to show my mother. I had to bring proof so that no one could say that she was a whore or that I had married a used girl. An Arab girl could never find a husband if she wasn't a virgin.

We went to my mother in Bethlehem. She asked me who the girl was, and I told her she was Nabilla, my father's cousin from Jordan. I told my mother the whole story and that I loved the girl. She asked: You left for Ramallah two hours ago and met a girl, and already you love her? I explained that times had changed, but my mother said: A girl who is willing to marry you without her parent's consent, is not for you! She strongly opposed our marriage. I took out my undershirt and showed it to her. She was very angry with me, still refused to allow us to marry, and demanded I take Nabilla and get out of her house

until the problem was solved. She was a very religious woman, an Arab and a devout Catholic, and my deed shocked her.

Nabilla trembled with fear. I reassured her and told her we would get the Catholics to marry us, and if they refused then the Moslems, or even the Jews if we had no choice. I went to my brother and sister and told them the story, but they opposed the marriage and supported my mother.

I took Nabilla and two witnesses to the Catholic Church. The priest claimed that he needed a month to investigate the girl's past in Jordan and make sure that there was no problem to marry us. I showed my bloodied undershirt to the priest, to prove to him that Nabilla had not been married. We had an argument, and I told him that if he didn't perform the ceremony, we would go to the Moslems. He asked for two days to discuss the matter with the Bishop and the Patriarch. I had no choice but to agree, but I was still fearful that her family in Ramallah would search for her and cause trouble.

I took Nabilla to a hotel owned by a friend of mine, and asked him to hide her and not put our names on the register. Two days later we returned to the church and the priest married us. We got married with only two witnesses. My entire family refused to acknowledge the marriage.

We continued to live at the hotel, and meanwhile I sent some respected elders from Bethlehem to the uncle's home in Ramallah with a photocopy of the marriage certificate. My intention was to convince her family to have a "*sulkha*" (an Arab ceremony of reconciliation), and indeed, a month after the wedding it was held in Ramallah.

I went to the Ministry of the Interior and filled out a form for family reunion, so that my wife could stay in Bethlehem and not be forced to return to Jordan.

About a week after the wedding we left the hotel and heard a taxi driver calling for passengers who wanted to travel to Gaza. I asked her: What do you think? I'm on holiday today, so maybe we can go to Gaza? She was happy with the opportunity to travel. About three kilometers before Gaza there was an Israeli police roadblock. The policeman asked for our identity cards. I gave him mine and she gave him her Jordanian passport. He saw that her tourist visa had expired a week earlier, and asked her to step out of the taxi. I told him she was my wife, but he was not impressed. I showed him my Ministry of Agriculture employee card, and told him that I had applied for a family reunion permit, but he insisted she step out of the taxi. I joined her.

He spoke on his radio and a Gaza police jeep pulled up with three local Arab policemen. When the sergeant saw Nabilla, he was smitten by her beauty. I told the Israeli policeman that my wife and I would not get into a jeep with

these three primitives. He tried to reassure me and said: They are policemen; they won't harm your wife.

The fat sergeant said to her: Come on, get into the jeep. What are you waiting for? And he put his hand on her back as if to move her along, but I read his mind. He touched her because he had never before touched such a beautiful woman.

I caught his hand. I am a civil servant, I said to him, and I'm warning you not to touch my wife. Act like a policeman in uniform.

We arrived at the police station, and luckily there was an Israeli policeman there, a Christian like myself. I said to him: Listen, my friend, I am a Christian like you, and I feel as if we're in Iran. These are primitive policemen. I can't leave my wife in their hands. He called his commander in Gaza, who said that if I brought them an official letter from my bosses at the Ministry of Agriculture, that confirms my application for family reunion, they would not arrest her.

He promised to leave my wife with policewomen, and I took a special taxi back to the Ministry of Agriculture in Bethlehem. I went to my boss, but he couldn't help me. I drove to a more senior official in his home in Jerusalem, told him the story, and he gave me a signed letter for the Gaza police commander.

I took the envelope, drove back to Gaza, and handed the letter to the policeman. He read it to his commander over the phone, who ordered Nabilla's release.

By the time we were back on the street it was already evening. The streets were empty. We saw no people or cars. We walked the streets in hope of finding a taxi back to Bethlehem. Suddenly, we were lit by a searchlight, and I saw a machine gun pointed at us from an army vehicle. A soldier stepped out of the armored vehicle, told us that Gaza was under curfew, and inquired what we were doing. I told him we were searching for a taxi and he got us into the army vehicle.

The next day I went to the Ministry of Agriculture executive who had helped me, and introduced him to wife. He said to me: It was worth kidnapping her, but he claimed that she had broken the law and that she would have to return to Jordan until her documents were in order.

Things finally worked out. I continued my job with the Ministry of Agriculture, we had a daughter, and life was great. About a year after we were married, and after our daughter was born, my mother-in-law suddenly visited us. I came home from work, and my wife introduced her mother. I went into the kitchen, prepared some cold lemonade, returned with three glasses and

offered her a drink. I did not come from Jordan to drink lemonade, she said, but to take my daughter back with me.

I was insulted that her family had seen fit to send a woman instead of a man. I know they did this deliberately to insult me.

Do you want to go back with your mother? I asked my wife.

She didn't answer. She didn't want to upset her mother, whom she hadn't seen for over a year, or me.

I got annoyed with my wife and said to her: Speak freely. Do you want to stay or go?

I want to stay with him, Nabilla told her mother straightforwardly.

I am telling you again, I said to my mother-in-law, you are welcome. My home is open to you because you are my wife's mother. She got angry and said: I will take my daughter by force, and she threw the tray with the glasses, which shattered noisily on the floor.

You are looking for trouble, I told her, for yourself and everyone else.

I left the room with my wife. Who arranged your mother's visit? I asked. She said that it was probably the relatives in Ramallah. I realized that if the permit was issued in Ramallah, she couldn't stay in Bethlehem overnight.

I called the police and reported her. When the policemen arrived my mother-in-law was very rude to them and spit at them. I didn't want her arrested, but I did want them to send her back to Ramallah. She burst into tears, so I asked the policemen to leave her alone and we would make our peace.

About a month later my boss summoned me to his office. I saw a stranger there, so I meant to wait outside, but he called me in and introduced me to my wife's father. I approached to hug him and shake his hand, but he rejected me and didn't allow me to come near him. He was a very rich man in Jordan, and treated me with disrespect and anger for supposedly kidnapping his daughter.

He wants to see his daughter, my boss said.

Then why doesn't he come straight to me? I asked. He can come to my home and I will honor him.

You are unreliable, the father said to me. I only want to see my daughter, and I demand to take her to Ramallah before my visit in Israel is over.

I got annoyed. I told him that I didn't want a penny of his money, and added: I honored you, and I expect respect from you, not disrespect.

My boss calmed things down and initiated reconciliation. Eventually we hugged. He cried and so did I. I brought him home with me, prepared a meal

for him, and he stayed with us for four days. My wife was overjoyed that I had managed to win her father over.

On the last night he gave my wife an envelope and wished us luck. There were one thousand *dinars* in the envelope, a considerable sum. I hinted to my wife not to take the money. He was offended but I insisted. He demanded we take the money as a gift for the baby, but I wouldn't hear of it. I have honor. I am willing to live on bread and olives, I said, but I won't take the money.

The man returned to Jordan and told everyone that he liked me a lot, that he esteemed me, and that he was pleased with his daughter's marriage.

Years went by. We had two sons. I continued to work for the Ministry of Agriculture and was even promoted.

A new manager was appointed for our region. At one of the parties held for all civil servants in Bethlehem, he met my wife and me. I didn't like the way he looked at my wife, but I kept quiet. I couldn't confront him just for staring at my wife.

One day he suggested that all department employees, Jews and Arabs, have breakfast together, and asked me whether I would be willing to host them.

I invited them all to a meal, and suddenly noticed that my wife was behaving oddly. She spoke and laughed with my boss as if she knew him well. That night, while she slept, I opened the closet and looked for her notebook, in which she wrote various things. I had never opened her notebook before. I knew it had telephone numbers, doctor's appointments etc. written in it. I opened the notebook and found my boss's home telephone number in Beit Shemesh written there. I worked with him and didn't know his home number, and she had it. I felt that something was going on between them.

I didn't say anything to her, but told Munir, my ten year old son, to go everywhere with his mother, and to tell me what she does. This boy was very bright, and told me that the neighbor called her to the phone every day.

The neighbor's son was a sixteen-year-old boy. He had no father and his mother was a prostitute. I took him to a restaurant, gave him some money, bought him a shirt, and promised to help him with anything he wanted. In return, he told me that my wife came to their house to speak on the phone, and that she spoke with a government official. His mother used to tell him to call my wife to the phone, and to tell her that the manager was calling. He also told me that she sometimes made calls from the shop near our house. I went to the shop owner and asked him to see which phone number she was dialing. A few days later, the shop owner gave me the telephone number that, as I expected, belonged to my boss at home.

I started following my wife with a gun that I had a permit for and with a knife. When I saw her getting into a Ministry of Agriculture van, I decided to kill her.

I intended to shoot my boss and stab my wife to death. I wanted her to suffer more. I couldn't settle for just pulling the trigger. I wanted to take pleasure in her murder, to avenge my honor, mainly because many government employees already knew what was going on.

I returned home and she showed up two hours later. I asked her where she had been, and she said on a visit to her uncle in Ramallah.

I saw you getting out of the red Fiat and into my boss's van, I said. You are going to Jordan tomorrow, staying there for a few months, and then we will get a divorce.

By Israeli law I deserve alimony and a house, and I keep the children, she said to me.

You Jordanian piece of trash. What do you know about Israeli law? I said. But I couldn't kill her. I saw the children and didn't have it in me to kill her.

The next day, at work, the senior manager summoned me. He told me that he knew I had troubles with my wife, and that he was confiscating my gun. I asked for a week's leave and he agreed. During that week I didn't shower or shave or change my clothes. I felt as small as a fly. I didn't speak to anyone. I wandered the streets and slept in public parks.

On Thursday I went to a Jordan-bound taxi station. I took out a permit and went to Jordan. I looked totally neglected and I smelled. I went to the Lebanese Embassy, requested a visa and flew to Beirut.

About two kilometers from the airport, a roadblock of Syrian soldiers stopped the taxi. They asked for passports, and I presented a forged Jordanian passport that I had organized for myself in Bethlehem. I was taken out of the taxi and beaten on my shoulders and head with a *Kalashnikov* rifle butt. A Syrian jeep arrived. They blindfolded me and tied my hands behind my back, and took me to an army base. There they tied me to a tree and interrogated me. I was beaten because they suspected I was a Jordanian spy. They released me three days later.

I arrived at my brother's home in Lebanon. I showered and dressed, and told my brother everything that had happened to me. My brother suggested I go to Abu Dabi and find work there. He praised me for coming to him rather than doing something drastic.

My brother traveled to Abu Dabi and made all the arrangements. I returned to Jordan to obtain a visa to Abu Dabi, and in Amman I met a neighbor from Bethlehem. He told me that my wife was fucking my boss, that my children

were neglected, that one of them had fallen down the stairs and hurt himself, and that he kept crying and calling father, father.

I returned to Israel the next day. At the Allenby Bridge I was told that I was wanted by the police, and at the Bethlehem police station I was told that my wife had issued a warrant against me for alimony and a restraining order. I sent a priest to her to tell her that I wanted to speak with her. I asked him to tell her that I had resigned my job with the government, that I had received my severance pay, and that I wanted to live near my children. She told the priest that I had to speak to her lawyer.

Three-four years passed, during which I hardly saw the children. My wife humiliated me in every possible way. I didn't have an apartment, and I lived on and off with my mother, my sister or in sleazy hotels. I saw my wife occasionally on the street and she would spit at me.

At my lawyer's advice, I planned to leave for the United States with one of my sons. I had a visa, but was prevented from leaving at the airport. My wife had issued a warrant restraining me from leaving the country because I hadn't paid alimony.

One day, when I was staying at my sister's house, I saw a known criminal approach the house in a suspicious manner. I surprised him from behind with a large knife. I frightened him so he told me that my wife had paid him to kill me.

I saw there was no end to the story, so I sent a older and respected man to tell her that I would give her 5,000 dollars to move to Jordan but without the children. I also asked him to tell her that after five years this was her last chance. He spoke to her but she didn't listen. At that time she was living with an Arab criminal, a known drug addict in Bethlehem, who also acted as her bodyguard. I didn't care anymore who she was sleeping with, but I was afraid that the criminal would attack my daughter, who was fourteen years old.

I went to Ramallah to my wife's uncle, so that he would help me get my daughter out. He told me he was afraid of her. I went to another uncle and asked for his help. He told me, in front of his family, that Israel was a democracy, and that both my wife and my daughter could do what they wanted and sleep with whom they felt like.

When I left his house I swore on my father's grave that I would send that uncle my wife's head in a box after I killed her.

I returned to Bethlehem. On the way I bought acid and a ten-inch knife. The acid was not for her. It was for her bodyguard or anyone else who might try to interfere. The knife was for her.

I wore a big coat, put the knife and the acid in the pockets, and went looking for my wife in town. I left at three in the afternoon and searched until seven in the evening. Suddenly I saw her walking with my daughter. I followed them to the street corner. I chased my wife' caught her by the hair, pushed her forward, and hit her head on the wall. She fell to the ground screaming. Her eyes were turned up, so she couldn't see me and didn't know who I was. I was completely silent, and didn't utter a word.

My daughter froze. I told her to go to her uncle, because she didn't have a mother anymore, and stabbed my wife in the back. She screamed in pain. I said to her: Don't scream. Now I will give you a medicine so you never scream again in your life. I was still calm on the outside, but like a volcano on the inside. I had tried to cope with my problem for five years without success. I felt that all the doors were closed.

After the first stab wound, she got up and started running without seeing. She bumped into a wall and fell to the pavement again. I lifted her and started stabbing her in the chest. After the second stab wound she was already dead, but I continued stabbing her seventeen more times.

I could not cut her head off, as I had sworn to do on my father's grave. I poured the acid over her and ran to the police to give myself up."

It was almost three in the morning by the time William had finished his story. We lay in the dark, each in his bed. He had spoken for six straight hours, and I hadn't interrupted him with even one question. I lay in the dark, and listened silently to his terrible tale. I had mixed feelings. On one hand I completely understood his anger and frustration, and on the other hand I pitied the woman. I had only heard his version, and I knew for sure that it was only part of the truth, but the truth didn't matter anymore. The wife was dead, the children were orphans, and William was sentenced to a life sentence. It didn't really matter anymore which one of them was right. Both were not very smart, but lack of wisdom is not a reason to kill or be killed.

Every time I read in the paper about a man killing his wife, I identified with the woman. I saw in front of my eyes a violent man abusing his wife and finally killing her. William's story was different. I didn't think he was right to do what he did, but I understood the humiliation he had suffered from his wife and her family, and felt a certain compassion towards him.

"Shall I make you a cup of tea?" I asked him.

"Yes, please."

I turned on the light and saw his grim face. “If you wish, we can continue talking tomorrow.”

“Yes,” he relied pensively, “I’d like to continue talking to you. I feel I can count on you.”

Although I hadn’t opened my mouth during all the hours he recounted his story, I understood exactly what he meant. He wanted an attentive listener who would hear him out. Despite the darkness and total silence, he knew I had been listening to every word.

“A good friend,” he said, “is someone who can listen to you, not necessarily talk to you.”

SKIN DISEASE

A couple of months after William joined my cell I experienced one of the strangest experiences of my imprisonment. One day, coming out of the shower, a towel wrapped around my lower body, William asked me what the spot on my body was. I looked where he pointed and noticed a strange spot, the size of a coin, on my lower chest. “I don’t know,” I replied, “this is the first time I’ve seen it.”

When the medic came for a visit, I showed him the spot, and he gave me an anti-fungal ointment. A week later the spot had grown, and a growth on my forehead, which I couldn’t stop scratching, turned out to be a large, ugly scab. The medic added a smelly shampoo, and said: “It’s nothing!”

Two weeks later my entire body was covered with small sores and large spots, and the itching all over my body was unbearable. This time the medic was alarmed and made an appointment for me to see the doctor. When Dr. Popesku arrived I realized that luckily (in the short range), before he had immigrated to Israel, he had been a skin specialist at one of the hot-water spas in Rumania. He immediately identified the phenomenon as Erythroderma, which manifests itself in red and peeling skin, and severe and ugly damage to the nails. He recommended immediate hospitalization at Belinson Hospital, where the dermatology department was considered one of the best in Israel, mainly due to the excellent reputation of the department chief, Professor Yakov.

My stay at the hospital may seem to be more comfortable than jail, but I soon discovered that it was much more comfortable to be in a small cell with three other convicts than in a room with seven other skin patients. I had a clear disadvantage compared to the other patients; my left hand was handcuffed to the bed frame. The two armed guards posted outside the room didn’t bother me at all.

Sleep at night was impossible. Some of the patients snored, others coughed, moaned, groaned and farted out loud. I played a game with myself trying to guess what the next noise would be.

I fell asleep at five in the morning. Before long, a short but loud nurse turned on all the lights in the room, greeted us with “good morning” and stuck a thermometer in our mouths.

The medical staff and the patients knew that I was a convicted murderer sentenced to life imprisonment, and it scared them. The guards reassured them that I wasn’t dangerous, and that they would watch me carefully. More

afraid than anyone was a relatively older doctor form the former Soviet Union, who never came near my bed during doctors' rounds accompanied by five of her colleagues. My neighbor, whose bed was right alongside mine, was also afraid. He asked to be transferred because he feared I'd kill him in the night. The patients' and doctors' behavior demonstrated how ignorant people are. They truly believed that if one has committed murder once, he will kill again, but didn't understand that I had killed but wasn't a killer. They thought I enjoyed killing.

I was treated especially well by Dr. Aliza Morag. She was a young, tall, good-looking doctor, who was deputy chief of the department and very knowledgeable in the area of dermatology. Like many other doctors she was not keen on giving me medicine that might do good, but might also cause damage. She wanted to know every thing with certainty before prescribing a treatment. I, who wanted to return to prison as soon as possible, pressured her to give me something and release me, but she claimed that until she knew the exact reason for my symptoms, she could not give me drugs, only ointment treatment, and couldn't send me back to jail.

She also knew, of course, that I had murdered and was considered a dangerous convict, but her attitude towards me was pleasant and friendly, and she took the trouble to explain all the tests and their results.

She never called the patients by their first names, always Mr. this or that, and I got the impression that this helped her maintain a certain distance from her patients. I was, nevertheless, happy that she called me Mr. Tal. It made me feel that she respected me.

Her attitude to the interns was that of a teacher who respects her students. In some way, doctors' rounds reminded me of an organized tour, in which the guide shows the group members sites and locations, and tells them about the places' history. That is how they treated the spots on my body. I noticed that Dr. Morag, who was the senior doctor on the rounds, never expressed her views about my condition, but always first consulted the interns. I lay in bed half naked, and thought that this was how managers or doctors should run meetings. Her attitude expressed modesty and openness.

Later, when I had returned to prison and told my cellmates about this, Hugo, who had already begun his long journey back to the Jewish faith, said that in the *Mishna*, in the *Sanhedrin* tractate, it says: "Capital cases start from the side", meaning that first the minor judges, who sit on the side are asked, rather than the chief judge, in case the minor judges rely on his opinion.

Once, during morning rounds, a group of foreign dermatologists joined our doctors. The discussion between them was held in English, so that the guests

could understand and participate. In face of their surprise at my handcuffs, Dr. Morag explained that I was considered a dangerous criminal. When one of the young visiting doctors from the United States asked her: “What was his crime?” I answered: “Murder in the USA.” The American doctor was a bit startled. She asked hesitantly and politely if I would tell her whom I had murdered in her country. I told her briefly. Fortunately, she had not heard about the case.

The discussion around my bed lasted twenty minutes. The Israeli and foreign doctors asked many questions about my disease, and finally Dr. Morag summarized the topic. She determined that I probably had a disease called *psoriasis*. Before they left one of the interns, a pleasant young redhead, said to me kindly: “Don’t worry, you’ll be fine.”

“Tell me, Doctor,” I asked him quietly after the group had moved on to the next patient, “I hear there is a drug called Neotigason, which is effective against *psoriasis*. Why don’t they give it to me?”

“Because we’re not certain you have *psoriasis*,” he replied. “The symptoms also indicate another disease called PRP.”

“And which drug treats PRP?”

“Also Neotigason.”

“So why don’t you give it to me if it’s good for both diseases?”

“Because we have to know what you have before we treat it. If your life were in danger, we would give you the drug. In your condition, we’d rather know first which disease you have and then treat it.”

One day Dr. Morag told me that I should go the Rambam Hospital for a very expensive test.

“What’s this about?” I asked her.

“There is a chance, of maybe one percent, that the cause of your symptoms is a hidden cancerous growth. With this test I recommended, we can rule out this possibility, and then I’ll be much calmer.”

“Of course,” I said, although I wasn’t really sure I wanted to do the test. She did say that there was only a one percent chance, but I felt that the chance I had cancer was at least fifty percent.

Eventually it turned out that I did have *psoriasis*. When I had returned to jail, the prison rabbi told me that it was probably the disease of boils that had afflicted Job and the ancient Egyptians, between the plague and the hailstones. That didn’t comfort me at all.

The rabbi also added that he had calculated and found that the Hebrew numerology of “he murdered in America” is exactly that of “Ofer Tal – boils in Israel”. And also that the Hebrew numerology of my surname “Tal” is that of “like Job”.

I was, at first, astonished by the rare coincidence, until I recalled the Israeli physicist who had discovered that if he picked every seventh letter of a certain chapter of the bible, it spelled the name of a famous rabbi, and every eighth letter of another chapter spelled the name of a different rabbi, and so on. This astounded many people and impressed others, mainly religious people, until a prominent professor from the psychology faculty at the Hebrew University demonstrated that she could create names of famous rabbis from “War and Peace” by Tolstoy, who was not a specially observant Jew.

I was in the hospital for three weeks. After the shock of the first few days, I was able to make social contact with most of my fellow patients. There were people who were led by their ailments to seek real and bogus *tzadikkim,* to hot and cold springs, to alternative and conventional medical charlatans, to ointment makers who declared that they had suffered from the disease and cured themselves with the magic potions they had invented, to acupuncturists, to energy healers and to other false hopes. Their last hope was the hospital, and even here no big miracles awaited them. Dermatology, perhaps because of the relatively low damage of its diseases, is way behind in research, and cannot exactly say why many diseases, such as *psoriasis*, happen and how and when they are cured.

One day Professor Yakov called me into his office. I went there handcuffed by my right wrist to a guard. He told me that once a month a conference of all the dermatology departments’ head physicians in the country is held, and that the next one would be at Belinson Hospital. At these meetings the host presents a number of cases with difficult diagnoses, and a consultation is held regarding the diagnosis and the treatment of each case. Professor Yakov asked me whether I would be prepared to be one of the patients presented at the conference. I agreed, of course. I wanted a maximum number of experts to give their opinion about the causes of my disease and the preferred treatment.

The meeting took place a few days later, and reminded me of a visit to an agricultural exhibition. Every patient got a “cell”, in which he sat half naked. The doctors moved from one cell to another, looked and argued.

I sat in my cell, in my underpants, and shivered with cold. The first to examine me was Dr. Hasid, whom Professor Yakov introduced as serving for many years as a famous dermatologist in Switzerland, in Israel on a family visit. Dr.

Hasid examined my palms, one of which was handcuffed to the chair, and declared without hesitation: “Psoriasis!”

This was an excellent example of intuitive decision-making. Dr. Hasid did not hesitate, did not ask questions, and did not read my case history. It took him two seconds to make his diagnosis.

The next doctor was Dr. Davidovich, chief dermatologist at one of the hospitals in the north. He looked at me and asked the nurse for my medical records.

“Has he had a biopsy?”

“Yes, but it isn’t conclusive.”

“Have his T-cells been tested?”

“Yes, the result was negative.”

“Any lymphatic ties?”

“One, but painless.”

“What’s his blood pressure?”

“A hundred and twenty over eighty.”

“Cholesterol level?”

“Two hundred and two.”

“Lymphocytes?”

“Normal.”

“Triglycerides?”

“Two hundred and nine.”

“Bilirubin?”

“Zero point four.”

“Mmm…” said Dr. Davidovich, “it’s hard to say. It seems to be psoriasis, but it could be PRP.”

This was an example of rational decision-making. The doctor collected many details, examined the data, analyzed the findings, and eventually continued to waver. It seemed that Dr. Hasid looked at the general picture and was not afraid to make a decision even without complete information. He, thereby, took a certain degree of risk. Dr. Davidovich, in contrast, examined the details rather than the entirety, and seemed more apprehensive. Good doctors, I thought to myself, should have knowledge and analytical skills, but also healthy intuition and an ability to reach decisions under uncertain conditions.

After all the doctors had seen me, Professor Yakov came and told me that my disease was probably psoriasis, which is a chronic disease that lasts for many years.

“Are you sure?”

“When I say I’m sure,” answered the professor, “I am right only in seventy percent of the cases. When I say that there is a seventy percent chance that I am right, I am only fifty percent right. So, all I can tell you is that you probably have psoriasis.”

“And how many years till I recover? More than ten?”

“No, I think less. I imagine five to six years.”

Years of living in uncertainty have taught me that when I ask people to approximate something that they have no certain knowledge about, and I supply them with a reference point, an anchor, they tend to give me an estimate that is close to that anchor. I suppose that if I had asked him if the disease would last more than two years, he would have said: Yes. I estimate it will last three to four years.

In the cell next to mine at the ‘doctors’ bazaar’ was a patient called Tal Malul, a young woman who had ugly, dark blotches all over her face and arms. She was a big woman, with a pleasant face and kind eyes. When I arrived at the hospital she had already been there over a month, and during the previous two years had come in often for treatment. She had good relationships with the staff and helped patients with all kinds of difficulties.

One day, as I was walking to the toilet, accompanied by a guard, I met her in the hall. She told me that she had heard about me and would be happy to help me with anything I might need. I was touched. Apart from professional conversations in jail with social workers and education officers, I had not had the chance to talk to a woman for many years.

Despite her blotchy face, Tal looked beautiful to me. I used to ask the guard to handcuff me to a metal bench in the hallway, not far from the nurses’ station, and talked with Tal for hours. Apart from treatment times and the spare time Tal devoted to feeding one of the elderly patients, Tal and I spent most of the day on that bench.

Tal had suffered from sores on her face ever since she had been a teenager. Skin diseases revolt people as convicts, or lepers, revolt them. Tal had been slowly rejected by society, and her friends were afraid to spend time with her. She turned from a happy, outgoing girl into a sad and introverted one. Not bitter, but quiet and melancholic.

I was not a symbol of joy either. The long years in prison and my bad conscience about what I had done tortured my soul. The conversations with Tal, during which quite a few tears were shed by both of us, were great. I felt that I was falling in love with her, but was afraid to tell her. Jokingly I once said that if we were to get married her name would be Tal Tal. She was wise enough to treat that with a sense of humor.

Tal was the only reason I wanted to remain in the hospital. When she was discharged, I asked Dr. Morag to discharge me too, and I returned to prison two days after Tal returned home.

We continued our relationship by letter and phone calls, and Tal visited me in prison a number of times. We began talking about the possibility of a common future. I felt that I was in love, but we both realized that we had a long way ahead of us and that it was anything but simple.

During my long years in jail I had seen quite a few cases of girls who fell in love with convicts, even murderers. I could never understand what the girl was seeking, what she saw in someone who had killed another human being, and why she would be willing to attach herself to him and wait for many years. I thought that it might be the solution for someone who was afraid of a relationship with a normal man, and preferred a virtual boyfriend, who she didn't have to live with. And maybe they think there is something romantic in the attachment with a murderer, who is at the same time a tough person and a sensitive one, in need of love and attention. From my point of view, all this romance was phony, and I thought there was something unhealthy about these women.

I recalled the case of the two fifteen-year olds who had murdered a bus driver in Ra'anana. They started going out on leave when they were eighteen and had lots of admirers, some very young girls, maybe fourteen or fifteen years old, and some older, including twenty-five or thirty year old married women. One of them would tell me, when he came back to prison, how he had slept with eight girls during one weekend, and how he had to juggle his dates with the various girls so they didn't bump into each other.

Even when they were inside the prison, between leaves, they spent hours on the phone talking to potential lovers. In the first conversations they didn't tell the girls that they were sentenced for murder. They said that they were in jail because of theft or robberies of jewelry shops. Only later, after they had gained their confidence, did they tell their girlfriends that they had a murderer for a boyfriend. If their friends asked them whether they were not afraid of getting killed, after the murderer was satisfied, they must have giggled and answered: No way! He's very cute.

But I am not talking only about sex during leave from prison. Women have tied their fates with murderers. They came to visit them week after week, in rain or storm, pledged their faith, and even married them twenty years before their expected release date.

After I met Tal and we fell in love, I realized that there are strange kinds of love, inexplicable and seemingly irrational, but not necessarily false, twisted or sick.

I once again learned that things seen from here are not seen from there. What may seem strange and hostile to the onlooker can be clear and pure to one who has lived through the experience oneself.

FRUIT COMFITURE

My only ties with the world outside were with my mother who had aged a great deal during the years I was in jail, with a kibbutz member who was one of my kindergarten teachers, with the Open University staff, and with Tal, of course.

Her weekly visit was a breath of fresh air. I waited for Sunday, visiting day, all week long. The visit hall was long and narrow, divided down the middle into two parallel parts by a low wall and wire mesh. Long stone tables lined both sides of the wall, so that the inmate and his visitors sat about a yard from each other. All the prisoners from a certain block who had visitors were assembled, and went through a security check to ascertain that they had had no knives they could use against each other or letters they could pass on to visitors. Afterwards, they were let into the visit hall where they waited for their relatives behind the fence.

The long room was painted white, and seemed to have been painted dozens of times, layer over layer. The original thickness of the fence was also difficult to determine. It was painted in many layers, and although white, seemed dirty. At its bottom, where it was attached to the stone table, were cigarette butts pushed there by the inmates. The ceiling had not been painted in a long time and was peeling in several places. A damp area in one corner of the ceiling meant there was a leak in the floor above. Two or three guards supervised the visit room, but usually did not interfere.

Before the visitors were allowed to enter the room, they were searched for drugs, weapons, files and other forbidden objects. It was allowed to bring the prisoners telephone cards, clothes and certain electrical appliances such as a television, a radio or a hotplate. It was completely forbidden to bring in food products, drinks or cigarettes, but there were vending machines for cigarettes and cold drinks near the entrance.

On the convicts' side there was nothing except chairs. On the visitors' side there was also a water cooler and a noisy air-conditioner, which made the noise produced by the conversations between convicts and their visitors, often accompanied by shouting and crying children, worse. The noise was enhanced by the terrible acoustics of the bare-walled room and by the prison's public address system, which made announcements to the staff. The most common announcement was: "For your knowledge – the count has ended."

Prisoners who were on vacation rounds, that is those entitled to a forty-eight hour leave once a month, could request that the fence between the convicts and the visitors be lifted. Others had to kiss through the wire mesh holes, which were less than an inch in diameter.

And so, amidst the noise, racket and smoke, I met my love once a week. From the minute I saw her and until she left I felt detached from the other prisoners, from the guards, the prison and the entire world.

When the visit ended the visitors said goodbye to their loved ones, and the prisoners were removed and submitted to another inspection, to make sure they hadn't received anything illegal. Electrical appliances were left with the guards and handed over to the prisoners after a thorough examination.

My relationship with Tal became stronger and stronger. We decided to marry before my release. This was a turning point in my prison life. Instead of a pessimist, I became an optimist. Tal began writing letters to the President and to the Pardons Department at the Ministry of Justice, and we soon saw results.

Eight years after my imprisonment, I had my first leave. Forty-eight hours of freedom after seventy thousand hours of incarceration. I spent half of the time with my mother on the kibbutz, and the other half at Tal's home, with her family.

Needless to say, I was very apprehensive about meeting Tal's parents. They looked at me suspiciously, like at someone who had managed to seduce their daughter. At first they were polite, then more blunt. I preferred their bluntness, because it gave me an opportunity to explain the sincerity of my intentions towards Tal, and the enormous change in me from the time I had participated in the murder of the old couple in California and until I met Tal.

When Tal came to visit me in jail a week later, she brought me fruit comfiture her mother had made for me. The guards refused, naturally, to let me have it, but to me it was a symbol, an expression of Tal's family's acceptance of me.

After the President measured my sentence at twenty-seven years, I started getting regular leaves. Every other month I got a seventy-two hour vacation from prison, most of which I spent with Tal and her family.

THE DYNAMICS OF RISK TAKING

When a convict is entitled to leaves from prison, it totally changes his life. The reason is not merely the temporary tranquility he achieves and the expectation of the next time, but also the significant change in the Prison Authority's attitude towards the prisoner. No longer sentenced to life, but a prisoner whose date of release is known. Instead of someone dangerous to the public, the inmate becomes someone who can be relied upon. He is trusted, does not violate that trust and returns to jail when his leave ends.

There are many opportunities open to convicts who are granted leave and behave properly. They are entitled to go to the theatre and other cultural events in a group, and their study opportunities are also more varied.

The first thing I gained when my status changed will remain with me for the rest of my life. I was chosen, with nine other inmates, to participate in a workshop for students and convicts with the pretentious name: "Dynamics of Risk Taking".

The workshop was held at the Ruppin Institute, an academic institution that awards academic degrees in management, economics and behavioral sciences. The college is about ten minutes away from the jail by car, but light years away in every other way. The sweeping lawns exuded a sense of peace and tranquility, as did the tall trees dispersed among the classrooms and dormitories. Here and there students sat on the grass, books and papers spread around them, busily doing their homework. The atmosphere was charming, but was only an introduction to the workshop itself.

We arrived on Wednesday afternoon by minibus from prison, and were led to a classroom. Ten students were waiting for us. Apprehension was apparent on both sides. They feared us because they thought we were dangerous, and we were afraid they'd find our language meager and us stupid. I was not worried about the level of my language, but was concerned about their reaction to my having killed someone. I had no intention of telling them, as I had not told anyone about my army and Mossad history. I decided to say only that I had been born on a kibbutz and been a paratrooper in the army.

Two people conducted the workshop. Batya Doron, a senior Prisons Authority officer, who had a lot of experience with groups in jail, and Dr. Nuphar, a lecturer at the Ruppin Institute and a longstanding volunteer at our prison.

The student group included four men and six women. I don't know who picked them, but they were each amazing. I was glad that my relationship with Tal was solid and that we had set a wedding date. If I hadn't had a steady

girlfriend, I might have missed the encounter with these incredible young women, relating to their bodies rather than their personalities. The fact that Tal was waiting for me allowed me to open up to these students without being bothered with trying to impress them or to seduce them.

We sat in a circle. Next to me was Gali, a very pretty girl with a friendly countenance.

The group leaders outlined the workshop objectives; creating conditions for looking inwards and examination of the risks we take in life and how we make decisions.

The participants introduced themselves briefly: name, residence, marital status. Some inmates also stated how long they had been in jail or how long till they were released. None of the inmates told why he was in prison. Among us were drug dealers, former addicts and two robbers. I was the only murderer.

The first exercise was to create a personal placard, which included pictures we cut out of various magazines. The work was supposed to reflect the issues we take risks in and those we avoid taking risks in. The pictures I chose were of a family, a house in the countryside, a group of people having a good time and a gun, which symbolized the risks I had taken in the past.

We were asked to pick a partner from the other group and to describe our placard to them. As Gali was sitting next to me, I felt comfortable asking her if she would be my partner for the exercise. I was afraid she would refuse, but she accepted gladly. My mood brightened considerably.

Gali and I spread our placards under one of the trees around the classroom. Gali had chosen pictures of a business career and a family, and told me that she was also getting married soon. I showed her my placard, and we were soon talking about ourselves. I told her about the old couple I had murdered in the US and about my torment ever since. When she saw the tears in my eyes, she took my hand in hers and squeezed it warmly. I was so touched by this beautiful, brave girl that I burst into tears. I was a bit embarrassed, nor did Gali know how to react to my emotional outburst. We sat quietly for a few moments until the group leaders called us back into the classroom.

There were traces of tears on other peoples' faces, students and convicts alike, while other faces were calm and smiling. I presented Gali's placard to the group, and she presented mine. The group leaders made a few remarks. All the couples did this, and thus ended the first chapter of the workshop. We returned to prison and the students – to their homes.

It was difficult to explain to the others what we had experienced. Any verbal explanation would spoil the experience. The workshop participants, who in the past were drug dealers and addicts, returned to prison with a special feeling. Perhaps for the first time in their lives someone from the non-criminal world treated them in a personal and warm manner and not in the line of duty. Someone did not reject them, accepted them and enjoyed their company, despite the fact that they were convicts and criminals.

We returned to the Ruppin Institute on Thursday morning. The meeting started with a round of personal reports about out feelings since we had parted. All of the reactions were positive, although some brought up the issue of deception. One student said that he was not sure that the inmates emotions were always sincere, that he was afraid that it was only pretense, and that we were not as nice as we seemed the previous day. He expressed his concern that after our release, we would resume a life of crime.

Some of the prisoners reacted angrily and said that they weren't sure that the personal attitude they received from the students was honest and non-condescending. I feared that the workshop would deteriorate into a battlefield, and that the group leaders would show signs of anxiety. But they seemed calm, even smiling. They spoke to us about trust and about the time it took to build it, and about the risk involved in trusting someone who might violate that trust. "Suspicion," they said, "is the surest cure against the fear of violated trust. If one is suspicious, one does not take risks, and if one takes risks, one must trust. That's the way it is between people, and that's the way it is between nations."

The second exercise was closed-circuit TV photography. Each one of us had to tell "himself" about the risks he had to take but did not dare to. Most convicts spoke about the need to stop taking drugs, but I was most touched by three participants. Yaffa, whose father had had abandoned her mother and her when she was a year old, said that she wanted to but was afraid to meet her father, and to find out why he had abandoned her and caused her to grow up an orphan.

Menashe, a man of forty, a long-time drug dealer from Be'er Sheva, said that he wanted to accompany his son to the Army Recruitment Bureau, something that was supposed to happen in three weeks time, but that his current girlfriend, whom he loved, told him that she wanted him to spend his leave with her in Tel Aviv. He was afraid that if he went to Be'er Sheva she would leave him. The students were quite amazed to hear Menashe's dilemma, and couldn't believe that this was what most troubled a temporarily retired drug dealer.

I told my television image that I wanted to work up enough courage to go to America, to the graveyard in which the two old people I had murdered were buried, and ask their forgiveness. And I wanted the strength to tell my mother how sorry I was for the pain I had caused her.

Bravest of all was Anat. She told herself on screen that she had to tell her mother that she had decided to cancel her wedding, that was due to take place in two months time. She said she had no problem telling her boyfriend, despite the anger and pain it would cause him, but she was afraid of her mother's reaction.

Like the other participants, I was surprised by Anat's candor in revealing her most intimate issue to us. We all saw it as a vote of trust in the group members. From the minute Anat spoke, the atmosphere in the group changed. Convicts and students became one entity.

Even the group leaders, who usually maintained an interested but distant countenance, could not stop the tears in their eyes when Haled, an Arab drug dealer from Acre, told Anat to go with her heart and not to bow to family pressures. He told us how he bowed to his older brother, who pressured him for help against another Acre drug dealer, and how he went to threaten this man against his own feelings, which told him to avoid the dirty world of drugs and crime. But he was powerless, his older brother's honor was more important to him, and that's how he became what he was.

Haled was the wisest member of the group, whether students or inmates. If he had lived in normal surroundings, there is no doubt he would have become a successful, educated man. His common sense was enormous, and when he spoke everyone listened attentively. He always spoke softly and with a degree of sadness, thoughtfully, with a great deal of empathy with the person he spoke to.

The workshop was divided into three: exercises, classroom discussions and private or group conversations during recess. One of the seemingly easy exercises was to sing in front of the group. Texts of the most popular Israeli songs were handed out to the participants, who each picked a song and sang it in front of the entire group. People who were not afraid to disclose their most intimate secrets, people who were not afraid to enter a bank as masked robbers and steal, were afraid to disgrace themselves singing off key. When someone finished singing they felt as if a weight had been lifted from their shoulders. If one continued to debate with oneself whether to sing or not, there was a lot of pressure to overcome the fear. I was very nervous. When someone finished his or her part, I almost got up to sing, but felt bound to the chair. Sometimes we sat in silence for a minute or two until someone else

found the courage to sing. I found the song I wanted to sing, but didn't dare. Finally, I jumped up and started to sing, and the whole group joined me.

The most exciting, and the seemingly most frightening, exercise was to walk on red-hot coals. A large bonfire was lit along the end of the lawn, not far from the classroom. We sat near it and were told that when the fire died out and became red-hot coals, we would walk on them barefoot. I wasn't sure that the exercise wasn't a hoax, meant to examine our reactions. I made up my mind that if it was for real I would do it, but that I wouldn't be the first to walk on the embers. The group leaders asked us to complete the following sentence: "If I can walk on red-hot coals, then I can…" People spoke about not resuming their drug habit, opening their own business, leaving the faith, leaving the kibbutz, and other things that people want to do but cannot find the courage for.

One of the students asked the group leaders: "Why do we have to walk on embers?"

"We don't have to," answered Dr. Nuphar.

"So why should we?"

"For no reason."

"What do you mean, for no reason? Everything we do has to have a reason!"

"If you don't have a reason, don't do it," was the answer.

"But I feel that I want to."

"Then do it."

"But I can't explain to myself why I'm doing it."

"Then do it without an explanation."

"What will I tell my father when he asks me why I walked on embers?"

"Tell him you wanted to."

"But he will ask for a reason…"

"Tell him you felt the wish to do it."

"That won't satisfy him."

"So tell your father that he shouldn't walk on red-hot coals."

"My father is an accountant. He needs three logical reasons for everything he does. I'm also afraid that if I get burned, he will sue you and the Ruppin Institute."

"It seems that your father is an accountant and you are a pessimist. Once, when I was little, my mother told me to count to ten before I said anything. By

the time I finished counting, I forgot what I had wanted to say. I suggest to you, and to the other group members, to listen also to your irrational part, to illogical feelings that our heart broadcasts to our brain. The brain, in its role as oppressor of all madness and spontaneity, tries to calm these feelings and to dispatch them to an additional hearing of the committee that will submit its report after you have counted to ten."

"With all due respect to you and your theories," said Yuval, "I will not walk on embers."

The fire died down. Aaref, a Bedouin drug dealer from the south, raked the embers into a red-hot circle almost two yards in diameter and two inches high. We all stood next to the glowing circle. Night had fallen, and the embers looked red and hot. And then, without any ecstasy exercises, singing or dancing, the group leaders told us to go ahead. They themselves did not walk on the coals first, but simply said: "OK, here we are. Who wants to go first?"

Yaffa, who wanted to confront her father, kept saying that if she could walk on the coals, she could handle meeting him. She was the first to walk barefoot on the embers. She walked slowly, and her foot was slightly burned. Immediately after her, about ten more people, including myself, walked through.

I have done dangerous things in my life. I have parachuted from airplanes, skied off cliffs, dived, slid down from helicopters, and jumped bungi, yet I hesitated. I stood by the embers and something held me back. And then I saw Gali muster her courage and walk through the embers with a brisk walk and a determined look, and I walked in right after her. As if to prove to myself that I could do anything, I walked slowly and quite burned my soles. In the mayhem and joy around the embers, by burns did not stop me from crossing through the embers twice more. Despite the pain, it felt great, a sort of transcendence and catharsis.

At this stage the two group leaders also walked on the embers, and there were only seven left who were afraid. Some of us, who had braved it the first time, repeated it a number of times. The social pressure on those who didn't do it was strong. Eventually, there were only two students left who didn't do the exercise. One of them was Amir, who had declared to begin with that the exercise made no sense and that he had no intention of participating, unless he was offered a large sum of money in return, or another serious motivation was found. Yuval, who had argued with Dr. Nuphar, was among the last to do the exercise, after which he burst into shouts of joy and a wild dance.

The group dispersed and met again on Friday morning, for a final encounter. After reports about our burns, a discussion was held about the members' feelings. Yossi, a student who was the last to walk on the embers, said that he

had done it only because of social pressure and not because he had really wanted to. From his point of view, walking on the embers was a failure. But most of the group said that for them it was an outstanding experience. In the evening, when we returned to prison, I felt that I could cope with any problem that came my way. The dread of my release, which by now seemed imminent, and of a life with Tal, had passed. I felt that if problems arose, I would be able to deal with them. Naturally, a few weeks after the workshop, my enthusiasm cooled down, but the memory of walking on red-hot coals stayed with me, and reinforced me whenever I felt hardship or fear.

In addition to the discussion on the last day of the workshop, there was also a final exercise. The group leaders called it the “gifts exercise”. We were asked to write on a piece of paper which gift we would like to give the other group members. I was surprised by the amount of “gifts” I received. I couldn’t believe I had touched so many people’s hearts.

Some gifts were specific, such as a plane ticket to the US (so that I could visit the murdered couple’s graves), and a instruction book for raising children for the family I would raise with Tal. Other gifts were more general, but not less touching. Some notes just wished me a lot of love. Others wished me success in my marriage, and others – that I once again become rational and practical. I wasn’t sure if this was a gift I really wanted, but I had no doubt that it was given from the heart.

The inmates were deeply touched by the attitude and emotions they won. It was a wonderful ending to the workshop, which was such an outstanding thing in our prison lives.

By means of the other participants in the group, mainly the students, and especially Gali, who had accepted me from the first day without barriers and had remained a loyal and loving friend throughout the workshop, I learned to once again value myself, to accept my limitations, and not to fear the challenges that lay ahead after my release from jail.

When I met Tal on my first leave after the workshop, she saw that my enthusiasm, as I had described it over the phone, was real, and that it had contributed a great deal to the deep esteem and love I felt for her.

THE SOUL OR BLACK SMOKE WHATEVER COMES OUT FIRST

A life sentence is anywhere between seven years and one's entire lifetime. The Jewish Underground prisoners, who had murdered Arabs in the occupied territories, were sentenced to life and released after six years and eight months. The President commuted their sentence to ten years, and with a third off for good behavior, they were released from jail almost before they entered it.

The custom is that judges condemn the criminal to a life sentence, and after five to ten years in prison the President of the State, at the recommendation of the Ministry of Justice, commutes the active sentence, according to the severity of the crime and its circumstances. So, for instance, the sentence of someone who murdered his neighbor during a quarrel is not the same as that of someone who murdered an old lady during a robbery.

The recommendations of the prison authorities are also taken into account by the Justice Department. If one is undergoing psychological treatment, studying and working as required, he gets warmer recommendations. Convicts, who have contacts in the Ministry of Justice or the President's bureau, or connections to a Member of Parliament or to other public officials, try to attain pressure in any possible way, so that the active sentence is minimal.

After the President commutes the sentence for the first time, he may shorten the life convict's sentence twice more. So, for instance, the president commuted one famous murderer's sentence to thirty years, then reduced it to twenty-four, and the final punishment was commuted by the President two years later to twenty-one years. It is no coincidence that the number of years in all cases divides by three. It is easier to calculate the "third" this way, That murderer was released, after a third was deducted from his sentence for good behavior, after fourteen years in jail.

Prior to my arrest, I had contacts with higher-ranking paratrooper officers and with senior Mossad officials, but immediately following my arrest and the publication of the murder I committed all my former friends turned their backs on me and refused to help me in any way. I could understand them. They did not want their reputation tarnished by the likes of me. I sincerely hope that if the tables turned, and a friend of mine was implicated in criminal activities, our

friendship would remain intact despite my frustration and disappointment at his behavior.

My mother petitioned the then Chief of Staff and later Cabinet Minister, who was my commander in the army, and requested his help. Her letters went unanswered, and her phone calls were rejected on the claim that the minister was unwilling to interfere in the matter.

When Tal entered the picture she went to the Ministry of Justice, bombarded anyone connected to the matter with letters, and the President finally commuted my sentence for the first time. It was set at twenty-seven years.

Two years later, at the recommendation of the Prison Authorities, I received another partial amnesty from the President, and my sentence was set at twenty-four years. I began to see the light at the end of the tunnel. A sentence of twenty-four years means sixteen years when the third is deducted, less six months administrative amnesty, that is, fifteen and a half years in jail. The last two years are usually spent working outside prison, so that I really only had three more years till rehabilitation, without an additional reduction of sentence.

But my release happened much sooner than I expected. One evening a fire broke out in the X-block. By the time it was detected, black smoke was pouring out of the cell windows, and the authorities started swiftly evacuating the inmates from the second-floor block to the open courtyard on the ground floor.

About five minutes after I reached the courtyard with the other inmates, while we were all waiting for the fire engine, it turned out that Admasso, a guard, a new immigrant from Ethiopia, was missing.

Before the prison warden said a word, I had taken off my shirt, wet it with water from a faucet near the stairs, tied it over my nose and mouth, and rushed upstairs. Within seconds I had become a commando fighter with a mission, which had to be accomplished in the most speedy and efficient way possible.

I entered the smoke-engulfed hallway, but couldn’t find the guard in his room. I knew he had been in the block when the fire broke out. I ran to the end of the hall, barely breathing or seeing, and looked for him in the room that served as a synagogue, but he wasn’t there either. On the way out, terribly frustrated, I remembered the side room that belonged to the social worker. The room was located about five yards form the entrance door to the block. The smoke was especially black and thick there, and there was a strong smell of burning rubber or plastic. I was afraid of gas poisoning, but decided that I had to check the room in which I had spent so many hours in psychological treatment.

And indeed, the guard lay on the floor. Through the smoke it looked like he wasn't breathing. I slung him over my shoulder, while choking on the smoke, and rushed down the narrow stairs.

Meanwhile, the prison security officer and the medic came up the stairs, and took the unconscious or dead guard from me. In the courtyard, the medic performed CPR on him, and within minutes Admasso was back to normal. It turned out that he had been napping in the social worker's room. When the smoke coming in through the open door woke him, the smoke in the hallway was so thick that he went back into the room, where he fainted.

Etti, the new prison warden, was very impressed by my "heroic" deed. She praised me and even hugged me lightly, albeit warmly. Employing women as wardens of male prisons is one of the Prisons Authority's wisest decisions. Etti could be tough when the need arose, but was sensitive enough and attentive when appropriate behavior could be achieved in good spirits. Her face expressed determination, but occasionally a shy, winning smile could be seen, and that was difficult to refuse.

On the morning after the fire, the warden summoned me to her office. On the way, which I had walked ten years earlier in chains, I was congratulated by guards and inmates and praised for my bravery.

The guard knocked on Etti's door and opened it without waiting for an answer, while sticking his head in to see if it was OK to enter. When Etti saw me she rose from her place at the head of the rectangular conference table, came up to me and shook my hand warmly. She asked me to sit down and called the "drinks" inmate in. I was very touched. The prison warden stood up in my honor, a life prisoner, and showed me so much sympathy? It felt great.

The office, in which Itzik received me that first day, had hardly changed. The inmates paintings and the aerial photos were still on the walls, as if ten years had not gone by. This time I also asked for sweet tea with mint, and experienced a strange but sweet feeling of deja vu.

Etti was about forty years old, shortish, with a full body and a pretty face. Her skin was dark, as were her eyes, and there were silver threads here and there in her black hair. Her beautifully ironed blue uniform and the gold ranks on her shoulders gave her an aura of power and authority.

She congratulated me again for last night's events and told me that she had called the Prisons Commissioner, who, after hearing about the incident, promised that he would act on my behalf in favor of an early pardon.

It also helped that the episode was published in the newspapers, and that I was interviewed on TV talk show, with the guard I had saved. Naturally, I did

what I did not for the reward, but when they started talking about the possibility that my actions would open the door to freedom, I was a bit sorry that I hadn't been asked to a different television show with higher rating.

"Why did you save your guard?" the host asked me.

"He almost suffocated in the fire in our block."

"Since when do murderers save other people's lives?" he asked rhetorically, and added with dry humor: "Murderers are not what they used to be."

"I am a man who committed murder," I answered, "but not a murderer. Do you think that all I do all day is think how to kill people?" He annoyed me, the oily host. Perhaps the fact that many politicians wanted to be on his show had gone to his head, and he became rude and insensitive.

"No, I was just kidding," he started to apologize when he realized his mistake. "I made a terrible mistake in my life," I said, "but today I am as sensitive to human life as you or anyone else."

He apologized, and then without warning asked: "Do you remember any of your teachers?"

"No," I replied. "I don't think I remember any one of them."

"Then you might be surprised to learn that one of them remembers you well."

The name Nurit Eshkol meant nothing to me. Nor did the upright, gray-haired, fifty-or-so-year-old woman seem familiar. I recognized her only when she sat down next to me. Nurit, my literature and bible teacher at the external high school in Afula. The host was not aware, of course, nor was I sure Nurit remembered, that thirty years ago she was the first woman I had known sexually.

Nurit told the host that she had been my teacher, and that she had loved me as a young boy. She said that she had remembered me for years, and how sorry she was when she heard about the murder, and how happy she was when she heard I had saved the guard. She suddenly bent over and hugged me. Just like that, in front of the nation.

She smelled so nice, a smell that reminded me of long-gone and forgotten memories. I hugged her warmly, trying to express my admiration for her. She had not rejected me or turned her back on me like so many of my old friends. There were tears in our eyes, and even the cynical host could not hide his emotions.

Four months later, I was told that the President of Israel had decided to pardon me, on account of "brave and unselfish behavior, risking his life…"

EPILOGUE AND GLOSSARY

In addition to presenting crime and its motives, one of the goals of this book is to impart theories and concepts in the area of decision-making. These topics have been woven into the story, overtly or covertly, in hope and expectation that they evoke attention and interest. For this reason, I have added a list of various terms, each with a short academic definition and where it was referred to in the book.

Anchoring Effect – An anchor is an arbitrary number that one refers to before making a numerical evaluation. Evaluations of groups that received different anchors tend to approach the anchor they received, and they range around half the distance between their original evaluation and the anchor.

Availability – A phenomenon seems more likely if it is available to memory or is easily retrieved.

Certainty Effect – The great significance of the transition from a 99% chance that something will happen to full certainty that it will happen.

Coincidence – Relating a special significance to a phenomenon in which two events occurred simultaneously, and misunderstanding the true probability of these events occurring at the same time.

Damasio A. R. – A neurologist, author of the book “Descartes’ Error”, which deals with the importance of emotions in decision-making.

Decision – A chemical or electrical process that occurs in the brain and ends with a verbal statement or an action.

Disappointment – A negative emotion that we feel when the real or imaginary present could have been better if we were luckier. The strength of the disappointment is measured by the difference between what we achieved and what we expected to achieve. As opposed to regret, disappointment is not the result of a decision we made. The only way to minimize it is to lower our expectations. (page)

Dynamics of Risk Taking – A workshop that enables participants to examine their attitude towards risk taking and to learn how to take more risks in the personal and business arenas.

Emotional Decision – Similar to an intuitive decision, occurs in the evolutionary ancient parts of the brain. Has an advantage in the personal and social areas.

Gambler's Fallacy – The assumption of dependence between independent events. Luck has no memory, and it does not mend past behavior.

Gender Differences – Women make decisions a bit differently than men. Although modern studies refute "female intuition", it seems that women involve more emotions in decision making than men.

Group Decision – Its results are more extreme than the average of the group members' decisions.

Hindsight Effect – Tendency of people to overestimate in hindsight what they could have predicted in foresight. Exaggerating the predictability of past events.

Inside and Outside Views – An inside view focuses on a certain event, while considering its unique qualities. An outside view focuses on statistics of similar problems and usually provides a more realistic forecast.

Integration of Losses and Segregation of Gains – People prefer to suffer badly for a short time, rather than suffer a little for a long time. On the other hand, people prefer to enjoy a little for a long time, rather than enjoy a lot for a short time.

Intuitive Decision – A decision rooted in a general perception while ignoring details.

Inverse Fallacy – The probability that an event will occur given another event has occurred, is not equal to the probability that the second event will occur given the first event has occurred.

Loss Aversion – A lack of symmetry between the response to loss and the response to gain. Bad things seem worse (twice as much) than good things seem good.

Luck versus Chance – A personal probability evaluation as opposed to a statistical evaluation of uncertain events.

Nothing to lose – A situation in which objective changes for the worse are not felt subjectively (page)

Numerator Effect – The different perception of probabilities for various fractions. 1 out of 1,000 seems more rare than 500 out of 500,000.

Overconfidence – the probability that a certain event will occur is usually lower than the probability that people assume it will occur.

Passive Decision – No change in the status quo.

Peak and End Rule – The memory of an experience (painful or pleasurable) is determined by the most extreme moment of the experience and by the feeling at its end, and is not influenced by the duration of the experience.

Persistence of Beliefs – We tend to ignore information that contradicts our previous viewpoint.

Possibility Effect – The great significance of the transition from a 1% chance that something will happen to full certainty that it will happen

Preference of Ambiguity – Especially in negative situations, people sometimes prefer no to know the outcome and the chances.

Prisoner's Dilemma – A competitive situation in which both competitors are better off cooperating, but for each separately it is preferable not to cooperate.

Prospect Theory – A theory developed by Tversky & Kahneman, which describes decision-making behavior.

Rational Decision – An examination of the problem data, identification of the possible options, evaluation of the opportunities and risks, analysis of the final results and their weight in light of a certain principle, such as maximum expected utility, in order to choose the optimal alternative.

Regret – A negative emotion we experience when the real or imaginary present could have been better had we made a different decision. The strength of our regret is measured as the difference between what we have and the maximum we could have had.

Regularity Condition – An option cannot be made more or less attractive by adding another option.

Risk Aversion – The preference of certainty over an uncertain situation with equal expected value (average).

Risk Taking – The preference of uncertainty over a certain situation with equal expected value (average).

Self-Control – A rational decision ("of the head") the purpose of which is to avoid emotional and intuitive decisions ("of the body").

Status Quo – People remain in a known situation if it is not bad enough. The larger the investment in the status quo is, the greater the tendency to remain in it.

Sure Thing Principle – If we choose a certain decision given X, and the same decision given the opposite to X, then it is not important to know whether X occurred or not to make that decision. For instance, if we drink coffee with milk, whether the milk at the café is fresh or from yesterday, then we do not have to know the milk date before we order our coffee.

Tversky & Kahneman – The late Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman are two Israeli psychologists, pioneers in the field of decision-making. Their main contribution is the Prospects Theory and the understanding of behavior rules in decision-making. They were nominated for the Nobel Prize in Economics.

Value Curve – Part of Tversky & Kahneman's Prospect Theory, which expresses subjective feelings regarding objective changes.

Verbal Evaluation of Probability – The phrase "there is a good chance", e.g. may be evaluated by different people between 10% and 99%.

What is the problem? – A clear definition of the problem will evoke a wider variety of possible solutions.

Winner's Curse – If one wins in a bid against many competitors, it is likely that his offer was bad and that he would regret it.

Zero Illusion – A relatively hard feeling caused as result of a small loss.