

Simon van Drogen

S H I M O N B E N - D R O R

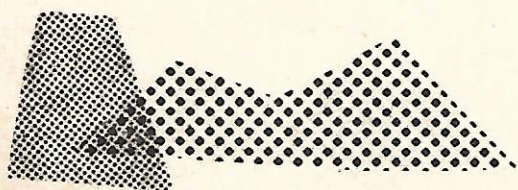
Born in Sde - Nehemia
29-5-1951

Killed in battle in Sinai
in the War of Atonement
6-10-1973

THE COCOA TOLD ME A STORY

Many hundreds of years ago there were Indians in America. That was before Columbus discovered America. They have cocoa trees there. The cocoa is inside a pod which is as big as a cucumber. They put the cocoa in water. One day I went to America and then suddenly the cocoa ran up to me and asked me if I wanted to be cocoa like him and sit in a pod. The Indians said I should put the cocoa in water. I told them that I had pity on the cocoa. After that I went back and said to Columbus to go and discover America.

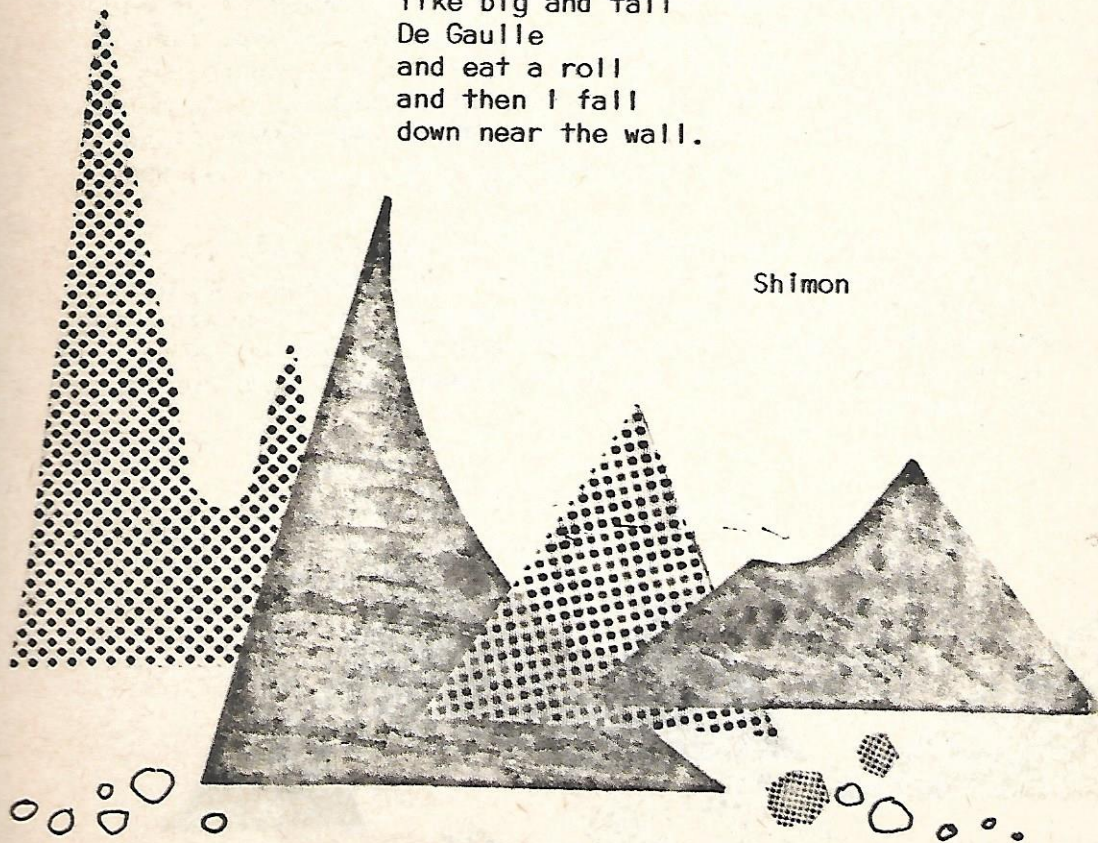
Shimon.



POEM

Big and tall
De Gaulle,
he made a goal.
And then the cock crowed and called.
What did he call?
I too can do it all.
I too can make a goal
like big and tall
De Gaulle
and eat a roll
and then I fall
down near the wall.

Shimon



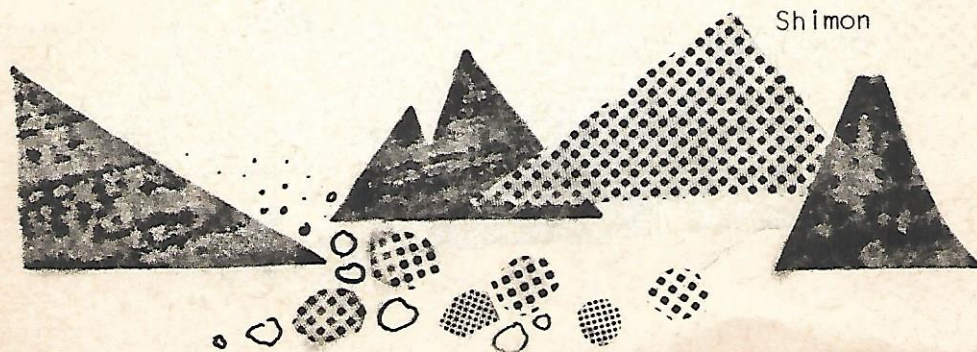
Climbing and going down the Arbel.

When we left Kfar Hitim we went through an unpopulated area. We went through the weeds and then sat down near the Lake of Kinnereth and there we ate.

After we had finished eating we started to climb and Yossi and I were ahead of the others all the time. Then we rested. On the way up the hill we were very amazed, because as long as we went we did not see any cliff, but when we came to the top we saw an enormous cliff lying a few steps before us. We were overwhelmed. The whole valley of Ginossar was there before us. The houses looked like matchboxes. There we rested and Reuven wanted to make a photograph of us and we sat down on the big stones. He took the picture. Then we got up and went on a winding and twisting path untrodden by human feet except for Arab shepherds leading their herds over those paths. And we went on and on. Jehudith hurt herself on a grey thistle that was stuck in her coat and she fell.

After all these adventures we went on feeling very strong and secure and suddenly we saw our goal before us. We went for another five minutes and then we were in a narrow valley between two steep mountains that were like high walls on our right and our left. We sat down and drank from Yael's waterbottle.

THE END.



ITHAMAR AND THE BULL

Words: Shimon Ben-Dror
Melody: Shimon Ben-Dror

Said Ithamar
from the village:
"I have got a bull
grazing in the field
in the rain,
and he can also sing.
Do you want to buy my bull?"

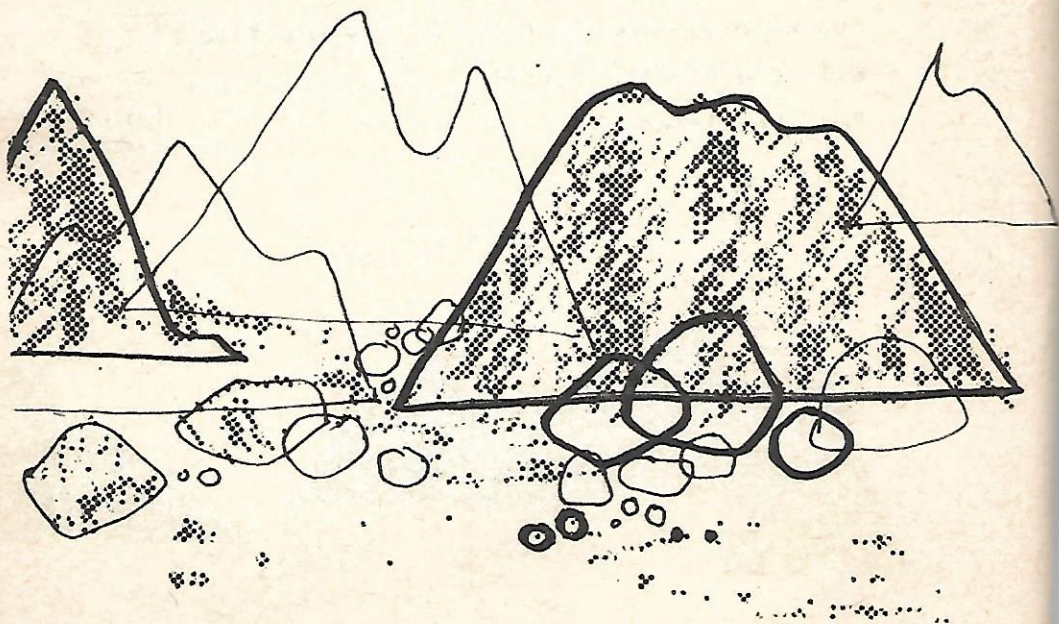
"Yes, Mr. Ithamar.
But does he sing well?"
"Sure, he is a real singer.
And with his leg he kicks up any mountain.
Will you buy the bull?"
"No, Mr. Ithamar".

Shimon

Our dear river Jordan.

The source of this old river is on Mount Hermon. There the Banyas comes out of several springs. Then he meets the Dan and the Dan agrees to go with him, for the Dan does not like to go alone either. So they go together and suddenly they hear the rustle of water. At first they are frightened - but then they see the Hatzbani. The two of them say: "Come with us, dear Hatzbani, three are better than two." The Hatzbani says: "You wait here for one day and tomorrow I'll tell you if I will go with you or not."

So the two of them went to sleep and from this the beautiful pool came into being. The next day the Hatzbani agreed to go with them. The three of them made a short trip and came to the Lake of Kinnereth. They rested and went on and on and on, suddenly they started hurrying very much. People saw them and said: "The Jordan is in a great hurry." For that is how they called the three rivers after they had joined together. The Jordan went on till the Dead Sea and there poured itself out in it and till today the Jordan pours itself out in the Dead Sea.



T H E F L O O D

- - - - -

When I came home, Mother said to me: "Go and look at the Banyas." I went with Yossi and Gil and saw that the Banyas was rising. Then I went home and read and played. Suddenly Michael said: "I hear a tractor, people are being evacuated from their houses." I jumped into my boots and Michael and I took the bicycle and then I saw what was going on. After some time I went again to look and saw that the water had already entered the houses of families Schabracq and Khalifa. The people took everything out. Again I went home and played for an hour and a half. The water was rising all the time and already flooding the big lawn. It had reached a height of 20 - 30 cm. Almost the whole kibbutz was there. We started to take our things up. Every 20 minutes I went to look at the water. It had already reached the road and then it stopped rising. That was about 8.30. Then I said: "I am sure the water will come to our house from the West."

Shimon Ben-Dror

T H E F L O O D (Continued)

- - - - -

So I said and I looked Westward, in the direction of the "Rafi-Park", and saw that the water was already flooding the house of family Pimentel, so then I knew that it would go fast now. I sat on a chair, then went to sleep. At about eleven o'clock I woke up and fell out of bed and felt water on the floor. I went back to sleep. Later they woke me up and told me: "We are going to Kfar Gileadi" but that is something else.

Shimon Ben-Dror (Fifth Grade)

Composition

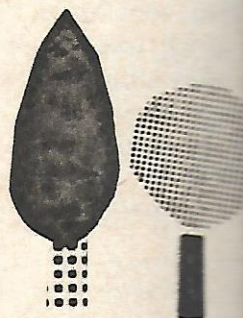
18th of Adar

My Hulirot

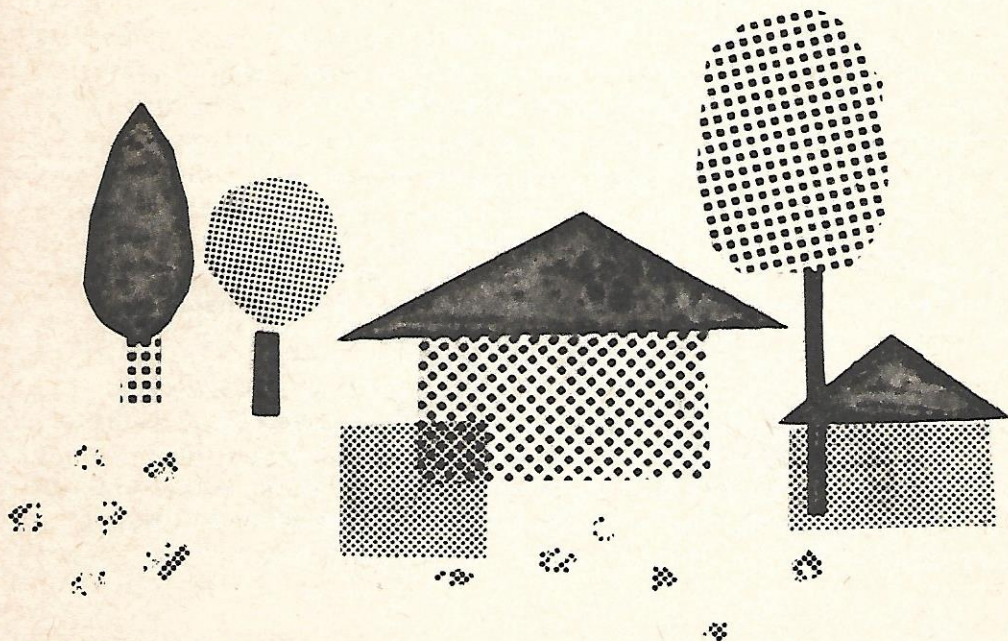
Twenty years ago eight men and one woman came here to build up a new settlement. The women remained in Netain till a children's house would be set up. But the men did not know how many difficulties there would be. First of all Mrs. Malaria was living here - secondly the Arabs, and thirdly - a wilderness. but the surroundings attracted our chaverim so much that nothing could withhold them from coming here. They worked in the sweat of their brows for they knew that otherwise they would never succeed. The first cook was Yoram and he cooked real "delicacies". They planted a vegetable garden and to their great joy after half a year the women came with the children and the Kvutza grew and developed and prospered.

But then, after 7 years, bad days came, the days of the War of Independence. We got orders to evacuate the place. The entire non-fighting population was to go to Haifa. There, in the Gefen-street was a house that had belonged to Arabs. We lived there in very hard conditions. Also there were victims; one was Pinhas - he fell when he went to save Menara. Another one was Rafi Reiss - he fell when he was a parachutist in the second World War. He went to save the Jews in the Exile. The war ended with our victory.

When we came back
Thistles and thorn
Today our Kvutza
Gradually conditi
to imagine what
"Twenty years ago



When we came back from Haifa, we did not recognize the place.
Thistles and thorns everywhere, they grew all over the place.
Today our Kvutza consists of people from 15 different countries.
Gradually conditions became better and today it is impossible
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he comes home, he finds it almost impossible to be active within the frame of the kibbutz society. He creates for himself (or the kibbutz creates for him) a closed, firmly integrated social group, with little interest in what goes on in the kibbutz - and these two are bound to collide. Things like the using of cars without permission, breaking into all sorts of places, storerooms etc. (Seneca says "Every place that has a lock offers you the opportunity to break it open"), are a natural result of the son's alienation from his home-kibbutz.

Another symptom of this alienation is the formation of a regional social group where the young generation finds itself more at home than in its own kibbutz - and this too widens the gap. As long as they are in elementary school, children usually find complete identification with their kibbutz; this disappears to a great extent during the period of communal education in secondary school.

Another factor has to be mentioned; social life in the kibbutz is mainly founded on work. Consequently the son who studies outside and does not work, who does not participate in this life of work, feels a stranger and cut-off from kibbutz-society.

The main cause of alienation is the communal high school. Education at home for all twelve grades would create a much stronger tie. And then comes army service: four years of living away from the kibbutz intensify the process of alienation still more.

All this puts the holy axioma of the kibbutz son's destination: to continue on the way begun, on very shaky ground. But let us think for a moment - did the people who founded the kibbutz, come here with the intention to create a society that would go on existing for ever, or did they come to find for themselves a place to live? Hardly anyone came with the thought of future generations in their minds. The joy of creation belonged to the ones who began. They came to set up a kibbutz

THE SONS IN THE KIBBUTZ

(From the "Bulletin of the Communal
High School of the Hule Valley")

The problem of the young generation in the kibbutz is perhaps the central problem of the kibbutz in general. The great number of sons leaving the kibbutz and the lack of communication between the adult kibbutz society and the younger generation - these are only certain aspects of the overall problem of the son in the kibbutz.

From his earliest days on a kibbutz-child is educated towards the aim of staying there, and his becoming a member immediately after he has finished high school, without any hesitations, thoughts or questions, is regarded by the kibbutz as a son's normal development.

It is the son's task to continue what has been begun, to find his place in the kibbutz which is his home, and finally to carry the burden of this enterprise on his own shoulders. This "natural" process is fraught with serious problems - starting from the question of the young people who study outside and get completely out of touch with their kibbutz, till the one of acceptance for membership and of the son's resistance against having to find his place in an already completed enterprise and against following obediently in his parents' footsteps.

The lack of contact between the son studying outside and the kibbutz is the most serious of all these problems. Usually the children are educated in the kibbutz until the eighth grade, then they go and study in the communal high school, which is in another place. Most of the day he is not at home. When

Wednesday, 9.6.71

Hello!

..... In any case today I am really awake and fresh, my weapon (the ballpoint) is in my hand and I am ready to charge down on these lines and fill them with letters and words that together will make up a work of art probably so boring as to make anybody sick.

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For the rest - tout va tres bien,

Madame la Marquise,

no more news to tell

(Shakespeare, Macbeth)

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Since it is quiet now here and I have time, I want to write to you about the record of John Lennon which I heard last Shabbat. I was really impressed by it. I wanted to tell you about it on Shabbat, but somehow didn't manage in the end. The record is not new at all, it came out in October '70, i.e. almost a year ago, but it is not very wellknown, understandably so. These are not songs that will make the hitparade, although some of them, quiet ones, are really very beautiful, if only from the musical point of view. I cannot exactly say what impressed me so much about them, I think it is chiefly his frankness, his straightforwardness. The album is very personal, many songs are about himself and about Yoko, about his childhood, his father and mother (I read the biography of the Beatles some time ago, the book was in Mavo-Hamma and Oded brought it to Hulirot; I think that if one has not read the biography, one can hardly understand the songs because they are so very personal.)

I think John Lennon is the first of the four to have grown up and to be able to see reality with open eyes. For example the song "God" which is the most important one for understanding Lennon's outlook on life. Here it goes:

God is a concept
by which we measure
our pain

I'll say it again

God is a concept
by which we measure
our pain

I don't believe in magic

I don't believe in I Ching

I don't believe in Bible

I don't believe in Tarot

I don't believe in Hitler

I don't believe in Jesus

I don't believe in Kennedy

I don't believe in Buddha

I don't believe in Mantra

I don't believe in Gita

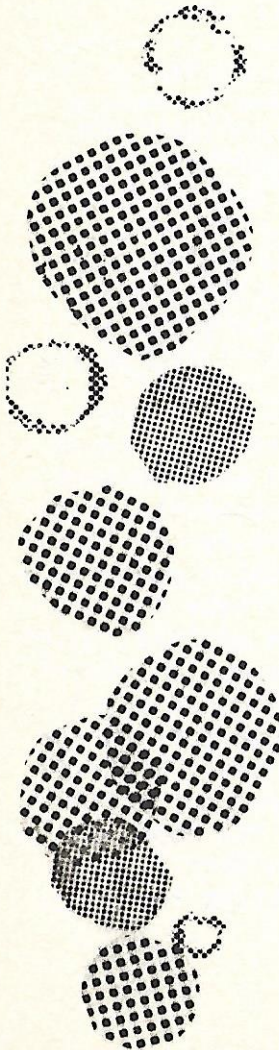
I don't believe in Yoga

I don't believe in Kings

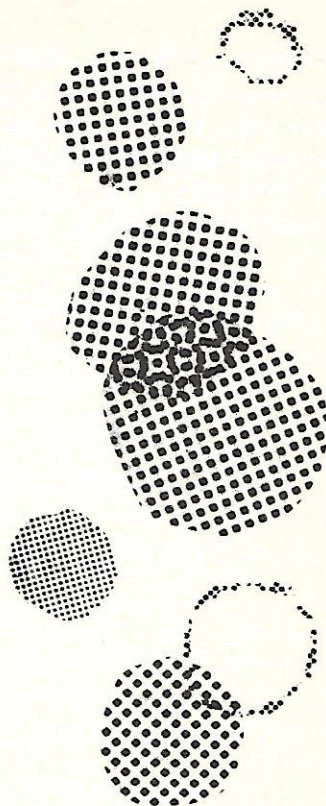
I don't believe in Elvis

I don't believe in Zimmerman (Bob Dylan)

I don't believe in Beatles

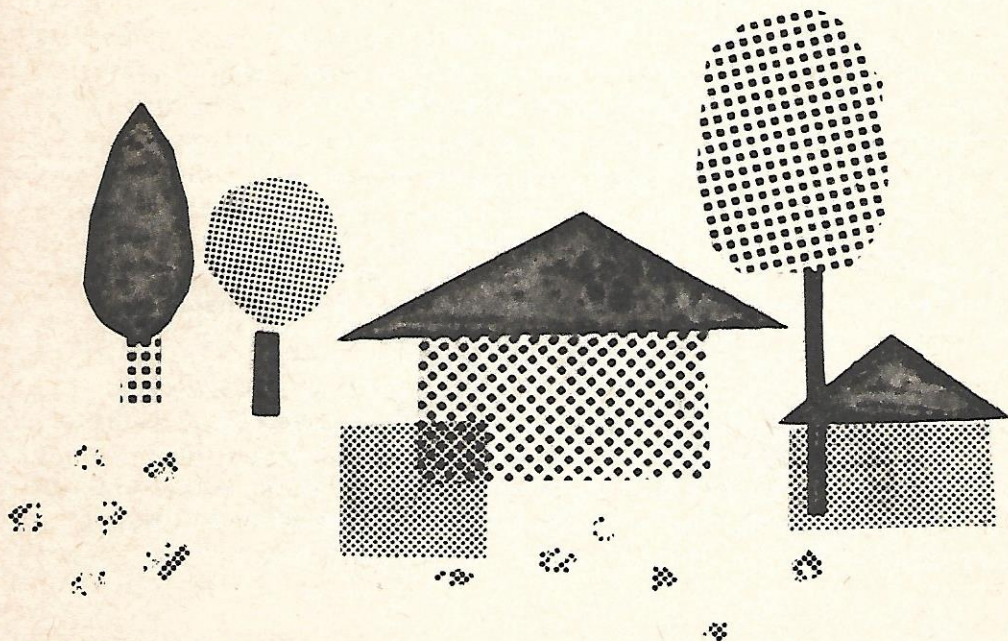


I just believe in me
Yoko and me
And that's reality
The dream is over
What can I say
The dream is over
Yesterday
I was the dreamweaver
But now I'm reborn
I was the walrus
But now I'm John
And so dear friends
You just have to carry on
The dream is over



That's it, more or less. I don't remember all the words exactly. It is clear that he talks about the Beatles. That period is over and done with. And he says so in a painfully clear way, while McCarthy goes on playing the fool like a child and singing his sweet songs, and George Harrison, with all due respect to his exceptionally beautiful music, goes on singing in the same old style of the Beatles, as if nothing had ever happened. Lennon has the courage and the sincerity to say simply: "The dream is ended. I am reborn." It is true that all of them seek themselves, each his own individuality, but Lennon is the only one who has found it. Now he turns mainly to social protest songs, like "Isolation", "Middle Class Hero", "I found out", and to very simple love songs ("Love",

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for themselves - not for us. Gradually, in the course of the years they became convinced that this way of life must endure for ever, and so naturally they educated their children towards continuation. And so now they come and force the task, the "mission" upon the son - to continue what they have begun. That is self-deceit! You created the place where you wanted to live for yourselves. It is not destined for us. And if we stay in the kibbutz, we will build it after our fashion and not for our children and the generations after them.

Therefore, prior to the question "What is the future of the kibbutz?" we must ask: "Must there be a future to the kibbutz at all?"

In addition to these problems there is the one called "the revolt of youth", which is usually regarded as the main problem of the young generation in the kibbutz. That is not so however. The common argument is that the second generation's unwillingness to continue in the way of their parents springs from the wish to start something new and to rebel against conventions.

But in my opinion this unwillingness is caused by other things: the son's alienation from the kibbutz and the poorly justified demand for continuation from the side of the founders.

All these factors manifest themselves jointly in the specific dilemma - acceptance for membership, before or after the army? In our kibbutz it is customary to accept the boys and girls as members before they go into the army; that is a purely automatic act and the voting in the general meeting is just ridiculous.

Membership before the army is a mere fiction. The son is accepted as a "member with equal rights and duties", whereas there is practically nothing that binds him to the kibbutz and he will soon go into the army for three or four years anyway.

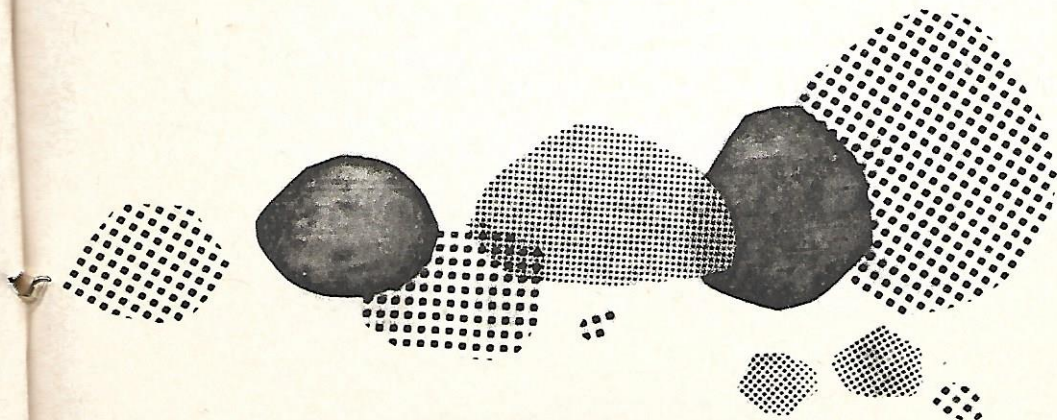
The new membership does not mark a turningpoint; it is neither the end of the period of alienation nor the beginning of the formation of an organic, natural bond with the kibbutz.

This formal acceptance, which has no real significance whatsoever, lowers the value of the kibbutz. The son who has just finished school, has as a rule neither an idea of life outside nor of that in the kibbutz and so he is unable to figure out whether it is his destination to "continue the work" or to go and live somewhere else.

Becoming a member after military service is much more realistic. Then the young man has already a certain notion of life outside as well as of life in the kibbutz and so his membership is not an automatic situation, but occurs after many hesitations and questions, both from his own side as from the side of the kibbutz.

The claim that acceptance before the army is the natural continuation of the son's life in the kibbutz does not apply, for this "natural continuation" is not real - anyhow, much less real than a true continuation which comes with acceptance after the army.

Shimon (12th grade)



Tuesday night.

Mood: Satisfactory.

Good evening to us!

I promised you a lot of stories for today and I really have. First of all this: Today I got a letter, not from you but from Sde Boker, from Noam. Although he did not sign it, there is no doubt that it is from him. For instance a passage like this (pity I can't send you the whole letter, it's really something special):

"Subject: My present occupation, i.e. the organization of a big trip for all the "Shnat-Sherut"* people in all the different places.

According to rumors that reached our ears, you people suffer severely from strenuous work and are therefore in need of recuperation and vacation.

So it has been decided by the Knights of the Round Table, headed by King Arthur, that I organize a trip, camouflage as a trip in which all the Shnat-Sherut people will participate. Some of the wise men asked: "What will be the place of destination?" Then King Arthur rose up, silenced the assembly, kicked his wife in the behind and slowly spoke the magic word: "S I N A I !" And the whole gathering rose up and said: "So be it, we shall do as thou has told us".

And the King's scribes rose up etc. etc.

* Year of work in a young kibbutz, obligatory for every boy and girl after finishing high school.

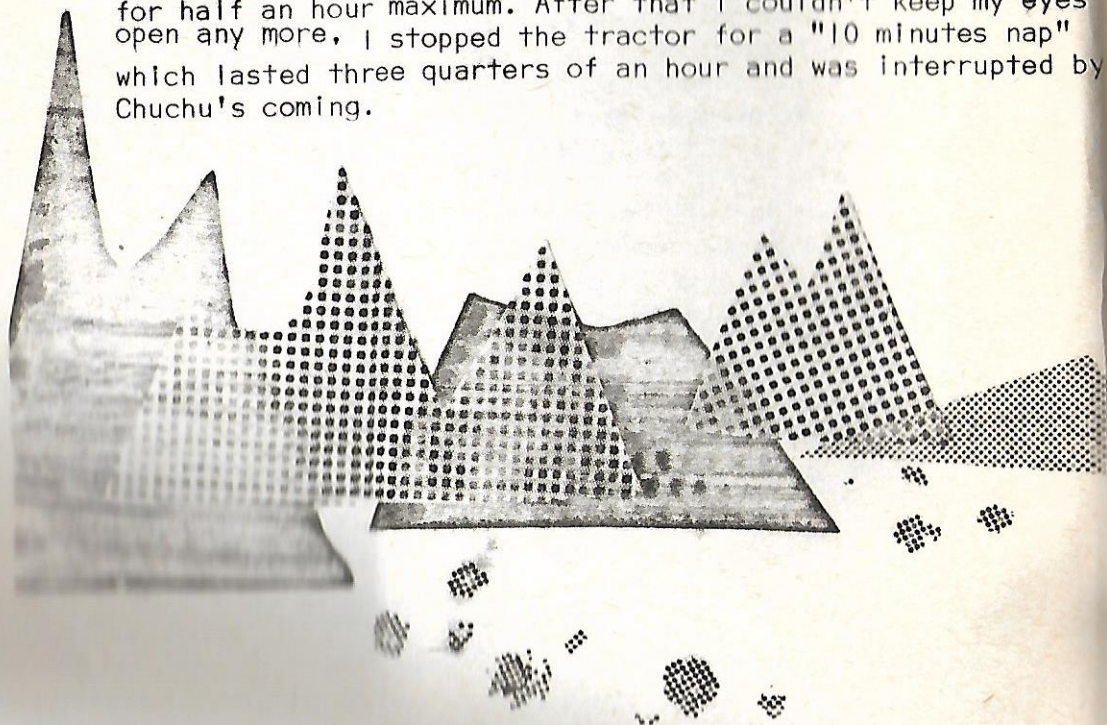
In short, for all its Noam-ish style, this letter presents an idea unprecedented in its absurdity, namely that we, i.e. I, must organize a trip to Sinai for all the Shnat-Sherut people! In principle I agree, but there is one delicate problem which the designer of the plan did not solve, to wit: the dough. For "no dough, no go". Like our wise forefathers said in their time, and the same goes for us: Who will sign the cheque? That is the question.

September 1971.

Today I wanted to go and check the route for the trip of the children on Friday, from Kfar-Harev to Sussita. So yesterday night I inquired if there was anybody who had already made that route once. I knew that the area was heavily mined, but on the other hand Michael had made the trip so that there is a way, only I did not know exactly where. Everyone whom I asked said that he did not know the route, only that it was full of mines and dangerous. In the end I decided to go alone and find the way by myself; I was advised to take a gun with me so I would not just be yelled at without any reason. I went to the girl on night duty in the children's houses and told her to ask one of the nightguards to leave me his gun in the morning. It so happened that all the security people were there and they brainwashed me for half an hour, telling me that it was impossible to go there without a mine chart and even then it would be pretty dangerous considering that mines had been washed away in the last winters and that the slopes of the Sussita too were mined. I decided to get up at 8 o'clock the next morning and phone home and ask if they have a permit from the army and mine charts, and if not - they would have

to go to regional headquarters and ask for a permit and charts. Well, you know me - eight o'clock! I got up at twelve as usual.

In the evening I decided to call after all and then it turned out that the army had obligingly forbidden the trip for security reasons, so that I needn't lose one or two legs (they had really succeeded in frightening me, those chaps who were sitting with the girl on night duty!). So instead they will now go down from Khorazm to the Osher Mountain and swim in Lake Kinnereth. That's that. That is what has kept me busy for most of the last two days besides ordinary work. Oh, listen how I disgraced myself on the tractor last Sunday - such a thing has never happened to me yet. After working for one hour I was already in such a state that I fell asleep standing (!), so I got down and slept in the field on the clumps of earth (the field had been ploughed) for about an hour. I slept like an elephant. I felt like a fakir. And that was after I had slept all the way in the bus. And that too helped only for half an hour maximum. After that I couldn't keep my eyes open any more. I stopped the tractor for a "10 minutes nap" which lasted three quarters of an hour and was interrupted by Chuchu's coming.



Monday, 7.6

"Richard Nixon is the easiest man to get along with in the whole world".

(Patricia Nixon, his wife)

Michali my darling, how are you? This ballpoint writes beautifully, it's a real pleasure the way the letters flow. There is a queer chap here who sleeps in the room next to the electronics technician. He is from Haifa where he had work and money and he left everything and came here to work as a volunteer in the factory, without a salary, without the living conditions of the members. He is really strange, not only because he left everything and came here, but also on account of his behaviour. For instance: He was sitting here for about one hour and during that time he asked me at least three times what my name was and every time again he told me that his name was Hagai. Five minutes ago he came here again to say that my transistor radio does not bother him at all (!) and to ask me once more what my name was. I told him and again he stated that he was Hagai. I think I'll really learn that name of his in the end. It's Hagai or something like that, I believe

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our pain

I don't believe in magic

I don't believe in I Ching

I don't believe in Bible

I don't believe in Tarot

I don't believe in Hitler

I don't believe in Jesus

I don't believe in Kennedy

I don't believe in Buddha

I don't believe in Mantra

I don't believe in Gita

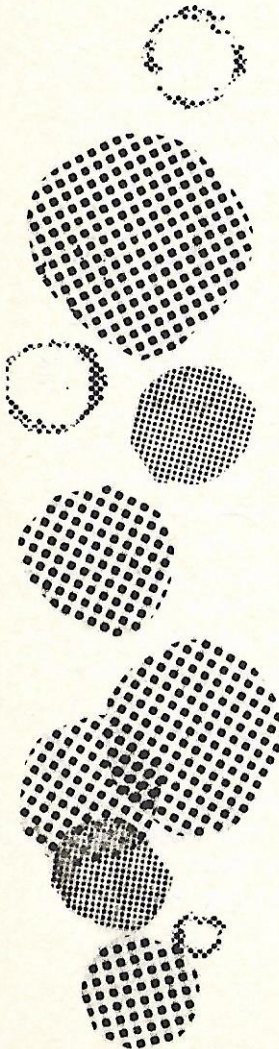
I don't believe in Yoga

I don't believe in Kings

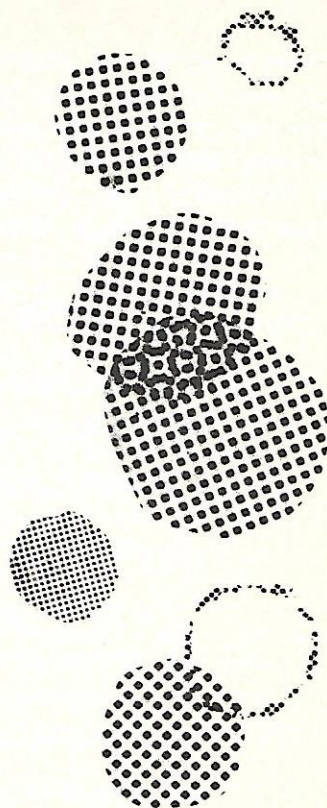
I don't believe in Elvis

I don't believe in Zimmerman (Bob Dylan)

I don't believe in Beatles



I just believe in me
Yoko and me
And that's reality
The dream is over
What can I say
The dream is over
Yesterday
I was the dreamweaver
But now I'm reborn
I was the walrus
But now I'm John
And so dear friends
You just have to carry on
The dream is over



That's it, more or less. I don't remember all the words exactly. It is clear that he talks about the Beatles. That period is over and done with. And he says so in a painfully clear way, while McCarthy goes on playing the fool like a child and singing his sweet songs, and George Harrison, with all due respect to his exceptionally beautiful music, goes on singing in the same old style of the Beatles, as if nothing had ever happened. Lennon has the courage and the sincerity to say simply: "The dream is ended. I am reborn." It is true that all of them seek themselves, each his own individuality, but Lennon is the only one who has found it. Now he turns mainly to social protest songs, like "Isolation", "Middle Class Hero", "I found out", and to very simple love songs ("Love",

"Here I am") and that is a very good and very beautiful combination. You can see that in the song "God", where he says: Everything is a lousy mess, society is degenerate, the world is rotten, what remains is just you and me, just simple love, that is the only real thing, and that is what gives an optimistic tone to his songs. For example the song "Hold on"

Hold on John

Hold on John, John hold on
It's gonna be alright
you gonna win the fight

Hold on Yoko, Yoko hold on
It's gonna be alright
you gonna make the flight

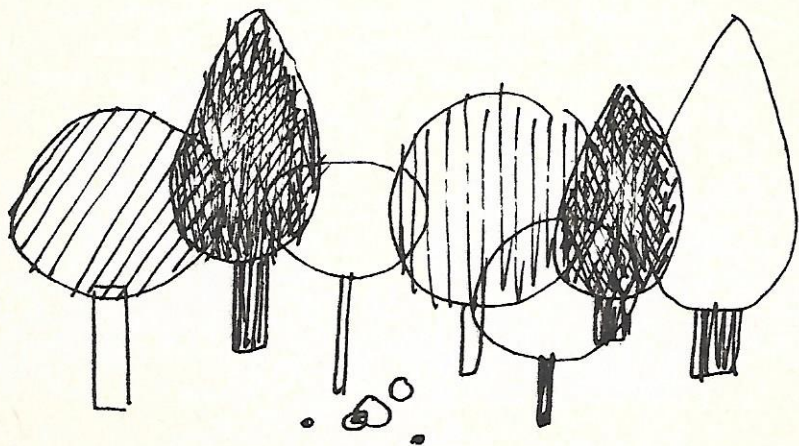
When you're by yourself
and there's no one else
you just tell yourself
to hold on

Hold on world, world hold on
It's gonna be alright
you gonna see the light

When you're one
really one
you get things done
like they never be done
so hold on, hold on

The third kind is the kind of songs we have never heard from the Beatles, the ones on his childhood, on his father and mother. These are mostly sad, for he had a very difficult childhood. ("Goodbye, my Mummy's dead"). The music of these songs is extraordinary, I think. Many people think the music is bad. I can understand that, it is extreme, full of dissonants and changing rhythms, it is really very special and wild. There is no consistent, definite style. Frequently we find the style that he developed with the "Plastic Ono Band", like for example in the songs "Cold Turkey" or "Strength for the masses", i.e. very heavy rhythm and intensive use of filters. On the other hand you can suddenly find a protest song which could easily have come from Bob Dylan some 10 years ago ("Middle Class Hero") or quiet songs that remind you of the quiet period of the Beatles and of the personal style of Lennon since "Love, here am I" or mixed styles ("God", "Isolation").

I don't know if you will like it, these things are very personal with everybody. Either you like it or you don't. I was completely thrilled by it, by the feeling of personal contact with him; his openness, his sincerity and quietness impressed me deeply.



January 1971.

..... First of all something not so important but nice. We had finished work. It was raining and cold and I was dirty with grease. I was standing in the doorway and taking off my shoes. Suddenly (really suddenly, in a second - that happens sometimes), in a flash I saw that it is beautiful here. You understand? No, of course not.

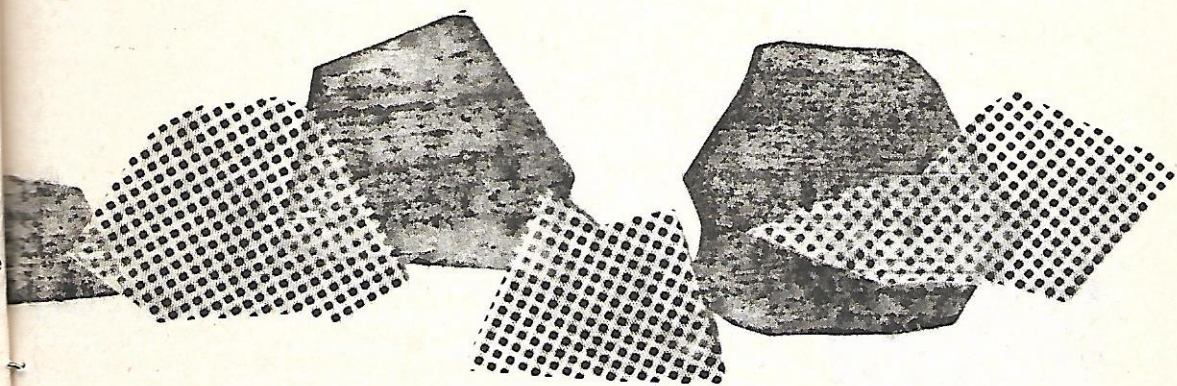
So I'll explain: on the Lake of Kinnereth there was fog, a heavy grey fog. The sky was grey and so were the mountains; and against that grey background there were those black poles put up in white barrels, which was the Army's Hanuka-candleholder, that was supposed to shine over the whole valley. All this together was fantastically beautiful. Not "beautiful" in the way of those romantic, coloured sunsets or like an anemone or a soft red rose which is beautiful but ordinary and garish. This was a silent, mysterious beauty, not sharp and not so obvious: the grey with the black and white which are both soft and hard at the same time. Beautiful. Then it came to me that I really need a camera. That a camera is of vital importance. So many beautiful things here just get lost. Really, one must take pictures here. Only you have to know how to catch these things. You need an eye for that. And a good camera.

And what was really great in all this was that a moment later the fog disappeared. In one instant it was as if it had never been there and the Lake was as usual, as if nothing had happened, and that made the whole thing so mysterious and so beautiful.

March 1971.

It is a bit sad here although the night is beautiful. The sky was yellow today and it was hot and stuffy and now and then it rained and in between it was hot and humid.

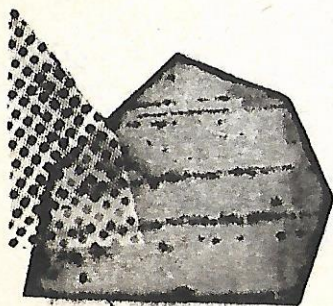
I am alone and at work. Time passes slowly and all the days are alike, even when they are different. At such times I like being alone when all is quiet and everybody asleep. Tomorrow I'll get up early, at 5.15, and look at the sunrise. The sky will be grey but not heavy like today. Nobody will be outside for it will be very early. Then I fill up water and oil in the tractor and drink coffee in the garage being all by myself and I'll smoke my cigarette till the end, for I'll have lots of time. At six I'll ring up Pieck and ask him if one can go into the fields already. If they say yes I'll go. Outside it will be green and brown and grey and perhaps black, and it will be very still and very good.



August 1971.

Just now I remembered that I promised you to write at least today, so here I am. It is quite late already, about one o'clock, Frits is already asleep. Until now we have been sitting on the steps at Jehudith and Shaul's, we had coffee and watermelon and as usual had discussions on music (Micky) and on kibbutz affairs and on our leaving. Every day I realize how much I shall miss everything and how much I shall lose when I leave. Somehow towards the end everything suddenly becomes good or maybe I simply was not aware of it. Also that I have this wonderful room, clean and tidy, and nice neighbours, and social life on the steps and bridge with the English people (there is an English group here again, who arrived two days ago), we played bridge with them to-night. They are not as good as the group that was here earlier and we beat them easily. But still it was nice.

I have not been home for a whole week and it seems like two years. I miss the view so terribly, I don't know how I'll manage without the Kinnereth below and without the El-Hamma road. I was so glad to see it again when I came back here. Just as if I was not sure that it would really be there, this fascinating view of El-Hamma. And Motti Shapira and the motorbike and my Fiat. To realize that all this will be over in another three weeks. Every day seems to be the last and I try to absorb as much as possible of it.



August 1971.

After I had been rather stingy with letters etc. lately and after promising you that I would write, I decided that today I would really sit down and get started. What can I say? As usual there is nothing to write. This peace and quiet are very pleasant but fatal when it comes to letter writing. Nothing special or exciting happens which couldn't fill one page, The biggest things take only three

lines, half a page at the most. Here for instance is something that happened Sunday night, but it is not more than four or five lines. So what was it? Remember we went hunting swine in the morning? So we went and found 5 little ones plus the mother. We cut them up then and there, in the fields, and took two livers and two hearts for ourselves (and what a liver they have, these pigs!) and decided to make ourselves a meal in the evening. And so we really prepared something enormous, we cooked the livers and the hearts with the best spices we could find, made potato chips and salad enough for a battalion of hungry elephants, bought beer, fruit juice and coca cola in the kibbutz store, and had watermelon for dessert. Do you know what that means, liver melting in your mouth, fried with onions and tomatoes, garlic and cumin? Paradise is nothing compared with that, especially when it goes together with chips that could easily be mentioned in the restaurant column in "Ha'aretz"*; about the salad I don't want to talk at all, it is almost embarrassing, you know, "let a stranger praise you and not your own mouth" etc. Inshort we made such a lot of food and we were only four people, Jehudith doesn't eat at all, and nobody else came, for there were two other places in the kibbutz where they were holding the same kind of food-orgies: so that in the end we gave a whole potful of livers and hearts straight from the restaurant column to Shabtai's dog and twice as big a quantity of chips and salad went straight to the rubbish bin. What a pity But all in all it was nice. After that we ate the second watermelon which I kept under my bed.

That was that. And now I'll try and write something. You know what? I feel it's no good, it just doesn't come today. I have been boring you already for about two pages with nothing. And the

* daily paper

really important things, I don't know how to write them. I feel that it's going to be just dry stuff and not at all what I wanted to write to you, so I'll just stop here.

Remember what the fox in "The Little Prince" said? That the really important things are hidden from the eye? If you remember it, you'll understand. The really important things I did not write, and both of us know them and feel them.....

January 1971.

..... and it is not my fault that other people felt the same before me and wrote down what they felt in the same words. I presume that it is love and if so, then we are not different from millions of other people who were in love or are in love, and therefore you'll say: "Why do you write me this? It is superfluous, it is already written in thousands of books." But our love too is unique in that I love you and you love me, and this love between me and you has never before happened in the whole history and will never happen again, just as there are no two identical fingerprints in the whole world. We are just two people who were born in the same period and will die some time, and at one certain point in our life spans there is a special bond between us - the uniqueness of which springs from the personal uniqueness of each one of us and from the special conditions of the moment. A bond that has never yet existed between two people and never will be again, because each love is special in its own kind and no other one is like it. We must live ourselves, in the full meaning of this word, for there will be no one else who will live us in our stead. And in the same measure we must live our love, the only one of its kind in the whole world, with all the strength and the vitality that is in us, for no one else will live it instead of us.

FROM ME

your dearest friend and beloved
 kneeling down among
 autumn's falling leaves
 offering you his heart
 roasted in fried onions
 on a plastic plate
 together with a slice of bread

I am really tired.

I'll see you.

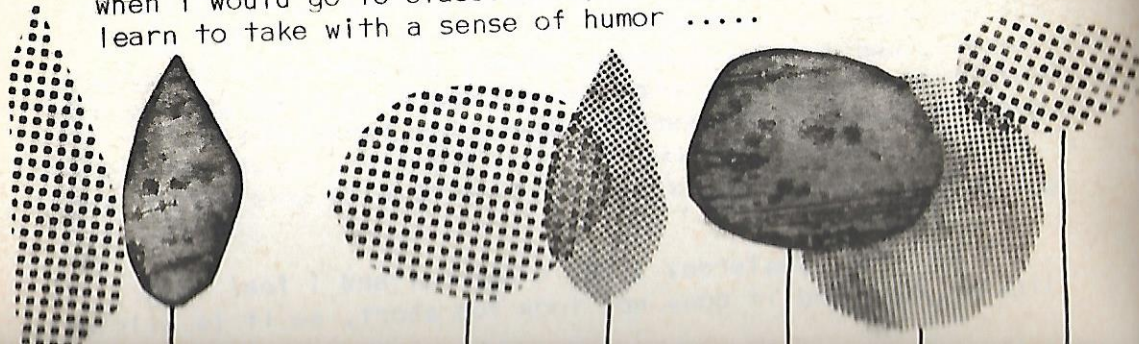
Shimon

You are not angry if I don't come on Friday? I think I explained it as best as I could in yesterday's letter, so you must separate that part from the letter which was written in a crazy mood, and take that seriously. Please understand. Look, for me too it is hard to be alone on Friday and Saturday and not see you, but I undertook this "Shnat Sherut" for serious reasons, and I have ideas and wishes and ambitions in connection with this place, and I cannot see it only as a place to spend my time in between one week-end and the next.

Mavo-Hamma, Febr. 1971.

..... Darling, yesterday I had a haircut and I feel much lighter now, and it does not look too short, so it is alright.

This haircut affair was quite a riot: I went through all Tiberias to look for a barber's shop (I remembered that in the Rasco area there used to be one, but that turned out to be a ladies' hairdresser, so I did not go in). I did not find one. I went till the busstop to Jordan Valley. First I thought that I'd give up the idea, but in the end I decided to walk on for a while. Two metres further on I found a barber's shop (I forgot to tell you that I had come here with only 3 pounds, so I had borrowed two pounds from Shaul B. for the haircut). The shop was empty except for a French looking character, sort of homo-type. I went in, looked at the prices. It said: "Haircut - 1L 1.80". that was not too bad. So I said to that chap that I wanted a haircut. Well, he decided that I was exactly the right object to do his doctorate in hairdressing on and he fiddled around with my hair for at least an hour and a half (this is not exaggerated!). That included a hairwash which meant that he kept jumping around me for half an hour with a hairdrier and all sorts of different scissors. But I thought that he liked doing that and it did not really bother me - so I let him have his fun. After one hour and a half he had finished: he had fixed me up with that "flower" hairdo, and what really made me mad was that I could not undo it because of all the hairdriers and stuff. Besides that I stank like Cleopatra in her bath. Still, I did not want to offend him, so I didn't say anything. I gave him the 1.80 and wanted to leave. Then he said: "Four and a half pounds, if you please". What an idiot I had been! I had walked into the trap like any sucker and I should have known it right away! In short, I did not have enough money, so I gave him only three with the promise that I would bring him the 1.50 the next day when I would go to class. Well, things like that one also must learn to take with a sense of humor



January 1971.

.... In the radio there is a program about a man from the Armoured Corps who was killed. His friends are talking about him. Judging from the stories he had been an extraordinary man, a harsh commander, but with personal charm, very human and of high morals. One of those who get killed and afterwards their friends tell stories about them over the military radio station. Am I cynical? Perhaps.

I finished reading "Lady Chatterley's Lover". So hundred percent D.H. Lawrence. That hankering for the sun, the green grass, for healthy sexual love without hiding anything and without shame. That kick to the establishment of false spirituality and to the crazy race of England and of the whole world towards perdition, the industry and the grey and vile weather and the money etc. I remember a poem of his which we learned in Shoshana Hameiri's class (nice to remember!)

For God's sake, let us be men
 For God's sake, let us be men
 Not monkeys minding machines
 etc.

That seems to express his outlook very well. Interesting to see how up-to-date that is even today, and always.

May 1971.

How are things with you? You'll receive this letter on Wednesday, so I must ask you how the party was. How was the party? How does it feel to be big children now and to have finished school, at least children's school? not that I'm making fun of you, but I remember having had that funny feeling of regret that all this was over now, for all in all it had been nice and it seemed that it was all so short.

..... And actually we, like all the other people on this planet, are looking for the beautiful, for the exciting, the great moments, the moments in which we feel somehow close to God, to the flowers or to the movie we saw here last week, and we want it to last the whole day, the whole week, our whole lives. And that is natural and good and obvious, for we are young and not yet used to the fact that life is based on six workdays and one Shabbat in the best case, and it is right that we are not used to it, for it is good to see the world in technicolor, even if inside we know, or ought to know, that it is black and white with every shade of grey (and grey has many many shades - this is for your information).

Look what we are doing, I escape into the imaginary and the problem is so simple. In two sentences one can sum up what you said in a long letter and what I'll say in an even longer one: "My dear old-mannish boy, you bore me and I bore you, what will be the end?" And the answer will be: "My one-and-only darling, little rabbit of mine, we have known that for a long time already, but come, let's go on boring each other till death. That's all there is, isn't it?"

And instead of that I run away and paint you a blue sky with golden ornaments and flowers that never wither and try to make us forget that I am as ugly as a crooked monkey and that you are not much prettier and that both of us are such ordinary people that it hurts. But if you give a child a picture in black and white and grey, he will colour it red and gold and blue and green and purple for that is how he wants to see life, and so do we. But I ask you: What is wrong with that actually? For God gave us life as a very black and white and grey picture and we, his puny little rats, cannot change it, and you won't find it different from that in anybody else, the only thing you will perhaps find is somebody who will paint life in nicer colours for you than I do. And you will not find a whole week of Shabbat-days, and if you will, then that is the very worst thing that can happen to you, for within a month's time all those Shabbat-days will change into weekdays and there will be nothing to strive for anymore and that is the worst nightmare of all.

So come, let us enliven the grey and make the light grey into green and the darker grey into red and the other grey into gold and let us learn to find our Shabbat-days in the weekdays, for the grains of gold that God scattered about smilingly are hidden among the dust and the mud, and happy is the man who can find them with the naked eye.

Let us give the thorns the smell of roses, the weeds the fragrance of the wild tulip and our grey love all the colours of the rainbow and the taste of honey, for a wise man said: "Not hatred is the opposite of love but indifference".

After the walrus had eaten all the snails, he sat down on a rock to rest and lighted a cigarette, but that is another story.

Friday, 24.10

I have been in the army for a week and a half now and all in all it is not so terrible as it could have been. The people are wonderful, every one of them. There is a really good atmosphere and lots of fun all the time. If it continues like that, it will be wonderful. All bad things can be overcome if you are with nice people and if there are guys you can talk to and if you can laugh about everything together.

I cannot very well describe the atmosphere here, or what I am feeling. I am really very happy that it is like that. I had been afraid I would be lonesome and that I would walk around depressed all day long because they had taken away my freedom and my individuality. I was afraid I'd never be able to cope with this discipline and with all the demands. I was afraid that I'd go through a terrible crisis in the beginning, especially after I had been so free this last year, and then suddenly to have to go to this sort of jail and all that. But like this it is really good, I discovered that it passes and I remain alive. There are such nice fellows here and everybody goes through the same things and that makes everything so much easier, you've no idea. One looks differently at the whole business, we laugh about everything, and then instead of thinking that it is all shit, you realize that it is another new experience after all. Moreover it is really quite easy, much easier than I thought it would be. Still, there are moments of depression sometimes, especially when I think of you and of home, and then it seems to me that the best thing in the world is to walk around barefoot with my shirt hanging loose and to shave once in two weeks. And still something comes up in my throat every time I have to say "Yes sir" instead of "up yours", which I really would like to say sometimes. And I still hate the army with all my soul (on that point nothing has changed and I don't believe it ever will). But all in all I manage and I begin to get used to it.

January 1972.


..... And at the moment it is the beginning, you must understand that, and one has to put in all one's efforts simply to keep oneself above the water. And what is much worse than the question of letter-writing is that I simply do not have the time to think of you or of any other things in general, or to feel things that are outside the army atmosphere. For life here is something completely different from ordinary ways of life, and there is a completely different way of thinking here, someone who is not in the army just cannot understand the enormous change that is involved when a civilian becomes a soldier, when he has to switch over from his ordinary reactions and ways of thinking to those of a soldier. It is terribly difficult and takes a lot of time and effort. For after all, even if I did not want to, I came into the army like all the others, and in spite of all personal opinions and points of view, one just cannot stand aside all the time and stick to one's outlook of a free person, one simply cannot keep going in that way, one would drown. That is hard to understand for you, for when you look at the kids that come home from the army, you say: "You are wrong, they are the same as ever", but that is not true. Everyone becomes a soldier in the end, whether he wants to or not, a soldier who thinks and feels and reacts as a soldier. At home it is a little less obvious and does not strike others so much, but the fact remains.

One simply must switch over, and I know you disagree with this, but it can't be helped. The army is stronger than all of us. There are those who resist and then the process is much more painful and takes much longer and those are the types we called bad soldiers, for they keep their thoughts outside the army, and do not think; they do not understand that they have switched over to a completely different kind of life and that they must turn about their whole way of thinking a full 180 degrees.

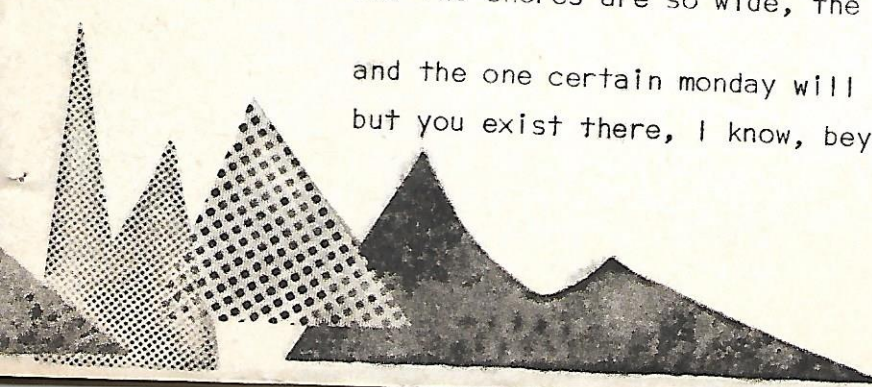
Then they spend their time in jail or merely have a hard time for they are for ever in opposition. I do not say that for me it is so easy, but I've decided that this resistance must stop and that one must accept things as they come and even co-operate as much as possible. And that's terribly difficult. It means that towards section commanders you must behave as towards real commanders, as to people that are in everything above you, who have to be obeyed in all cases, who are always right and always cleverer and always know everything better than you, even if I think they are stupid and childish. People I would never have looked at in the street, are "commanders" to me here. It is hard not to laugh when they talk the greatest rubbish in the world, and not to think what I should have done as a good section commander, or not to show them the mistakes they make. It is hard to get used to it that "the commander is always right, and even if he isn't - he still is the commander". I must try to begin considering the things I do here as the most important in the whole world, much more important than things at home, otherwise I simply can't keep going. So now I am in this stage of transition. In the long run I shall become a soldier, and even a good one, for that is what is required from me, and whether you want to or not, it won't help you. For the moment it is hard and I have to put all my efforts to it, just to keep my head above water and not go under, and that will take time.

Things that at this stage require my full attention will become automatic and then I shall have time to think and to feel and to be both a soldier and a human being. And then people will say: "Look, the army did not change him one bit, he has remained exactly the same person", just like you say about the guys that come home on leave, and then the gap will seem more natural and it will not be so disturbing as today. It was like that in the beginning when I was in Mavo-Hamma, maybe you'll remember. It simply takes time to adjust oneself to things, only here it is more serious and much more difficult.

Y O U



You - that is somebody who writes me letters
like drops of rain falling
one by one
you, that's somebody who writes me letters
you, that is somebody, somebody
to whom I too write letters
sometimes
like a cliff hearing the waves
that come and hit and go
you, that's somebody from letters, sometimes
and I know that you exist somewhere
beyond the shores, beyond the stars
on a certain monday after a thousand days,
beyond the shores, the mountains. Beyond life
someone said that there is love and a life of flowers
and people
but the shores are so wide, the stars so many and far
away
and the one certain monday will never come perhaps
but you exist there, I know, beyond life



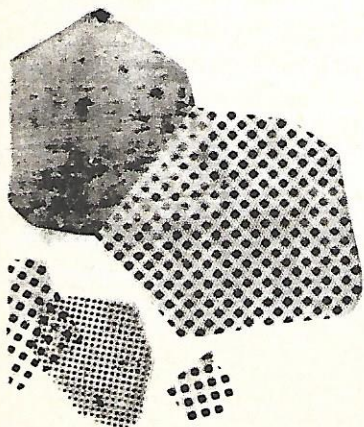
Shabbat, 11.12.

I wanted to draw a sketch for you of something we saw yesterday; since it is forbidden to take pictures, I'll tell you about it, I hope you'll get an idea. We had a roll-call before Shabbat went in. We stood on the beach in rows of three. It was late in the afternoon already and the sun was almost setting. The sky was greyish, with a bit of yellow in it from the light of the sun. The horizon was all blue. One soldier talked during roll-call and as a punishment he was assigned to make the beds in the dug-out, about 100 metres away from us. When he had finished, he stood there at attention, rifle in hand, his face undiscernible because he had the sun at his back, wide pants and his belt somewhere under his armpits. There he stood, at attention, with his rifle in his hand. A solitary soldier against a horizon of sand and grey skies, in the setting sun and behind him the barbed wire.

Now put this in a frame and under it write in great big letters: "THE RECRUIT". For me it symbolized all the humiliations, the whole absurdity and the taste of shit of this entire period. It was a picture that I shall not forget so soon.

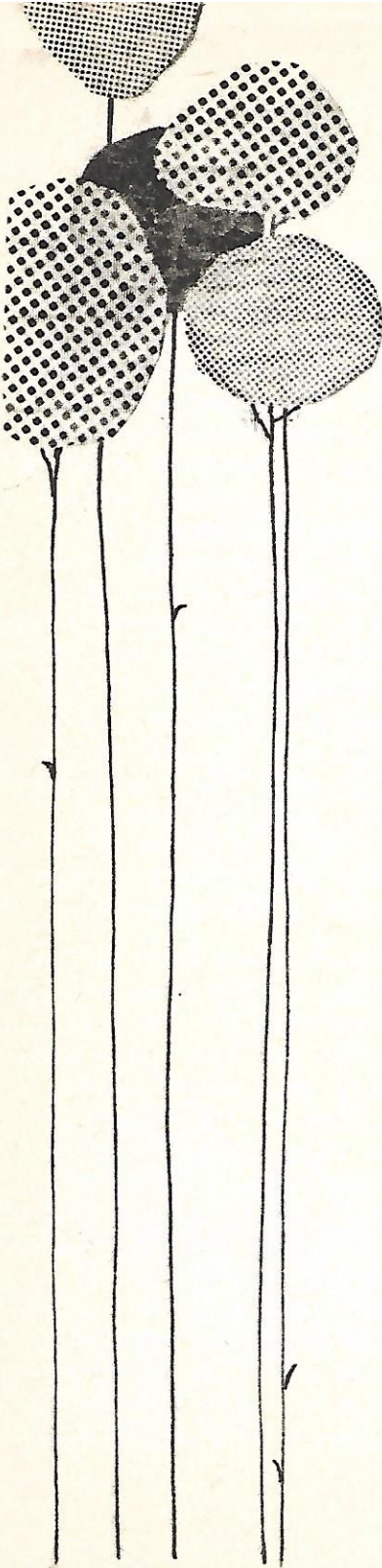
Shabbat-morning, 18.12.

Now do you remember what I wrote to you yesterday night? That we'd get up together on Shabbat morning? Well, we really did, but at the same time there was someone else who awoke with us, a very unpleasant fellow who always appears when you don't need him, without asking if it is convenient or allowed. If he'd come in another three days, he'd have been mighty welcome, but today - the son of a bitch! I don't have to tell you anymore what his name is, you've guessed it. He's called son-of-a-bitch rain or rain-son-of-a-bitch for short. Since five O'clock in the



morning he's been rapping on our tent and after about one hour his vanguard broke through into the strongholds of warmth and dryness. Now, 10 a.m. he is pressing forward, his motorized infantry troops are wiping out the last pockets of resisting dryness that were still there, and what did we do? By way of a last suicidal counter-attack we went out for five minutes to meet him when we had our morning roll-call. Of course the attack was a complete failure and at this moment half our tent, i.e. my friend Atai, has already been evacuated to the neighbouring tent of Dani and Zeharia (the ones who took me in last week in the big rain) and now I am left here alone, wet and shivering in my sleeping-bag, doing nothing but curse the day that the rain was born, and as a result of those five minutes outside all my clothes are drenched so that even the sleeping-bag is no help. Now tell me, what can one do? Just grouse of course and that's all. Our last hope is, that Atai's parents will come and then we'll sit in the warm car for a few moments.

Before that three boys were court-martialled, one of them from our section, a nice chap who just forgot to get up one morning for roll-call. The trials of course were "to see and to be seen" but we didn't see them, only what went before. Such dreadful humiliation, the brutality of it all, words cannot describe them. It was like a scene from a movie or a nightmare, like nazis they were. To hell with the army! What's all that fine talk about a decent attitude towards the common soldiers, and that they are not being humiliated or brutalized? And I, fool that I was, I thought that all this had been done with ten or fifteen years ago. It was all like a scene from a movie about some nazi p.o.w. camp. Those sergeant-majors, that arrogance of theirs! One



of them said to us: "Now you'll see a real show!" The pride with which he said it. Hell, what do they have to be proud of? It's a disgrace for the army, for everything they pretend to stand for. Believe me, all those notions I had about a more or less decent human behaviour on the part of the army were shattered to pieces, we were standing there and gnashing our teeth. The swine, the brutes. That's the kind of thing they're proud of. What is easier than to drag a soldier through the mud in front of the whole company, every little heel can do that!

And right after that they handed out the parcels. Incredible how quickly people forget! In less than two minutes everything was gone, all the cursing, all the disgust, and everyone grabbed his parcel and gobbled his chocolate as eagerly as ever. I don't blame anyone. That's how life is and that's how human beings are, they prefer to forget and not to think of bad things. Just to eat their chocolate, draw back into their shells without looking one metre forward. I too was pleased with my parcel and ate my chocolate, still it had a slightly queer taste and I tried to forget it all, but I could not quite make it. The thought that one has to live in the army for three years and that these are its ways, is not pleasant.

Friday, 10.12.71

I think that I wrote my last letter to you when the rain started. After that there was no time anymore even to think of letter-writing. Only of trying to find a relatively dry corner (and relatively dry, that would still be soaking wet in your eyes) to sleep there, shaking and shivering, for our 3 or 4 hours, and then to wake up as if we hadn't slept at all. We had already left our tent at the start of the big rains and each one of us had gone to another tent that was a little less wet, because ours was just simply soaked. Everything was floating around, our whole equipment was drenched. I joined two boys of our unit, one is Danny from Beth-Lehem in Galilee, the other is Zeharia. Both first-rate chaps. They took me in without a word, although it is far less comfortable to sleep three in a tent than two. It was great to be with them, in spite of the mess and in spite of the hopelessness of the situation. (And it was really hopeless, for there was no end to it, and it was not at all like going to work in the rain and the cold, for then you know, no matter how wet and how cold it is, you'll finish some time and then you'll come back to your room and there it's dry and there is a stove and a warm bed. But now you go back and you know it will be to a soppy tent, to wet blankets, everything cold and wet, cold as stone, and there's no way of warming yourself but huddling together really tight and singing at the top of your lungs, and then you do not feel so much how cold and miserable it is). But that's all over now, today the sun appeared and the two of us went back to our own tent. Not so jolly perhaps, but at least there's room to sleep.

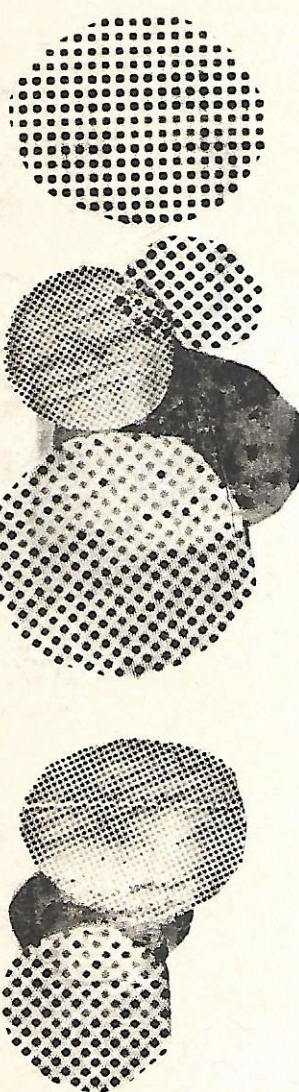
February, 1972.

Anyway: Hello to you, Mr. Censor. How do you do? Write a few words to me once in a while (my address is on the envelope). I'm crazy to know who it is that reads all those letters I send and if they do not bore him. Or maybe it's a girl, who knows? It is a mystery without any clue. Should I perhaps

send him a song over the radio? Otherwise I shall for ever and ever be waiting for a few words from him (or her) to see if he (or she) will not reveal his (or her) identity.

So please, (good censor (or is it you, sweet censorress?), write to the unknown soldier, for else my eyes will know no sleep, I shall be tossing on my bed for hours on end, staring ahead and trying to visualize the dirty pig who dares to read all my letters. By the way, dear censor, do they interest you at all? I'm dying with curiosity. Write to me how you like it, being censor, how you came to be censor. Perhaps I can become a censor too. That might be nice; if only people did not write such boring letters, like this one. So that's all, Censy, so long and do not cut too much, O.K?

Where were we when this censor came along all of a sudden? Oh yes, in the army. So as I have already said, everything is running smoothly and they seem to be able to do without me, a most reassuring thought. Yesterday we took the animals out for their first turn in the field, it was incredible. They're so easy to drive, and you feel such immense power in your hands. It is very difficult to describe, but try to imagine what kind of feeling that is, to control such an enormous beast of 50 ton, "and a tender child drives them", it's a delight. But of course, like always, before and after and all the time, you have to clean and to scrub and to wipe and to scour, so there you are



how can I tell you that I loved you?

I loved you but I do not find the words to tell you
I want to tell you that I think of you always
all the time I think of you but my words vanish into
air

just vanish into air

it always ends in the same way my sweet
and I do not find the words to tell you
wherever I am my sweet

always always you are near me
you are near but I look and I do not find you
I speak to you always and I'm so sad you cannot hear me
it always ends in the same way my sweet
when I look - and I do not find you

I am yearning to touch you
to feel you and have my arms around you
to feel my arms embracing you

like the ocean embraces the shore
and every day and every night I pray I hope
that perhaps I shall find you for my heart cannot
endure anymore

it always ends in the same way my sweet
and still I go down on my knees
how can I tell you that I loved you?

I loved you but I do not find the words to tell you

That was a beautiful song once, until I put my hands on it. I
hope that you can still recognize the original (Cat Stevens).

It is really beautiful and appropriate too. But how is it? When one tries to translate it into Hebrew, that's what comes out and a pity it is. Why on earth am I fooling around with such nonsense at all? Yesterday I had guard-duty in camp, and you know, Friday night, a full moon, enough to drive one crazy, and anyhow one has to pass the time.

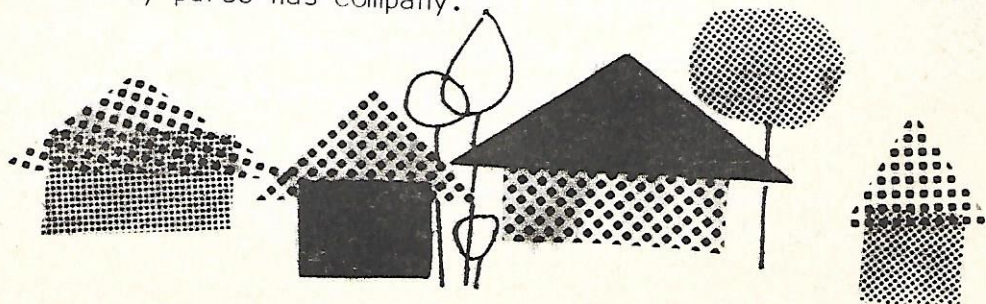
What more? Nothing.

May 1972.

I haven't yet told you my story in sequels that we shall entitle "How I Gave Everything I Had To The Armoured Corps". It started with my purse that one bright day jumped into the abyss of the engine and got stuck there. Fortunately there was hardly any money in it, just some 15 pounds. To make things simpler I also lost my list of personal equipment there plus my identity card. I hope I'll find them when we clean up. After my purse, a couple of days later, I sacrificed my watch on the altar of the desert. What with all this jumping into and out of the tank, I suddenly found myself without my watch, i.e. only the strap was left, so now when I want to know the time, I look on my strap. That's always something.

Well, and then the keys of my kitbag fell out through a brand-new hole in my pants and that made the whole affair perfect.

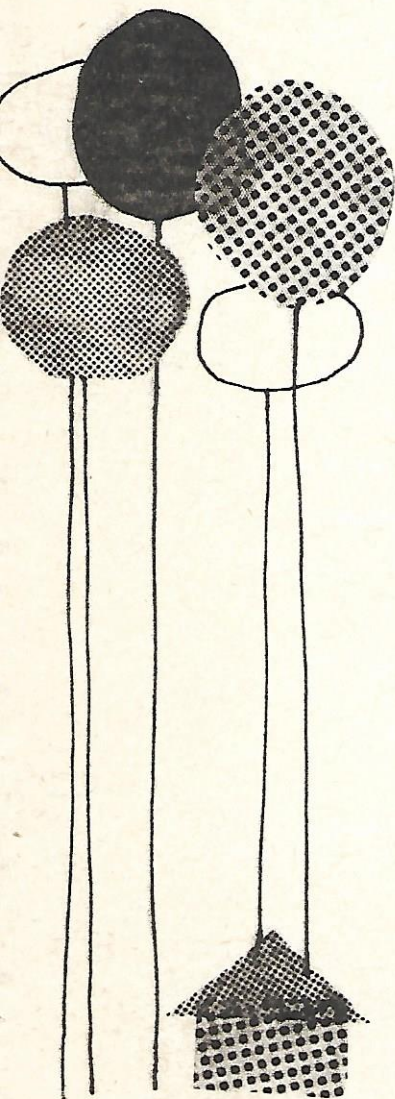
What comforted me in this mess was, that one day after I had dropped my purse into the engine, a gunman who had come to work in our tank in a sudden burst of generosity, offered his transistor radio to the engine. And half an hour later my driver dropped his Parker ballpoint there. And now my purse has company.



Tuesday, 7.6

There were several songs humming in my head these last days.
they are rotten, I know, but I believe that way I can explain
myself better, everything I felt.

A D R E A M



In darkness you stood
among the rows of empty chairs
and your angelic smile illuminated the night.
Weeping, you called me to come with you,
because you're alone,
because you are sad.
And then you pointed your rifle
and wept, with tears black and big.
And I,
on the other side of the empty rows,
facing the immense and empty screen,
I shrieked one terrified shriek:
N O !
Then you wept, and you fired
and I fled through the empty door
into the streets that were shining
with black rain.
You fired, you pursued me through red tracks.
You pursued me, black and red and weeping.
Until you hit me.
And in the street shining with black rain,
I was killed
and I came with you.

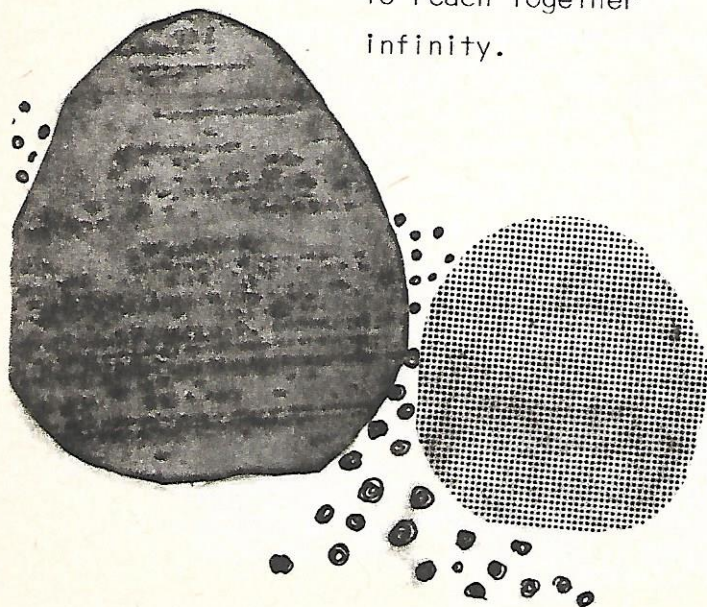
(Shimon wrote this song following a dream he had after hearing that his friend Gili had been killed. Ed.)

PARALLEL LINES DIE

Parallel lines run side by side,
run along together,
thinking they'll reach infinity
together.

But all at once,
one second before infinity,
one of them is stopped.

The other one runs on,
seeking its parallel,
to reach together
infinity.



a song for sunday

when you wake up alone in the morning
you'll find in your bed a kiss
that I have left there

as if dropped from my pocket
just so by chance

when you get up alone in the morning

I shall already be far away

on the black roads of golden Sinai

and be thinking of you

and of a kiss that I left in your bed

as if dropped from my pocket

just so by chance

keep it for yourself

that kiss that you found

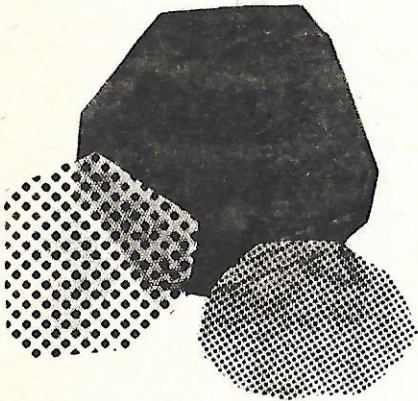
don't send it away in a parcel

it did not drop from my pocket

just so by chance

It is for you

That's it. the problem is that it always turns out completely different from what I think it will be. But I hope that somehow this will help you to understand what I felt and still feel. I told you that I had been having terrible dreams until I came home; I couldn't tell you then what I had been dreaming, but in that poem I have tried to picture somehow what went on there.



July 1972.

Shabbat morning, from 8 till 12.

I don't know exactly what I'm going to write to you, but I'll write something, that's sure. I'm sitting here in the sun (this is called guard-duty), with no shirt on and trying to get a nice suntan. Yesterday I got half my body burnt instead of getting a tan - but half my body length-wise and that looks very funny. A transistor radio, some almonds that were still left over from the last parcel, and as a novelty a pad of writing paper, a pen and a desperate effort to find something to write. On Thursday, after everyone had left, I got a letter from you to cheer me up, where you wrote about such things as the degradation of values and the rising star of sexual corruption in our fatherland, especially among the younger generation.

That's splendid and I hope you'll all be happy with it, only leave something for me too when I come, I want to see too. I've never seen a blue movie, not even a turquoise one or a tiny bit sky-blue (blue-white yes, but I don't think that's the same thing)*, all the time just red and green and yellow ones.

I made a short break here, went to eat something, washed my filthy workclothes, took a shower and did all kind of things. Now I'm back here in the sun, but it's got a bit cloudy in the meantime. I have to be on guard at the gate in less than an hour, and till then I'll try to give a different colour to this piece of paper.

There is a song on the radio: "He was a simple infantryman, like any in the company, in the infantry, the infantry etc." Laugh, please! They're having them singing songs from 1950, they're getting nostalgic, it's a joke.

What more is there to write that has not yet been written? I've read all the papers and solved all the crossword puzzles. I've read the magazines too. I have washed all my clothes, so what more is there to do? Lie in the sun (now it's time for my back, in 30 minutes I must turn over) and try to get a tan. You will judge the results in another 6 days' time, that is if The One Above does not interfere of course.

* "Blue-white" is the symbol for Israel-made products.

July 1972.

..... It's hot here. Infernally hot. The sun is burning, parching, sweltering. Like they say, wherever you go, you'll find a nasty sunray waiting for you to burn you alive. This heat is more than flesh and blood can stand; there is only one thing you can do: crawl to the shower every thirty minutes, cool off a little and go back to a your baking-hot room.

It makes you feel kind of hopeless, so, quietly, that there is nothing to do. I pass the time of day sleeping, or rather trying to sleep, sprawling on the floor and fighting away the flies with my last bit of strength. Someone once said that the human race is on the way of being annihilated and that when it is completely gone, there'll be only the insects left. I think that prophecy is coming true here. Here the flies and the mosquitoes and the cockroaches are in charge of things. They are boss. They get everywhere and they are entirely indestructible.

I presume that you were at home on Shabbat and that you saw Dubi, and he surely told you everything there was to tell, so that now I can't even tell you anything new. I hope you gave him something for me, for I'll very likely see him tomorrow or the day after, so then I'll hear his news.

Sort of dumb letter, this. My mental depth is getting down to a few flat centimetres. I do not set the engine of my thinking power in motion anymore for subjects other than the heat and the flies. What's the good of thinking?

To be callous, dumb, asinine, that's the best thing there is. That way you don't get hurt so much, there's not so much pain to cope with, and there's nothing to lose.

Sunday, 16.7.1972.

That's it. At last the siege has been lifted, the mobile cantine has arrived and brought envelopes and shampoo and cigarettes and many more delicacies. So now there is no pretext anymore to go and snooze during breaks, one has to start writing

letters again.

The difficulty is that there's really not much to write about. I have two poems that I wrote one night last week when I was on guard and when there was some moon still. I've just read them over once more, the thing that gets me is how I can write such claptrap in all seriousness.

I think that it is my turn for leave next week, i.e. on the 24th and that suits me fine for several reasons: a) it's the wedding of Eyal, a driver from Barkai, we did basic training together, the one I told you about (did I?), who had an accident (no, not with the tank). People must marry and I think it will be rather fun to see him at the funeral ceremony; b) on the 31st there's a kind of inspection here and that means that next week there will be more than regular brainwashing about cleaning and polishing and I hate that; c) I'm starting to get homesick and the sooner I get out of here the better.

On the other hand I understand that you have big plans to roam the country during that week: summercamp with the children, a visit to Margalith and Joel and all kinds of things like that, so there may be trouble in finding you. But you should know:

- a) If I do not get off that week, then it will be the week after and that's sure as death at least.
- b) I cannot in any way decide when it is my turn to go on leave, this week or the next, nor can I influence that decision.
- c) I'll know if and when I get off only two days beforehand so that it will be impossible to let you know.
- d) Here we get leave from Monday until the next Sunday, I think I told you once.

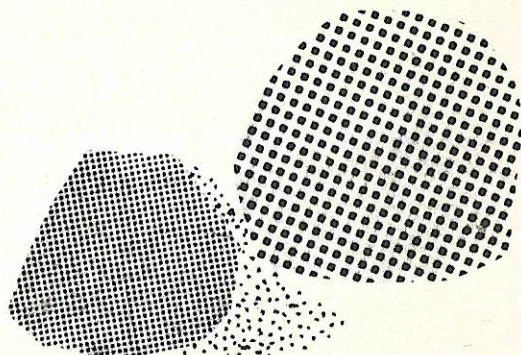
From there the conclusions:

- a) Don't make any change in your plans. Wherever you may be hiding, I'll find you.
- b) If you go anywhere during that week, make sure that I can know where you are, or leave a note, or God knows what.

Very soon they'll take the boys to work, those shit-shovelers, and here I am, biting my nails and whatever there is to bite. Oh, it's not as if nothing ever happens here, after all we have the most riotous goings-on: there's movies and there's meals and sleep and chess (I'm the champion for the time being), and there's backgammon and bridge and there is an immense lot of sand and still more sky, there's newspapers and radio and heat. But can one fill a letter about all that?

On Friday night we made such a beautiful supper, just fantastic; we put the tables outside on the road, there was still a little bit of daylight, kind of dusk, white tablecloths, red wine, white bread. All the tables in one long row and our red-haired officer at the head of it, like a shining sun. And what food! humus and pickles, eggplant salad with eggs, in the Moroccan way, hot like hell, fresh vegetables salad, heavenly chickensoup - and that was only the beginning. The main course was steak and potato chips of course, that's a must, and for dessert canned pears and after that coffee and cake, that's a must too. Do I hear you asking who the cook was? What a question, really!

That's it. End of the story. It's late at night already and someone has to get up at 4 o'clock (last watch). There is a movie: "Visit of the old lady" and I have already seen that twice at least, so today I shall not be there when the old lady comes.



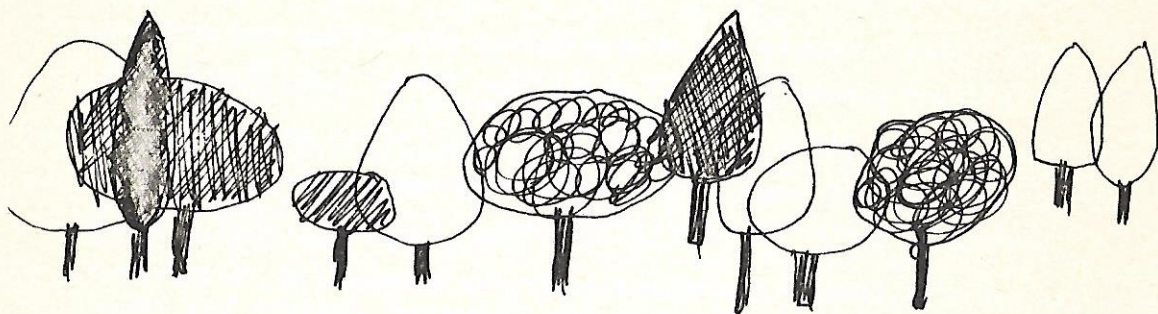
July 1972.

There is a big discussion going on here on the subject "The bullshit-standard-letter-to-girlfriend/family". According to agreed qualifications I am a little better than the rest, not much. Conclusions are that a regular letter runs somehow like this: "Dear Varda, I've just got your letter and I'm starting to answer it at once (the liar!). Here everything is OK. They're driving us hard, I'm fed up with the bloody business. In two weeks I'll come home. We eat shit, we sleep shit, I detest the army. How are you? Many kisses, Yeruba'al."

There may be variations of course, but the true soldier owes it to his honour to use at least three curses and to describe a more or less equal number of sexual organs out of their natural order. It is of course possible to give a description of the landscape (guard-duty), of lunch (during noon-break) or of yesterday's movie. Regards are commendable: they show that our soldiers have not forgotten their friends at the rear and that they think of them day and night. Letters to parents usually expatiate on the subject of parcels, that of yesterday ("that was really good, especially the cookies with the jam") and that of tomorrow ("people here are crazy about lemon-flavoured biscuits").

Don't you think too that it's about time I make an end to this letter? Tomorrow morning I'll go up in the mountains to see the sunrise, perhaps I'll get some inspiration there. I'll take my writing-pad with me at any rate.

Just now the long expected news came in that there's a movie at 8.30, i.e. in five minutes. I must run and find a seat. Heavens, it's like a small kibbutz here, only different.



Somewhere, in the army.

I don't know exactly how to start. In my mind I've tried all kinds of beginnings, and nothing is suitable, it's no good. I've found a pen and some paper, but that does not guarantee a letter will come out of them. On the whole it's an erroneous supposition that a letter will result from the components pen, paper and a man on a chair. A letter is real when it contains something that I want to pass on to you. That's why the mail-service and other means of communication were invented, so that people who feel close to each other, but do not really know how to handle that closeness because they cannot manipulate it with their hands, can convey their thoughts and feelings, something full and real, to each other. It makes no sense at all to dispatch pieces of paper with just words written on them, empty words, words of self-deception that have no inner coherence and no real life. Words in which there is no trace of the real I and you. But all the time people send that kind of pieces of paper

to each other, they put them in envelopes and stick stamps on them, and then they write a name on them of a person whom they have nothing to give to, whom they have nothing in common with. The urge must be there; for even if there is contact between two people, that contact is spiritual only and impalpable. And sometimes you feel that it is there and I feel that it got interrupted somewhere, and there is no way of knowing for the thread cannot be seen with the eyes. And you ask for love, for what is good, for life to go on as you knew it, flowing steadily along that thread. And I want to give all that to you, but suddenly I do not see where I left my love for you, and I find only words, empty shells where once love dwelt. And I send them to you along the thread, the thread that got broken and you do not know it.

It's so easy for people to tell lies! Suppose you wanted to send me a parcel with sweets and other goodies and you start to look for them and suddenly you find you have nothing! Would you then send an empty box, just because you had promised to send me something every day? Now that would be absurd. So why letters??! Why is it allowed to lie, why do people lie so easily whenever there are things involved that they cannot touch with their hands? What's the big difference? A letter, that's the candy of the heart, the sweets of the feelings, so why do people send parcels with just empty wrappers in them, invisible as these things may be?

Sorry, all in all I only wanted to say that today is one of those days that I have nothing to say to you. There is nothing worthwhile giving to you, I've looked for something and found nothing. I could have sent you a parcel with empty shells and wrappers but didn't feel like it suddenly. Today there's no "I love you", no "I think", no "kisses" and no "darling". There are days like that, days of sand in the soul and clouds in the heart, and there's nothing to get upset about. Today I just don't feel like telling any lies, not to you and not to myself. You won't understand, I suppose, and you'll get mad and you'll write me at least three letters that we'd better finish. Please don't, it's a waste of time. Tomorrow the sun will shine

again, I'll be able to smile and shall want to kick myself for not having sent you a kiss. But we must love all the days and take them as they are. After all there is nothing sweeter than truth, however hard it may be sometimes. You've no idea how good I feel now and I'm really craving to kiss you.

Shimon

Shalom beloved!

Like explorers in Africa who climb the Kilimanjaro to look over the jungle from a high, we went up the mountain to look around, to see where we are, who we are and what we are doing in this universe of unending sand. Like any person who has been living in this world of ours for 21 years and who has seen many sunrises and sunsets, I know that this morning too the sun will rise from behind the distant sandhills, but in reality we cannot at all be certain of it. This universe of sand stretches from horizon to horizon, it dominates, it pulverizes everything into billions of glimmering grains that choke and suffocate all noses, ears and throats, This sand that covers up the whole earth, couldn't it cover up the sun as well?

But a whitish-orange light is suspended in the east, quietly waiting, as if signaling to us, people of the night, that there is nothing to fear, that everything is alright and that the sun will faithfully carry out its part of the deal, today too she will rise and like a policeman on his beat make her daily turn in the blue sky above us.

And we are waiting for the sun. Waiting for her love to warm our cold night, to colour our skies with a deep blue like only the sun knows, we are waiting for her awesomeness, for the anguish that is in her, the pain, the fire that will burn us and cover our faces with streams of sweat, that will dry up our throats and our eyes, heat up our deadly steel like a blacksmith heating up his iron hammer until a blinding and fearsome white.

But above all we are waiting for the sun to come as a well-known and familiar friend, who will restore our confidence in her rise, as we have known it for each day of our lives, so that we shall know again that the earth is still turning round, that each day has its night and every night its day, that old father God is still alive and has strength enough to keep this little world of his in its accustomed order, to look to it that in the morning the sun will rise to rule the day and in the evening the moon will

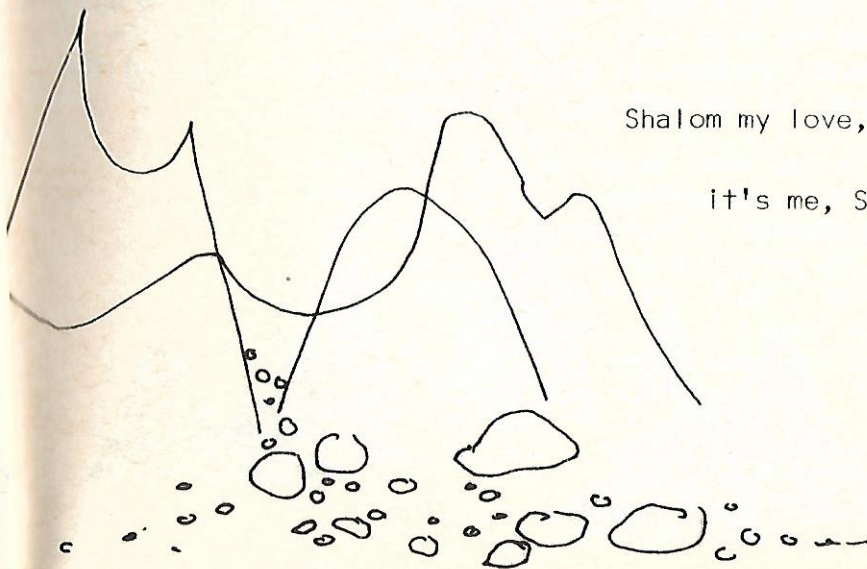
rise to rule the night. Like an old faithful soldier she rises every morning to her watch and sets every night - tirelessly, without going on strike or asking for a pay-raise. A simple, good and loyal creature.

And still we are waiting. Clouds, woolly and grey like an army blanket, have shrouded the white glow and for a few minutes our hopes have fallen. But there - from the big yellow sandhill in the distance, there rises something, like another new-born hill but different - red as fire it is and it rises and all the time it swells like a balloon. A kind of new creature that is born into our world. And now it is like the dome of a mosque of God, golden like a distant rosary. The outlines of the clouds that threatened to smother it, have turned pink and soon it will break through the barriers that were put up against it. There she rises, still blurred by clouds. For one moment she appeared from behind the horizon of sand and again - concealed by clouds. But for some reason or other the sky has become so very blue already. Now there is certainty, she will rise, she will master the clouds, the sand, all the devils that threaten to pull her down, but they themselves are already coloured blue, a velvety blue, deep and soft. And suddenly - two flashes like two huge diamonds penetrate through the clouds. Another moment

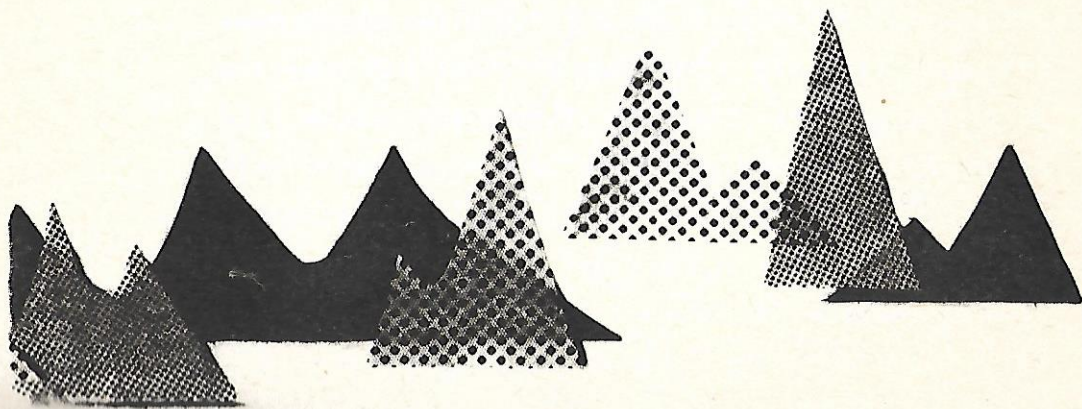
and half of the dome is uncovered, glittering and blinding like the blacksmith's iron. There she rises, all aflame. Passionate and burning like sexual love she rises and pierces through the clouds, forces her way through, bursts into them and fills with a happy ending the entire blue of our skies, spills her shining gold over our sand, pours herself out over us like the juice of love. And now it's ended, and life begins. From way down one little man asked "What's the time?" and another little man answered him. The generator begins to rumble as if by itself. And only I am here, just one man in the world, who has looked upon the splendour of the godly mistress, who knows that everything is finished now and that day is born from night's love.

Shalom my love,

it's me, Shimon



..... After that I got the worst of it because of him. Someone there told me to get off the line. "You'd like that" I told him and that he should stop pestering me and other things like that and he got mad - Wow, did he get mad! That was some cursing on the telephone! "You can kiss my arse!" "I'll kick you into the calaboose!" etc. And I remained cool as cool. I thought that some dumbhead wanted to give it to me, afterwards it appeared that it was the commander of another squadron who was talking to another officer and he wanted to know who that soldier was who had spoken to him. Good luck that our commander is a friend of mine, so he managed to calm him down, without mentioning any names. On the whole it's kind of hard for me to settle down again after I've come back from home, I feel numb like that. I've managed twice this week already to clash with one of our officers and today they wanted to write me down for refusal of order because I didn't want to clean the tables that the officers had messed in. I had kitchen duty and the sergeant, one Choko, wanted me to clean the mess that they had made there during the day, I said to him that he could go to hell and that the officers could clean up themselves if they wanted to eat there. He didn't have to think twice before he told the officer in charge to write me down for refusal. But what? That particular officer happens to be a bit soft in the head but in this kind of thing he's OK and he'd be the last one to lodge a complaint against me. We had a long talk and he saw my point that we are no waiters ("I serve the army here, not the officers", I told him; that's a splendid phrase, it always works), and in the end the officers cleaned up themselves, like good boys.



I got a lousy machine, damn it, absolutely wretched, which has to be turned into a machine fit for human beings, one that can compete with the others, and I have to do it all by myself. Until tomorrow evening, that's a lot of work, and I am alone and those stinkers are having their fun in the swimming pool, damn them.

Apart from that there's really nothing to tell. It is my mother's birthday, I must write a letter. Oh, we got a transistor radio! That's a beautiful story. We got there at that party and then this what's-his-name, the one who was in charge of the fun, said that we'd win a transistor and he meant it as a joke and of course nobody took it seriously, at least I didn't. Briefly, yesterday night a transistor arrived here, something really big and red, with two buttons and a lot of stations, one that runs on batteries and can also be plugged in, it is similar to the one you have in your house, only much redder and it makes a lot of noise. And now it's turned on all the time and it plays, not important what, the main thing is that it is our radio. Speeches, Carol King in Hebrew, murder ltd.

Oi, I quite forgot that I have to be on guard at the gate, the guy that's there now is sure getting the wind up, so I'm running. So long.

July, 1972.

Tonight I got a letter from you after some hundred years. I'm really longing for you, that's to say I feel that I'm longing for something, that somewhere there is someone I am supposed to love, but I just can't remember what you look like. I mean, dimly I remember something, but I cannot picture you in my mind, I don't see your face. One might get crazy, and then perhaps one might not. I'm simply sad. I'm fed up with all this sand, with all these people who think that they are better than you, just be-

cause they have one or two bats on the shoulder of their uniform. And that for that reason they can tell you what you must do. I'm fed up. I want to go home.

Shvartzi is gone, he got a function somewhere else and left. I asked him why he was leaving me alone and he did not reply. Heavens, they can say about him what they want, from a professional point of view he may be as rotten as anything, but I liked him, his sweet smile, he was so nice, that kid. Where will I find another mechanic like that who in the middle of all the commotion before we move, will throw me a smile so sweet that I feel like catching him in my arms and giving him a kiss on his forehead? (I mean it).

And after that Yehuda. At noon we got the message that they were coming, all of a sudden like that, and exactly one minute before I was to go on guard, they started to sing. Still I could speak a few words with him. Somehow he gave me such a feeling of sadness, a kind of terrible melancholy, I don't know exactly why it was the way he talked and looked and the things he said and the fact that I knew I wouldn't be able to be there at his show (he was so surprised to see me here, he just couldn't understand how I came to be here, a plain soldier like anybody, curse him). I was enormously glad to see him, but he made me feel so sad, quietly like that, you know. After the show he came to see me at the gate for a few moments before they left, to say goodbye, to talk for a couple of minutes more, to promise to say hello for me to everybody, and then he left. And I felt so miserable, I can't describe it at all. Suddenly everything looked so different, all that sand seemed so hateful and deadly monotonous, all the people seemed stupid and evil and everything was enervating and old and shabby. Like a balloon everything went flat, the whole structure that I had tried to build up around all those idiotic trivialities here, suddenly you see the inanity and the stupidity of it all, and you want to go home.

And now Alon has gone away, simply gone. And we remain alone. It is as if the seven lean years had started. I cannot tell you in a letter, even if it is not going to be censured, what Alon signified for me and for the whole crew and for everyone. But if you want, I'll try to tell you some day when I see you again.

My little gunman. I believe that we got really close, I got so used to him. That's what this training as a team does to people, we have become so completely adjusted one to the other in spite of the enormous differences in character, you have no idea. I think that we were a very special team, including Gil, and a team like that has never before been created by old Nick. But now, with only Gil left, we're nothing. Just nothing. We go on each other's nerves, we're unfit to work together, unable to get along. Nothing gets done. We feel his absence, feel it really strong. And whichever gunman they'll give us now, be he as good as anything, we'll never get that same perfection anymore, the same understanding and harmony as with Alon. And now I am the smallest of the team for there is no other little gunner like him.

My poor girl!

Yesterday night I got your unhappy letter. What can I say to you? That everything passes? How well I know that situation when one comes to a strange place and everyone is yelling and everything looks dismal; it's really depressing at first, but you'll see that very soon you'll be smiling again, if perhaps

not outright laughing.

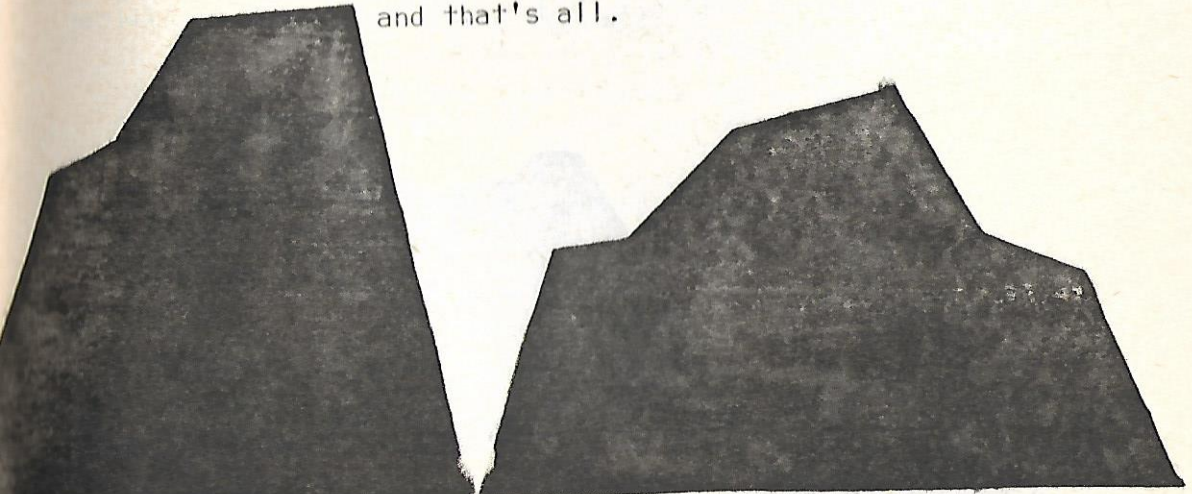
And please forgive me that I had to laugh yesterday when I read your letter. I'd never be able to keep a straight face in a place like that with so many girls whom they're trying to fit out with steel-helmets and personal equipment and who are being drilled: "Enemy on the left!" "Enemy on the right!"

It seems so funny that you are now "participating in the war effort", and that you'll come home in uniform, full of stories about the army. But at least there are a lot of girls there you know, and it makes things much easier when you are together.

This last part I'm writing in class. I have developed a perfect system - I bring my writing-pad to the lessons by way of copybook and then I can write letters in all tranquillity. And you are considered a most serious student, who notes down everything that's being said. The lesson is over now, I don't know how I got through it without falling asleep. At another lesson today I was sleeping like a log, suddenly I feel someone poking his elbow in my side, I open my eyes and see everybody looking at me with a ferocious glint in their eyes. What was, the teacher had apparently asked me a question and I had not woken up. Fortunately he repeated his question and it was simple, so I got up, quite composed, gave my answer and spared myself two hours of watch-duty for tonight. But that didn't withhold me from falling asleep again in the next lesson. It's not that the lessons are so boring, on the contrary, but I just fall asleep without being aware of it and without wanting to.

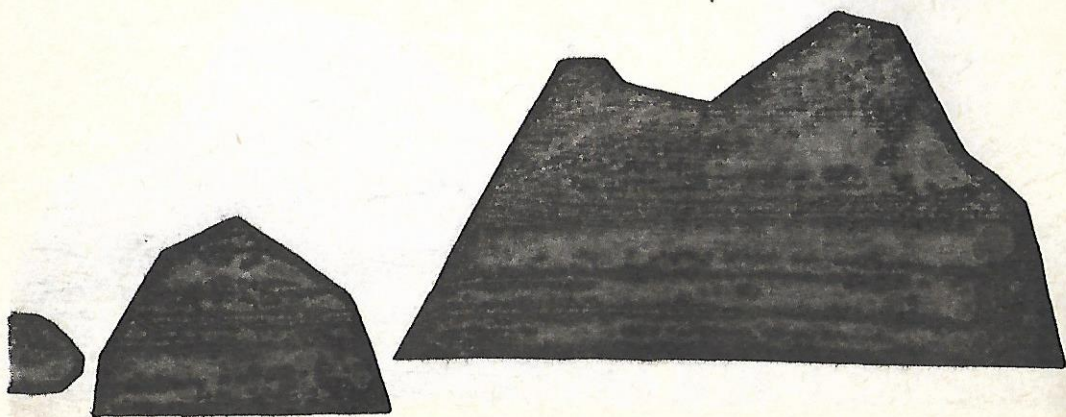
People, people, people,
hundreds, thousands, millions of them.
Black people, red people, yellow people,
dark and white,
slim and fat,
they go and sit and stand,
they are beautiful or ugly,
they are good or wicked,
wise or stupid,
they are silent, they laugh, they talk.

They all have eyes like you,
hair, like you,
they all have noses like you,
they all smile, like you.....
Only just slightly, slightly different,
and that's all.



Yesterday night we had big plans to go to Mavo-Hamma. We went to Kfar Blum to look for Shaul, but he had disappeared mysteriously, and Micky guards over our frontiers in Hurshat Tal. As we had a car, we decided to go anyhow, and as we had the car only till noon, we definitely decided to get up early and go, but with all those good intentions.....

In short, when we were sitting in the clubhouse after lunch, we concluded that we were wasting our time and that we should go somewhere, so we drove up the Golan Hills, with no particular aim, we drove around and covered kilometres, but somehow we had a great time. Tonight we decided to drive to Kiryat Shmonah and see a movie. Oded and I went. The movie was rotten. And there were only kids there, who screamed and laughed in the wrong places. You know that, but we were very tolerant. Ra'anan just now brought me a cigar, so here I am, sitting in my chair and smoking and writing. It's such a weird feeling, to be alone. I miss you terribly, but there is such a quiet here, I don't know exactly how to explain, but it's not important. It's not important because I shall get leave on the 19th (yes, next Thursday) and then you can tell me everything. I shall have nothing to tell of course, but I'll listen and I am sure you'll have had lots of adventures. I have a lot of money (almost fifty pounds) and if you still have a little bit of strength left, we can go and roam through the country. Of course nothing is certain yet, the leave is really for the new officers, but I consider myself an officer already, after my exams.



Friday night, 17.12.

.... But tonightoh, everything is so good, you've no idea. Finished, the two of us alone in our tent, with our parcels (these last two days I got two parcels), a candle, cigarette, and leisure to dream. In spite of all that noise of the radio, I hear very distinctly the violet sounds of the first part of "April". It gave me an odd feeling when you wrote that you identify me with that marvellous song. Maybe it's a kind of telepathy, but for me you are "April" and "April" that's you. The deep violet, here and there mixed with a bright and soft orange, that we (and you have no idea how happy I am that it's us both) love so much, for me that is you: the orange, the violet and soft blue that I love so much - that's you.

You see that I'm relaxed as if I had all the time in the world and as if this candle never burned out; I am dreaming and thinking of you and I feel you inside me and I'm warm all through, and over and over again I hear the letters that you wrote me, your words that make my heart happy in the darkest hours. And I'm writing pages full of nonsense to you and I don't care and nothing can disturb this delightful peace of mind that I feel.

I don't know exactly what I can write to you now, I have such a lot to write and to say and to tell to you, but nothing of all that fits the bliss of this moment, it would only mess it up, if you know what I mean.

So I think it's best to stop now. I think that part of what I'm feeling has come over to you,

such a long time and more than that - I have not said things to you and most of the time there was nothing to say or there were no words to express them in. Your letters do not say anything either, like mine. I open them, read them, search, read them again and do not find. Your life is regulated and it seems odd to me that everything goes on as it did, and it is a strange idea that you do not think. I must make a break here. I think that the things I'm going to say come from somewhere farther back in the mind and therefore the words that I'm using are mine only and you should not take them at face value. It happens sometimes that I must write things to somebody, I simply have to, so if you feel that you cannot follow my thoughts, for they are really very vague and nebulous, then please don't misunderstand the words and get hurt and start thinking the wrong things, for I do not intend that at all.

I'm trying to give up smoking and it's terribly difficult. There is something in my throat that bothers me a lot. That too is why I wrote you such a bad letter the last time. It's such a bad feeling. Everything I eat tastes terribly salty and that's awful, because you can't enjoy anything. You say something and then you note that you've said it wrong, all day long you sit and listen to things that plainly do not interest you, you wait for them to end and go to eat, and you can't swallow a thing. You light a cigarette and it burns you and suddenly it has such a queer taste. You come to your room and want to drink coffee and that too tastes like cheese. You go to the medical orderly and he gives you aspirin; you go to bed and then they wake you up at 5 a.m. for another day without taste or purpose; so then it is not surprising that you begin to ask yourself, wherefore all this, and you understand that you do not understand, that you are not you and not what you once thought you were going to be. You might get depressed but there's no need. It's just that you do not know what to do in order to feel, in order to be someone. To everything

you must add salt, pepper, a knife - so that you can feel the sharpness of things.

I must know who I really am and what I'm living for. I feel that I don't understand the clockwork of life, what makes it tick, and it doesn't make any difference what other people say. They are so different, and they understand themselves. And other people go through life as if they are born for it, and they know their way. I don't even know where all the paths lead to, and I have no idea whether they are mined or where. I don't want anyone to tell me where I should go. The mines are my own and nobody else can know the size of my feet, but neither do I know myself. There is only that feeling that I will go alone, my whole life. There comes a moment in life that man must know that that's it and that there will be nothing more. I feel that I have reached the point where I have to know that this one metre sixty nine is all there is of me and that the words: "When I'll be grown up", do not make sense anymore, and that this is all I'll have for life. And I can't resign myself to that. To know that the way leads straight to the age of thirty, forty, fifty, to know that one day I shall die, and that the story titled Shimon Ben-Dror, the man, is ended, like an allowance one gets and it's finished, just so. Without having been anything or having understood one jot more than nothing. I am afraid that even if I'm going to study mathematics, I won't find there either anything else than the average grey clouds, exactly like it has always been. Somewhere there is something more, something in which we can sense the realness of things and that we can lay our hands on. Find fulfilment; but I think I'll never find it because I am not the person for it, it's not my lot and it isn't for me.

It is like looking for the blue of the sky. You think you have found it, you climb up and up and suddenly you see that it too is grey, that there you will not find it either and it drives you out of your wits to think how other people know this and are able to live with it. And you see that they find

the blue of heaven every day in their lives, they live their lives and understand them and it's like oil for the clock-work. And they go about and run and jump, purposefully, and they hold the realness in their bones, in their songs, in their plans and knowledge and consciousness.

Is this it what man does with his life, to climb up to find the blue, and then go on to the grass and try to understand the green and die in order to understand life, or is he to float around all the time in lukewarm water, in silent despair? To marry and raise children, simply because it is hard to run and seek, and it's pleasanter to sleep in a bathtub.

I must understand life. I feel that it is passing me by, whispering to itself while I am outside it. I must grasp it firmly and wring it until it cries out with pain, and then say to it: "Hey, what's going on here really?", but that won't happen. To be in the world without understanding, that's to be stupid. And I've never been stupid. Maybe I was too stupid to see that I was? That's perhaps why I admire clever people and try to be near them so that I can perhaps take something in. But you did not give me more. I believe that you do not know at all how much you understand, how firmly you tread in reality, fully conscious of the motion of your feet and the steadiness of your breath, without thinking about it at all.

You and I never thought about it that we were you and I, we've never been conscious of it. But you make me feel that you are you, at least that, and the miracle is that I can feel you and sometimes, rarely, can understand the us of us. But we have never thought together, the thoughts of thinking. I'm not sad about it, but if we do come to that some day, I think that will be the blue. The outer tip of understanding.

The clock moves on and its hands show the hour. And it changes every minute and that again proves that life is outside, that there is no room in this world that we know for thoughts from the back of the mind, that at 6.30 we have to go to supper, and that it's forbidden to write things like these.

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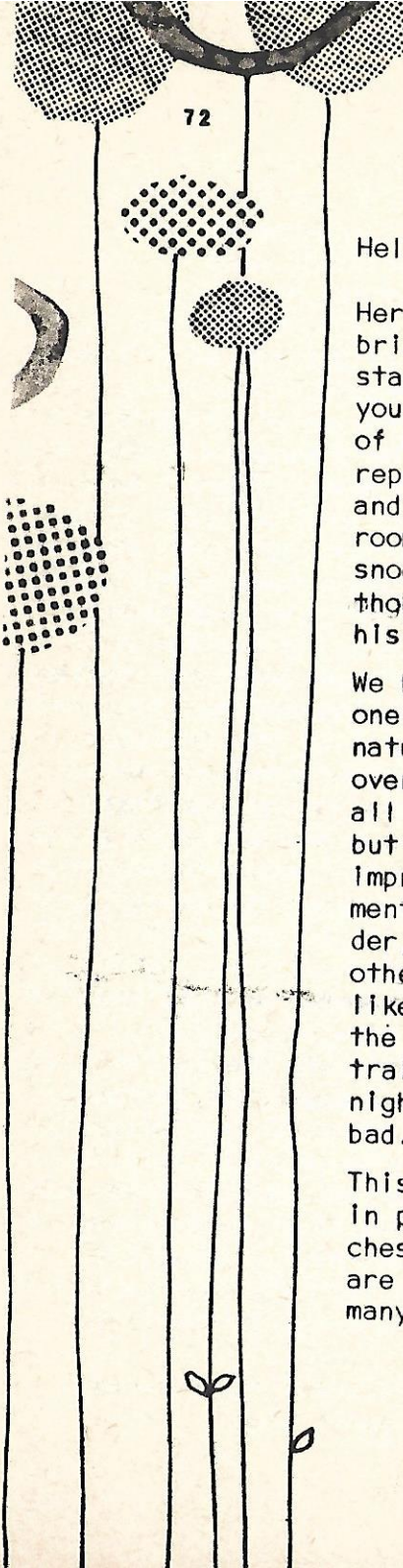
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Hello, my little girl!

Here it is, the Shabbat-letter. They've gone to bring water, and coffee is in the preliminary stage. There is a smell of ending. Afternoon: if you do not know, that's the time between a lunch of corned-beef and supper, the time of soccer-reports on the radio that do not let you sleep, and time to start cleaning up the mess in the room. There are those who claim that a healthy snooze also befits the hour, but far be that thought from whoever has not yet accomplished his Shabbat-letter!

We had a week of marvellous excursions. It made one think of summercamp with lots of sun and natural lawns and really beautiful trips. It's over now and we have come back to this room that, all allowances made, has become a sort of home, but that all the same immediately gives you an impression of prison. All these blocks of cement, the lack of fresh air, this frightful order, somehow they make you feel bad. But on the other hand it's something to be able to eat like a human being again and to take a book from the library, there are rubber mattresses, central heating, we have a tin of coffee, and tonight there's the movie "Z", all that is not so bad.

This is such a beautiful area, in this season in particular - everything is green, big stretches of green, everything is blooming and there are wild flowers all over. Also we've been to many places where I had never been before.

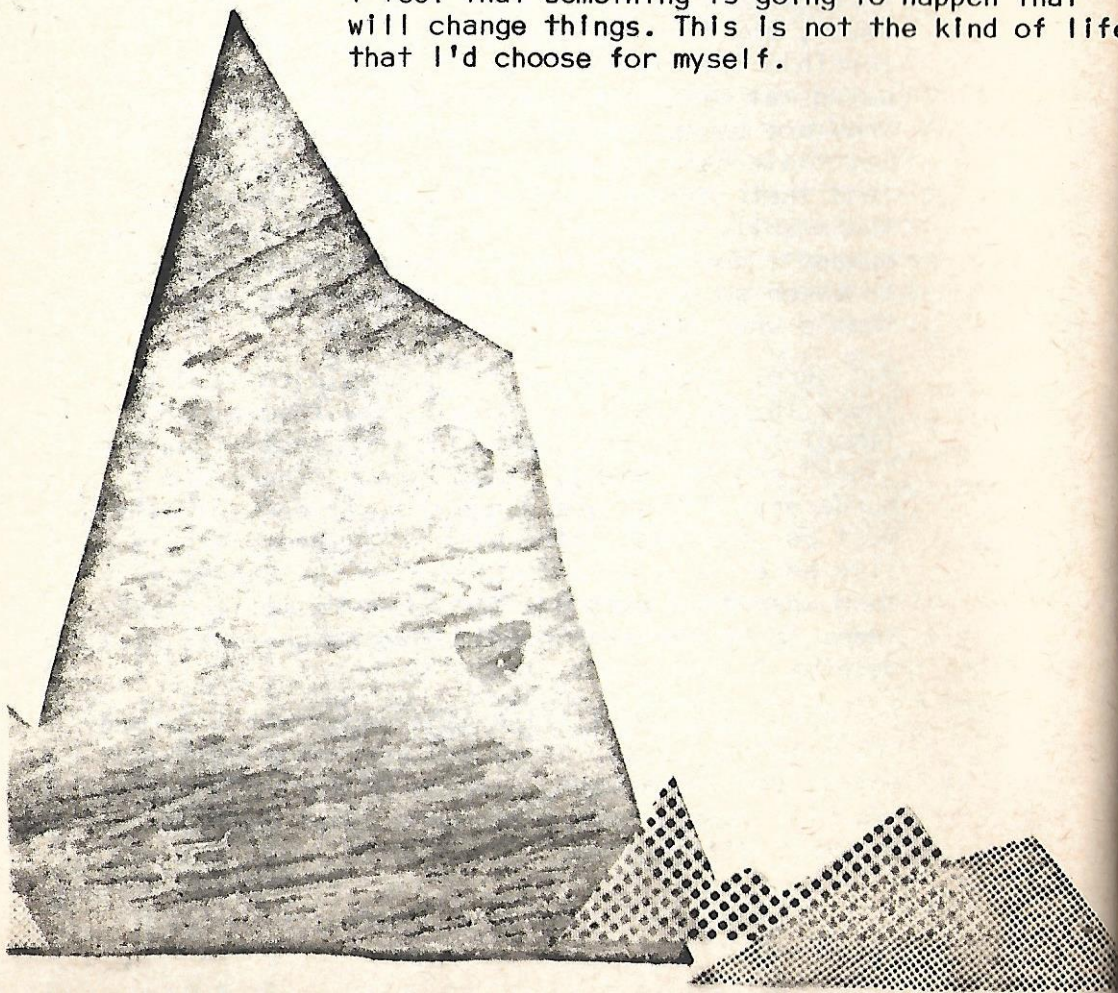
I got proof again that I'm not made for the army, and that I am incapable of thinking like a soldier. It makes me so mad when people are being trampled on, even if they are Arabs, that makes no difference at all. How can one believe or hope at all that one day there will be real peace? And it is possible to live in peace with people who are different from us (and they are very different). There they live on some hill, and they have their mountains and their wadi and their patch of soil, in each centimetre of which they put a litre of sweat, and then we come and insult them with this terrible indifference, as if they were not human beings at all. They are not hell-bred creatures, they are peaceful people; and then they come and let their hate grow on them, really nurse and tend their hate. They trample on the people and their soil, on their pride, on their right to be human. I don't believe that that's the only way in which we can safeguard our existence, although that's what they tell us here.

But here, and anywhere, it is forbidden to think these things and still more to say them aloud. Immediately you are looked at with suspicious eyes. "They" are the enemy, "they" are butchers and murderers, "they" are dangerous. It seems that you must believe that, otherwise it's impossible to live here. It's even forbidden to say Shalom to them when they pass by, forbidden to smile. That seems to be the meaning of being conquerors: kick, despoise.

For these reasons I think it's good that I joined the armoured corps. There you are not a human being, you are a tank, and you do not kill people, you kill tanks, from a distance. That makes an enormous difference.

I'm trying to read "People in a summer's night" and it does not mean anything to me. I feel that I've become obtuse. There was a time that I was able to read a book like that and understand it and enjoy it. Nowadays I try and it's no good. It's a kind of calcification, this obtuseness, that comes from living among the sand for a year and a half, while there's no time to think one metre ahead and still less aside.

I make an end to this letter without any excuses. I feel that something is going to happen that will change things. This is not the kind of life that I'd choose for myself.



On the night before the War of Atonement broke out, Shimon and his friends, graduates of the School for Officers of the Armoured Corps, were stationed in Bir-Hamda. Their course had specialized in independent action, but six men from among the new officers had been transferred to other units as tank-commanders, Shimon among them.

When the war broke out, Shimon and his five friends left their comrades and joined their new units.

On 6.10.73, around 9 p.m., Shimon took the place of a wounded tank-commander near the bunker called "Textile", on the road to the Gidi-pass, and started to move westward in order to join the section that was engaged in extricating people from the bunker "Litof" on the shore of the Small Bitter Lake, and that was at the same time moving northward, parallel to the waterline.

When they swerved off from the road into the sand, Shimon, who was standing exposed in the turret, got a direct hit and was killed. Another officer of the crew, Ze'ev Pe'er from Ramat-Gan, who was slightly injured, got out, together with the gunner and the driver of the tank.