Shovrim Shtika - Breaking the Silence

Soldiers Speak Out About their Service in Hebron

What follows is a compilation of testimonies by IDF soldiers who served until recently, or are still actively serving, in the West Bank city of Hebron. The testimonies were gathered by five of the soldiers, and this is what they write:

Recently, we were released from active military duty. Hebron was the hardest, most confusing place we served. Until now, each of us dealt with the difficult things we saw there on our own. Our photo albums - souvenirs from the time we spent in Hebron - have remained, until now, sealed on our respective bedroom shelves. Since we were released, we came to realize that these memories are common to all the guys who served alongside us. We decided to speak out. We decided to tell our stories. Hebron is not on another planet; it's an hour's drive from Jerusalem. But Hebron is light years from Tel Aviv. So we decided to bring Hebron to Tel Aviv. Now, its up to you to come, look, and listen. To understand what's going on there.

The testimonies of dozens of soldiers were captured on video and presented alongside photographs of the town taken by the soldiers themselves, in an exhibit which recently closed in Tel Aviv, but is soon to open in various other sites around the country. Breaking the silence - Shovrim Shtika.

website: www.shovrimshtika.org
contact: Yehuda Shaul yehuda@shovrimshtika.org phone: +972-50-8266289

First week, first time at the checkpoint, at the passage between the Palestinian area and the street where only Jews can go. You need to have a fence. Those guys, they have to stop, there's a line, then they hand you their ID cards through the fence, you check them, and let them through.
There was this guy with me who… We'd just finished advanced training, got to the assignment and he yells, "Waqif! Stop!" The man didn't quite understand and advanced one more step. One extra step, and then he yells again, "Waqif!" and the man freezes in fear. He didn't quite understand what the soldier said. Actually, it's a procedure nobody pays attention to, stopping them exactly on the line. So he decided that because the guy made this one extra step… they should obey us, therefore he'll be detained. I said to him, "Listen, what are you doing?" he said, "No, no, don't argue, at least not in front of them, what are you doing, I'm not going to trust you anymore, you're not reliable"… Eventually one of the patrol commanders came over, came from up there, and I spoke to him. I said, "Listen, what's the deal, how long do you want to detain him for?" He said, "Listen, you can do whatever you want, whatever you feel like doing. If you feel there's a problem with what he's done, if you feel something's wrong, even the slightest thing, you can detain him for as long as you want." And then I got it, a man who's been in Hebron one week, it has nothing to do with rank, he can do whatever he wants. He had been there a week, he was hardly even there, like… Really, he had no idea what was going on there, he didn't have a clue! He'd been there a week! But everyone can do whatever they want, it's like there are no rules, everything is permissible.

*

Another thing I remember from Hebron, something particularly strange, was this so-called "grass widow" procedure, a house the army had taken over and turned into an observation post, the home of a Palestinian family… Not a family of terrorists or anything like that, just a family whose home made a good observation post, so the army evicted them from the house and took it over. Now, when I arrived at this "grass widow"...
Q: how long has the army been there?
A long time, I don't know, since before we got there, we stayed there for months, I'm sure the house was taken over before that, and held long after that. It's not just the family who lived in this specific house who were evicted, but also the people living downstairs were evicted, to keep the area sterile for the army, for the sake of this post…
Q: That is to say, it's been two years now that this Palestinian family has been kept from living in its house.
Yes, that's it, so conceptually this was a really crazy thing, you're in somebody's house, and you climb the stairs of a building, everything is littered with shit, cartridges and glass on the stairs, so you can hear if anyone is approaching. It's simply a house covered in camouflage netting so people can't see what you're doing inside. You simply find yourself in a Palestinian neighborhood, in some family's home, and it's totally surreal, because there you are, sitting in the living room, listening for people coming to attack you. That's it. And through the window you can watch people walking in the street by their home, and the Jewish cemetery is just a few steps away, sometimes you can see Jews coming to the cemetery, to the cemetery area, and sometimes there are Arabs wandering in the area, this was

one of the strangest things I've ever seen. There was also food left behind, there was a TV, we weren't allowed to turn it on, this would be too much, this would be considered "bad occupation," using their electricity…

*

They used to send us to do guard-duty near the battalion headquarters, in Harsina. It was Friday night, and the auxiliary company came up against a terrorist cell, the auxiliary company was also stationed in Harsina, they eliminated two terrorists, killed two terrorists. Friday night dinner was, of course, a very happy affair, two terrorists exterminated, it was on the news, well-publicized in the media, the whole base was jumping. As I was leaving dinner, an armored ambulance arrived with the terrorists' corpses, and the sight which was revealed to me just after this delicious meal, was of two terrorists' corpses being held up in a standing position by three people who were posing for photographs. Even I was shocked by this sight, I closed my eyes so as not to see and walked away, I really didn't feel like looking at terrorists' corpses. I think your judgment gets a little impaired when everyday… when your enemy is an Arab or somebody else who in your eyes… like, you don't look at him as a person standing in front of you, but as the enemy, and this is the word for him: enemy. He is not a dog, he is not some animal, you don't think of him as inferior, he simply doesn't count. Period. He is not… he is your enemy, and if he's the enemy, you kill him. And if it's him that you kill, once you've killed him, then it seems that there's nothing worse you can do to him, but apparently there is.

*

Army routine during curfew, if that's what you mean, is simply standing… if you are in a fixed post it means standing there and shouting, "Waqif, ta`al jib al-hawiyya" [Stop, come give me your ID card] there's a curfew, go home, this is it more or less it, and saying, "I don't care, I don't care. No, no, no," the word we used the most was "No." If in the beginning we used to speak with them and tried to understand, what happened was that they "passed us off." A child arrives, you tell him "Listen, I'll let you pass now, but do me a favor and go home," and five minutes later he's back. Then you tell him, "Listen here, you said you'd go, now get lost," and two months later, I think it's enough, you don't need a year, a month is enough, a week is enough for you to get fed up with this child and with all these people, you are on eight-hour guard duty, and you are so tired, and so bummed, and so burnt out and you don't give a fuck about any of this shit, and then a person comes, and you don't care if he's old, if he's a man, a woman, an adult, a kid, you don't give a damn what species, race, or color he is, he arrives and you tell him "La, ruh `al beit" [No, go home]. You tell him "turn around and go home." I'm not interested in any excuses, I'm not interested in anything. You want to buy vegetables? What do I care about your vegetables. There's a curfew? Period. You don't move. Your house is in the other direction? I don't care, find another way, you can't pass from here.

*

Our job was to stop the Palestinians at… checkpoint and tell them they can't pass there anymore. Maybe a month ago they could, but now they can't. And we knew there was another way they could pass, so on the one hand we were not allowed to let them pass, and on the other hand there were all these old ladies who had to pass to get to their homes, so we'd point in the direction of the opening through which they could pass without us noticing. It was an absurd situation, we couldn't say "we, the soldiers, did that." Our officers also knew about this opening. Like, they told us about it. Nobody really cared about it. It made us wonder what we were doing at the… checkpoint. Why was it forbidden to pass? It was really a form collective punishment. Any terrorist could know about and pass through the opening. It was just a form of collective punishment. You're not allowed to pass because you're not allowed to pass. If you want to commit a terrorist attack, turn right there and then left, but if you do not want to commit a terrorist attack you'll have to make a very big detour or you won't get there at all, which was really brilliant …

*

Were I to divide it into percentages, I'm fairly certain that 80% of the time there was a curfew, that is, at first there was no curfew, and then it became a permanent situation. There was a day here and a day there without it, mostly during the Hudna [ceasefire] there was a two-week respite. Also, there were these strange decisions that gave you the impression that there was somebody sitting in some office who would ease things up a bit. Sometimes there's curfew… we had a long period of curfew from six till six, or from eight till twelve. Then, out of the blue, curfew from eight till noon and that's it, back to the routine. Close all the stores, send everybody home, then let them re-open.

Q: When you say "close the stores," where exactly in Hebron did you happen to come along and close a row of stores?

In the main street of the Casaba, always. At some point it became very easy, there were no more stores left.

Q: And when there were, how did it go?

"Sakir, sakir, sakir, sakir, sakir, sakir, sakir" [close!] making the rounds, reaching the end of the street, going back, one more round, and that's it, everything would be closed, not a living soul in sight. On a crowded street, with the skills the IDF has today, ten minutes.

*

I was ashamed of myself the day I realized that I simply enjoy the feeling of power. I don't believe in it: I think this is not the way to do anything to anyone, surely not to someone who has done nothing to you, but you can't help but enjoy it. People do what you tell them. You know it's because you carry a weapon. Knowing that if you didn't have it, and if your fellow soldiers weren't beside you, they would jump on you, beat the shit out of you, and stab you to death—you begin to enjoy it. Not merely enjoy it, you need it. And then, when someone suddenly says "No" to you, what do you mean no? Where do you draw the chutzpah from, to say no to me? Forget for a moment that I actually think that all those Jews are mad, and I actually want peace and believe we should leave the territories, how dare you say no to me? I am the Law! I am the Law here! And then you sort of begin to understand that it makes you feel good. I remember a very specific situation: I was at a checkpoint, a temporary one, a so-called strangulation checkpoint, it was a very small checkpoint, very intimate, four soldiers, no commanding officer, no protection worthy of the name, a true moonlighting job, blocking the entrance to a village. From one side a line of cars wanting to get out, and from the other side a line of cars wanting to pass, a huge line, and suddenly you have a mighty force at the tip of your fingers, as if playing a computer game. I stand there like this, pointing at someone, gesturing to you to do this or that, and you do this or that, the car starts, moves toward me, halts beside me. The next car follows, you signal, it stops. You start playing with them, like a computer game. You come here, you go there, like this. You barely move, you make them obey the tip of your finger. It's a mighty feeling. It's something you don't experience elsewhere. You know it's because you have a weapon, you know it's because you are a soldier, you know all this, but its addictive. When I realized this... I checked in with myself to see what had happened to me. That's it. And it was a big bubble that burst. I thought I was immune, that is, how can someone like me, a thinking, articulate, ethical, moral man—things I can attest to about myself without needing anyone else to validate for me. I thought of myself as such. Suddenly, I notice that I'm getting addicted to controlling people.

*

I want to talk about an incident that took place during a funeral at the Abu Sneina cemetery; at the time, the operations command center was composed of… and… We went to the funeral before it started, and arrived at the cemetery, and there were dozens of people, even more, I think, maybe a hundred mourners, and it really was before the funeral got started. The officer, he was the... approached the funeral and wanted to disperse it. As I see it, a funeral is a very... the actual burying of someone who has died is something that must be done... it is the most humanitarian thing possible, it is beyond question. When approaching the mourners and trying to disperse the funeral, he had, I was near him, a look of hatred in his eyes as he approached the mourners… who only wanted to bury their loved one, and came to disperse them with hatred and shouts and gun threats and turned his weapon against the mourners and the people near him, and after realizing that they were determined to bury their loved one, he insisted on taking advantage of every measure at his disposal... he even cursed, cocked his weapon, and approached an eighty-year-old man who could hardly move and pointed his gun at his face, and there were really more than a hundred people who watched this scene of an officer dispersing with such hatred. And through this hatred and insistence on dispersing a funeral, I could really see that he didn't consider them equal human beings. I'm still mad at myself for not saying anything. As in other incidents, I simply lowered my eyes and didn't know what to do with myself. I want to add one small detail that puts it all in a different perspective, the unbearable lightness of these things that happen, it was during the Hudna, and in the end it turned out that they had permission to hold this funeral. It was the hardest thing to find out later that they actually had a permit from the regiment, and all he had to do was ask the operations center what he should do, in order to understand that it wasn't necessary.

*

It is, in a way, a very good feeling because you can do whatever you want, you're the master of your actions, tell them what to do and they'll do it because they're afraid. And here enter the discretion and maturity of the soldiers which, are not always to be found... a lot of disasters happen here, because the moment you give an eighteen-year-old such power he can do horrible things, he may do… normal… things, I can't say good things… In principle, you shouldn't let people pass. People will beg you because you have a weapon, people know that you are actually their gateway to a certain place, and they have to convince you, if they want to get there. I, personally, made a special effort, precisely because I have a uniform and a weapon, to handle each and every case with logic; I gave the weapon and uniform a chance to prove that there is... ah... I don't know how to put it. That there are soldiers in the IDF... you know, there is hatred and there is... if soldiers don't behave like human beings there, then... Listen, Arabs see the State of Israel and the Jews they know, that is, the soldiers and the settlers. They don't know people from Tel Aviv or Kibbutzniks.

*

Concerning the IDF, the ease in which you actually do whatever you want to do unsupervised, that is, enter people's homes, conduct random searches. Every officer, every commander can decide now I'm entering a home, ordering the family out, ransacking the house... In fact, I think that in Hebron, I was disturbed and frightened most of all by the unregulated and uncontrolled power, and the things it made people do. On one occasion we were told: "Peace and quiet is not necessarily good, and if there isn't mayhem, we'll create it." To demonstrate power, to demonstrate that we are everywhere. A soldier like me felt embarrassed in situations in which I was confronted with adults, old people. There are things, I believe, that an army shouldn't do, like close schools; simply enter a school and: no school today. Without asking too many questions. That's it, in a nutshell.

*

At a certain stage, it was decided that for the soldiers to fulfill their duty and really check the Palestinians who pass there, they should check their ID cards, and so my company commander initiated a quota of twenty ID cards per guard duty, not at night, of course. Twenty IDs per guard duty. He also ordered, and this is the attempt to be enlightened: that a person who waits more than twenty minutes, a half an hour, should be released. After all, as I understood it, the people who are summoned to the police station are not terrorists or anything like that, but most probably collaborators. I suppose if they were terrorists, no one would let them walk from there to the police station. In any case, at a certain stage, the most exciting thing in the company was to compete who could check as many IDs as possible in a given guard duty. And what happened next was that in one case a commander and a soldier decided to reach the maximum , to break the quota, and check as many IDs as possible, and simply started taking groups of three, brought them over, and made them stand on the side while they checked their IDs over the radio. After adding other groups of three... the number swelled to seven, eight, nine people who were standing there within a space of one by two meters more or less, standing and waiting while their IDs were being checked over the radio. Now, first of all, operationally speaking this is dumb, and this was the first thing that came to mind. My company commander came and yelled at them, yelled because operationally speaking it was a dumb thing to do, when nine people are guarded by two people, not only is it unwise, its dangerous. The thing that I managed to understand only later, honestly because that place makes you emotionally detached and you aren't really able to figure out what goes on there... I understood how inhumane it was. How evil it is to do this to people. To take them and stick them on top of each other; to make them stand like this for twenty minutes, and not because of some security necessity, but because the soldiers acted out of inertia and found an interesting way to pass their guard duty.

*

There is this thing among the guys... I don't want to define them, but the guys who believe that it's not right to be in the territories, and nevertheless serve in the territories. There is a tendency to say, "I didn't do these things, and I don't do the bad things you hear about on the news or in stories about officer courses or other places." And many guys pat themselves on the back, saying, "Here here, look they're nice to us, they smile at us, offer us coffee." And whenever I'd hear this it drove me crazy. The question is: who is nice to us, who offers us coffee? The Arabs. The Jews are always nice, of course, unless it conflicts with their interests. But on a daily basis they're nice, and you expect the Arabs to be hostile... and you do what you do, climb up on a family's roof, and then the owner of the house brings you oranges and coffee. And you start feeling okay with it... You look the man in the eyes and say to yourself, "I can tell whether he's afraid of me or likes me." This is bullshit. He may even like you at this point, because you knocked on his door politely and didn't break it down. But ultimately, if I were them, it wouldn't matter to me if they told me: get inside your house please or get inside your house with a gun pointed in my face. What difference does it make? You don't let me walk around in the streets, you don't let me work, you don't let me live or breathe, what difference does it make whether it is done politely or by force? What difference does it make if you open the door or break it down, in any case you enter the house... It is self-evident to you. Moreover, a month before you arrived, a month after you'll leave, it's all the same. You were the moral soldier, the enlightened soldier, You behaved nicely and properly with each and every human being? Not only toward Arabs, toward every human being. You were decent. After you, someone less decent will come along.

*

About shooting? You hear a shot, someone, a Palestinian probably, a terrorist, shot at a certain post, or maybe not, I don't know. There's simply a shot... from the other side, the Palestinian side. And gradually, at first it was more focused and they didn't allow us to shoot back just like that, and when it slowly turned routine, this whole business, it simply became like... A shot is fired from their side, a barrage follows. We were in the Jewish neighborhood, and Abu Sneina hill was in front of us. Simply shooting at the hill. There was the... post, there were... all sorts of machine-guns, all sorts of mortars, all these things, a sniper. It was a permanent post, and it was from there that we shot the most. Each time there was a barrage, we tried to aim at certain buildings, and sometimes we fired with no specific targets. On the whole it was like this: one shot from their side, a bombardment from ours.

*

The crazy thing is that you stand there, an IDF soldier, okay? You've got a machine gun and it's loaded and the safety catch is off. So what, are you an idiot? How dare you not listen to me? I can shoot you at any given moment. I can split your head open with the butt of my gun and chances are my commander will give me a pat on the back and say: "That's showing them. Finally you got it right." Where do you get the nerve? How come you don't understand? How come you don't see the total control I have over you? Like, it's crazy! I'm just a kid. I was born yesterday. I derive my power from my uniform and my machine gun, its what gives me the right to decide everything. And I do what I'm told to. That's the power I have and I use it. I can be the most enlightened and considerate person in the world but when I say: "mamnu` tajawul, ruh `al beit" [there's a curfew, go home] there is a period and four exclamation marks at the end of that sentence. It's non-negotiable. I don't care if I'm 18 or 17 or 21. I'm a soldier. I've got a gun and I'm from the IDF. I've got orders, and they better follow them. They'd better follow the orders I give them. I give the orders here. In fact, they're civilians unrelated to me, and I'm giving them orders all the time… and they'll follow them whether they like it or not. And if they don't like it, if they make trouble, then I'll force them to follow them. Why? Good question. A very good question. I really don't know… just because. Because it's shit. That's what it is.

*

This is the most revolting sentence that, for me at least, has the most negative connotations in the world, and you'll hear almost every soldier speak: "I'm a soldier and I'm just following orders."

*

In a patrol in Abu Sneina a commanding officer and three soldiers, patrolling the area. We make a check post. Its a station where you stop cars and check 'em out. We stop a guy whom we know, who always hangs around, doesn't make trouble… and no, personally, I never had a run-in with him, in short, a guy who looks all right, it happens. Connections are made, even if we don't speak the same language and even if it's hard to explain. The commander stops him, the guy with the car, two soldiers on one side. "You cover the front. You cover the back." So I cover the front. The commander goes to him: "Do you know the commercials for Itong? "Go on, get going." "Get out your jack." The guy just stands there and stares. He doesn't understand what they want from him. So the commander yells at him that he should get out his jack and begin to take the wheels off. I'm standing near a stone wall and the guy comes over and takes a stone to put under the car, and then another stone. At that point, the commander comes over to me and says: "Does it look humane to you?" He has this horrible grin on his face. It's awful. I can't do anything. I don't have enough air to say anything. I take my helmet and fall on the stone wall, still covering from the front, and I cry. There's nothing I can do.

*

It was in the middle of an operation in Jabal Johar, actually in all of Hebron but specifically in Jabal Johar, where my company took position. As part of the house to house searches, there were lots of Border Police in the street. One of them overhears some guy insulting a sergeant from my unit. So they came and said, "No problem," took the Palestinian and brought him back about 20 minutes later. He's trembling in fear. They tell him, "Okay, now start singing 'Carnival in the Nahal' [name of an army unit]."

Q: How did you feel then?

I didn't like it. It looked like everybody there thought it was funny, so okay, I just sat there and kept quiet. I won't start fighting with my comrades."

Q: Why did you keep quiet?

I don't know. Maybe it wasn't important enough for me to say anything… I don't know. You just take a deep breath and keep doing what you're doing. It's the duty with which I've been entrusted. Right now I'm just a little cog in the wheel. I do my job and live from one furlough to the next, until my service is over. That's how it was all the time.

*

The great thing about Hebron, the thing that gets to you more than anything else, is the total indifference it instills in you. It's hard to describe the kind of enormous sea of indifference you're swimming in while you're there. It's possible to explain a little, through little anecdotes, but it's not enough to make it really clear. One story is about a little kid, a boy of about six, who passed by me at my post. We were at… He said to me: "Soldier, listen, don't get annoyed, don't try and stop me, I'm going out to kill some Arabs." I look at the kid and don't quite understand exactly what I'm supposed to do. So he says: "First, I'm going to buy a popsicle at Gotnik's"—that's their grocery store, "then I'm going to kill some Arabs." I had nothing to say to him. Nothing. I went completely blank. And that's not such a simple thing… that a city, that such an experience can turn someone who was an educator, a counselor, who believed in education, who believed in talking to people, even if their opinions were different. But I had nothing to say to a kid like that. There's nothing to say to him.

*

If I'm standing at a checkpoint that prevents people from going somewhere, somewhere it's obvious they need to get to, like from the grocery store to their house, and they can't get there because I'm standing in their way, it really doesn't matter how polite I am. I don't have to behave cruelly for it to be unjust. I can be the most courteous person in the world and still be unfair. Because from their point of view, it makes no difference if I'm a nice guy. I still don't let them go home. What difference does it make if I try to be nice? Or humiliate them? The very existence of the checkpoint is humiliating. As long as I'm doing my duty according to the regulations, something completely legal, I'm doing something that is inflicting pain on people, harming them unnecessarily. I guard, or enable the existence of, 500 Jewish settlers at the expense of 15,000 people under direct occupation in the H2 area and another 140,000-160,000 in the surrounding areas of Hebron. It makes no difference whatsoever how pleasant I am to them or how pleasant my company commander is, it simply… won't make it any better. I will still be their enemy. There will still be a conflict between us. And sometimes, the fact that I may be nice to them will only cause me trouble because then they'll have someone to argue with, someone to turn to. But there is nothing I can tell them. You can't go through the checkpoint because you can't, and that's it!! It's an order, based on security considerations. As long as you want to protect these 500 people, that's what you have to do. As long as you want to keep these folks in Hebron alive and enable them to go about their existence in a reasonable manner, you have to destroy the reasonable existence of all the rest. There's no alternative. For the most part, these are real security considerations. They're not imaginary. If you want to protect them from being shot at from above, you have to occupy all the hills around them. There are people living on those hills. They have to be subdued, they have to be detained, they have to be hurt at times. But as long as the government has decided that the settlement in Hebron will remain in tact, even without undue cruelty, the cruelty is there, and it doesn't matter whether or not we act nice.

*

Q: When you hear the word Hebron, what's the first thing that pops into your head? What connotations does the word have for you?
I don't want to go there… I don't want to be there… I've really got nothing to do there. It's a place I'll never go near again, it seems to me. I don't want to remember where I stood or where I didn't stand, where I was, in what post or on what corner I was positioned. And this is what happened here… No… No, I don't want any of it, I don't want to remember anything…

*

In one of our conversations with the Border Police in Hebron, two of them were bragging about how much they liked to take a Palestinian whom they caught throwing stones or just throwing a word at them, or looking at them the wrong way. They'd put him into an armored jeep and then hit him with the spark-mufflers of their weapons in the chest or the stomach or the neck. Then they'd bet how fast they could take the turn in the road where they'd throw him out of the armored jeep. If you ask me, then yes, it really bothered me, but what could I do about it?
Q: You know that the Border Police did this to someone afterwards and he was killed. They murdered someone.
That's very sad. And, so?
Q: Did you recognize any of the murderers, the guys who are standing trial now?
No. I didn't recognize anyone. I don't know them. I just heard 'em talking.

*

I can't remember exactly at what stage of the assignment it was…. I only remember that on a certain Friday we went on patrol. On patrol… that is walking towards… in… Square. We crossed Shlomo Square twice. The second time was a half an hour later. A half an hour after the first time, we discovered a large metal object lying there. Now, you have to understand Fridays in Hebron have an atmosphere that you won't find anywhere else, not in any Israeli settlement, or anywhere else. You really feel that here, on the Sabbath, someone could kill you at any moment. A Sabbath of tension. Every Sabbath I spent there shortened my life by a year or two. The tension is unbearable. And that's how it was, Sabbath after Sabbath. I don't remember what… we saw this object there, and our commander didn't quite know what to do. He contacted the company commander over the radio and the company commander sounded tense. The patrol commander wanted to call in the bomb squad or something like that, to remove this thing. You can't know what it is. Its clearly been put there in our honor, but its not clear whether its just laying there, or whether someone's watching to see what we'll do. Confusion. And the company commander was nervous over the radio. I didn't have a radio, I could hear him yelling through my commander's headpiece. Okay, we went up toward Abu Sneina, past the concrete blocks that once marked the boundary between what was then the Israeli-controlled areas of Hebron and the Palestinian areas, and there we saw what looked like an explosive device... We took some guy with us… Our commander stopped somebody and made him go down there, you could see that this man was totally confused. The commander told him to move the object, to lift it up from where it was lying. I remember the whole thing took a minute, maybe even less. The man went over there. I remember his face was trembling, he seemed unsure whether or not he really should do it. And we were standing there, four soldiers with the… four soldiers standing around at a safe distance. When this man went up to the object and began to move it, he was really, really scared. After it was all over and he was allowed back, after we let him go on his way, only then did I fully realize what we had done. Now, it was half a minute… a half-minute like any other half-minute on patrol in Hebron. So routine, nothing out of the ordinary. And I remember that afterwards me and… said to ourselves we have to go and do something about it, go to the regiment commander perhaps, how is it that we didn't refuse to carry-out orders and so on… and this and that… But somehow it just seemed to fade away.

*

Every day a six-man unit would cross over the roofs and enter a house. First they'd search the entrances and exits, order the entire family into a single room and get them to talk: ID cards, profession, begin to interrogate them. It also serves one of the army's aims—to make its presence felt. I remember many of the interrogations, but I recall one in particular where we asked… we spoke with an older man who, unlike many of the others who say things like, "We've got no problem with Israel," "We're neither Fatah nor Hamas"… "All we really want is peace so we can work"… Usually when they say things like that you can see that they're just looking at you. They're looking at your weapon. They're all scared, so it's only natural that they act so defeated. But this man was not obsequious, and he spoke the truth: that his life was a living hell, and that he wanted us to get out already. He said that we are to blame for this entire situation, and all he wanted was for us to get out. I think someone asked him why he hated us, why he supports the opposition fronts. Why he supports killings. I don't agree with the man's opinions, but he told the soldier that he had entered his home just like that, and was humiliating him, undermining his dignity. And I looked at this man and said to myself: wait a minute, here is this man in his own home, and it made me think of my own family home, surrounded by a garden, and greenery, a kind of fortress surrounded by a hedge of lantana and hibiscus, and I thought what if someone were to burst into our house like that, entering through an upstairs window, and force my parents and my younger brother into one of the rooms and start interrogating us, questioning us, searching the entrances and exits, and treating us so patronizingly… If I had not received the kind of education I did, I think I would certainly support even … That is to say, this going into people's houses, how can you relate to it as something separate? These are not people of a different kind. The men even physically look like my grandfather. … An elderly man, or an old man who has to beg you at the checkpoint to allow him to pass, who shows you an X-Ray and you have no idea why he's showing it to you, or the man who tells you that his brother in Bab al-Zawia is ill with asthma or some other disease and that he's has to pay him a visit. That same person could be your own father, for whom you have the greatest respect, but do we really understand what respect is…

Its hard to say what I felt at that moment. On the one hand, I was stationed there, I didn't choose to be there. On the other hand, I wanted to get the hell out of there. As an individual who considers himself a nice guy, a moral kind of guy... I said to myself, damn I'm really doing something here that I don't believe in. I don't believe in it 100%, and I'm putting myself in a position where someone wants to kill me because of it. The question is, where am I? Do I have no choice in the matter? In other words, should I refuse? Is refusal the answer? So there I was torn by the dilemma, pondering. I had lots of time eight by eight [eight hours on-duty eight hours off-duty] to think about it. The point is that I was faced with a crazy dilemma where I was torn between personal freedom and personal choice. Here lies the contradiction between the military, which is undemocratic and the state, which is supposed to be democratic. When you see that you are doing things which in your own home could not possibly happen and must never be allowed to happen, this is where you cross a certain line. Okay, so here you're in a different state. That is to say, everything you have known until now, all the rules by which you and your own family conduct your lives, all that does not seem to count here.

*

Be it during the day or at night, whenever I feel like it, we choose a house on the map, according to the geographic position of our unit at the time. We feel like it, that's the one we choose, we go on in. "Jaysh, jaysh… iftah al bab" [army, army, open the door] and they open the door. We move all the men into one room, all the women into another, and place them under guard. The rest of the unit does whatever they please, except destroy equipment—it goes without saying—no helping yourself to anything, and causing as little harm to the people as possible, as little physical damage as possible.

If I try to imagine the reverse situation: if they had entered my home—not a police force with a warrant, but a unit of soldiers, if they had burst into my home, shoved my mother and little sister into my bedroom, and forced my father and my younger brother and me into the living room, pointing their guns at us, laughing, smiling, and we didn't always understand what the soldiers were saying while they emptied the drawers and searched through my things. Oops it fell, broken... all kinds of photos, of my grandmother and grandfather... all kinds of sentimental things that you wouldn't want anyone else to see, wouldn't want them infringing on your privacy, your home is your place.

There is no justification for this, it definitely should not be happening. If there is a suspicion that a terrorist has entered a house, okay, so be it. But just to enter a home, any home: here I've chosen one, look what fun, there's a number on it in Arabic numerals that I can't even read. I felt like going in there. We go in, we check it out, we cause a bit of injustice, we've certainly asserted our military presence… and then we move on.

*

So I was on patrol one day, it was the morning shift, and there was no curfew that day, which means we have less work, you don't have to go and close shops and stuff… And then at some point during our shift they told us that there was a curfew, suddenly, and that means we have to go into the Small Shalala [street] and into HaShoter Square and shut down all the shops and that's a nightmare. So we started doing it, we began from the Small Shalala, that's how we advanced, and shops are starting to… we shout "curfew" and "mamnu` tajawul," [there's a curfew] and so on, and the shops start closing slowly. And then we get to the square and we are surrounded by scores of people and lots of commerce... you know, business is booming. So we get there and people start telling us, that's impossible, they told us there's no curfew, and, like, there's nothing I can tell them, I tell them, "There is a curfew. Get lost." And they start shouting at me… and at some point things there… they weren't really paying too much attention to us and we decided… we threw a stun grenade. So there was mayhem and we started, like…people started, like, running. The operations commander arrived and he started yelling curfew and stuff… and that's it, we started… We took tons of ID cards from people and we detained them in HaShoter Square, we made a mess there to impose the curfew, and then an operations commander came and went on with imposing the curfew, with the turmoil. And then we left, we returned to the Shoter post, and then about a half an hour later they announce that there's no curfew. I felt like an idiot, you know, scores of people coming to plead with me, ask me, beg me, that they cannot live like this, and they try to talk to you immediately, and you've got nothing to say to them. And a half an hour later they tell you there's no curfew. Anyway, life there feels as if, you know, there's no life there, every other minute someone comes and pushes them this way and that, whichever way he wants.

*

As soon as they don't know where you are, and they just suspect something is up and they don't know what it is, that's even scarier, that's why at night you need to fire as many grenades into the air as possible. Or else make a lot of noise or yell in Arabic in the middle of the night. That's why there were times when we actually got up in the middle of the night, in some house that we captured, in the East Casaba, we took some man's house, and there were actually some nights when we got up at 2am, went out, took loads of grenades, different types of grenades that fit onto your weapon and make a terrible noise, and moved between the houses and shot and screamed, and made awful noises and all just to frighten the enemy… and that's it. I don't know whether we made a few kids cry in the middle of the night or whether it really had some sort of psychological effect on someone who meant to attack us.

*

Well. This was following… There was a call-up one night, meaning we went in with two APCs [Armored Personnel Carriers], and we started driving towards Abu Sneina, this was after there had been too much shooting in town, meaning, the Arabs started shooting in the direction of the Jewish settlement and we fired back. Well, sometimes we used to go in there to demonstrate, when the shooting would get out of hand, we would simply go in, we'd go with the APCs pay a visit to Abu Sneina just to make our presence felt, do all sorts of things, shoot at some houses, just to intimidate them, so… I don't know… just so they wouldn't try again. Anyhow, that night we went with two APCs, one of them belonging to the platoon commander, that's the one I was in, and another one following us, and what we did, simply, in order to deter them, we simply moved through Abu Sneina with two APCs and all we did was shoot, shoot…. We were shooting, we stopped by a house, we moved through a street, and we fired at houses, not at windows, we fired at all kinds of houses. And I remember I was like a slightly better shot, my task was to shatter streetlights. And I remember that I fired at car windshields, and one of the soldiers who was with me fired a rifle with a grenade launcher right into a shop, simply into a Palestinian shop, to blow up the shop. And all of this, for no good reason, I mean, deterrence and not one of us asked himself what he was doing in order to, actually, you know, by way of a response. I think… I remember myself that night, I really meant it when I said that it was me who fired at the streetlights, me who fired at the cars, because it was me, I mean, among all those soldiers, I was shooting. And I remember that not one of us, that night… all of us were happy that we got the opportunity to shoot at streetlights and cars, because there's nothing so cool. Nothing like hearing a streetlight blow to bits after you've taken aim at it. And you know, I remember us doing it with such determination and with such a smile, and, I don't know, I consider myself someone who actually did think of what he was doing during his army service, and tried to avoid doing such things, and, like, I remember where this reality managed to… how it managed to sweep me into doing those things without any… without conscience, without any thought, maybe, yes, afterwards, but what good is that. Simply with a shit-eating grin on my face.

*

There's a very clear and powerful connection between how much time you serve in the territories and how fucked in the head you get. If someone is in the territories half a year, he's a beginner, they don't allow him into the interesting places, he does guard-duty, he's not the one to… all he does is just grow more and more bitter, angry. The more shit he eats, from the Jews and the Arabs and the army and the state, they call that numbness but I don't… maybe it's a heightening of the senses, like getting drunk… because serving in the territories isn't about numbness, it's a "high," a sort of negative high: you're always tired, you're always hungry, you always have to go to the bathroom, you're always scared to die, you're always eager to catch that terrorist. It's a life without rest. Even when you sleep, you don't sleep well. I don't remember even once sleeping well in Hebron. At home I'd arrive, fall asleep, get up—wow, that was some sleep! It doesn't need to be a long sleep. It's simply an experience that no human being should have. It fucks with your head. It's the experience of a hunted animal, a hunting animal, of an animal, whatever…

*

I remember an incident when there was shooting, I'm not sure whether the shooting was from Abu Sneina toward the Jewish neighborhood, or from the Jewish neighborhood toward Abu Sneina , maybe it was an exchange of fire, I don't know exactly who was shooting at who. It was early evening … we got an order over the radio… that from now on the city is a to be a ghost town. Meaning everybody is to get in their houses, and we start firing at "locations," which are points from which shots were fired at one time, or are suspect and could be used as firing points. I remember that we emptied magazines all night long, tons of ammunition, and I remember that I personally fired on an empty school, or empty windows or streetlights, just as a deterrent, just to instill fear. It was like target practice, but with real targets. And this horrified me, because… it wasn't justified, the quantity. If they want to deter, I think it was a bit more than a deterrent, it was grossly exaggerated.

*

I had a friend who carried a weapon equipped with a grenade launcher, and everybody with a launcher got ammunition for dispersing demonstrations. [And he] got lots of tear gas grenades, and he really liked to fire this gas, so he would also steal them from other guys who were equipped with gas grenade launchers, and he would fire them whenever he came on duty and before he went off. He would simply fire on groups of people who were just standing around and talking, to see them running and coughing, he got a kick out of it.
Q: How did the guys in his unit react to that?
I don't know, even the ones who were bothered by it didn't lay into him about it or… I don't know, everybody just took it as normal.

*

I remember a post called… and it was manned by the Sahlav company [military police unit], and it was a post in the middle of the street. There really was a pharmacy there, that's why they called it The Pharmacy, and they would simply stand there and stop people, which was legitimate, check their papers and stuff. And somehow, in the evening and at night, there was always mayhem. So, from talking to soldiers: how come there's always trouble at your post, and word gets around, a rumor circulated, one of their soldiers told me that one day they were bored and wanted some action, so they backed up a few meters inside to where they couldn't be seen, and he goes: "We slammed two or three bullets into the concrete blocks of the post, to leave marks, we reported that we were being fired at, and we started to shoot. We started throwing stun grenades and all kinds of shit." They were shooting there for no reason.

*

The thing that I remember that affected me emotionally the most from my time in Hebron, was when we had just arrived there. I was on guard at our post, when suddenly, from one of the small streets, a settler girl shows up and shouts at me very urgently: "Soldier, soldier, come quickly, there's an Arab here who's attacking a girl." I get very alarmed and advance with my weapon cocked. The scene that unfolds is of an Arab with his two children, he's trying to protect them from another settler girl who's throwing stones at them. I blew my fuse and starting screaming at her: "What are you doing, what's going on here," and I'm torn between the girl who's throwing stones and screaming that he's an Arab and he should be killed, and that they shouldn't be here, and the father, poor guy, who sort of says with his helpless eyes, "We're used to it, we've been here a long time now, it's alright."

*

Eight hours at the… post, it's hard, real hard, no fun. I was with… and myself, and the three of us stood at the post. It was a Saturday when the company commander wasn't there, so we felt less constrained and more free, we knew they wouldn't inspect our balls. Our deputy company commander was there that Saturday, and we got really, really bored, and started talking, trading war stories, who had already thrown a stun grenade, and who hadn't, who used tear gas, who shot, who hadn't shot, things like that, and we discovered that… had never thrown a stun grenade. So we decided to blow-up an incident, so as to throw a stun grenade. We threw a glass so it would break and shatter, reported that an empty bottle was thrown at us, and asked permission to throw a stun grenade. The operations command showed up, looked at the area, and said there was no need to use a stun grenade, they checked the area where we reported that the kids were and, of course, the kids weren't there. The operations command moved on, and we were pissed off that we hadn't thrown a stun grenade because we were still bored and nothing happened except that the operations command came by and helped us pass five more minutes of our shift, and we still had something like four-and-a half hours to go, only half our shift had passed, and we decided that we wanted to throw that grenade, because we were really bored and wanted to do something. We started over, and this time we didn't ask permission to throw a grenade,… just threw it. It's not that I put the blame on him, we were all there, and I gave him the grenade and explained to him how to throw a stun grenade, and that's it, he threw the stun grenade towards a group of children that were far away, but they were frightened and ran away.

*

Blowing up a house in the Casaba where two terrorists were staying, we entered the Casaba that night, took families out of the houses, and moved them away. At a certain stage it was decided that from one point onward some people could go back home, to a certain building. Four people went in; still outside were a three year old kid and his older brother, aged seven or eight or maybe even ten. It got tense, soldiers were shouting that the kids should get in the house, we were about to begin, or something like that. A senior officer showed up, stood next to me and started shouting at the two kids to get in the house. The mother of the little kid came out and yelled at him to get in quickly, he snapped out of it and ran in, his big brother was a bit… sort of froze on the spot, he didn't understand. At a certain point the senior officer stood there and started screaming: "kid, go home, get into the house.” The kid didn't respond, still frozen on the spot. The officer raised his weapon, held it savagely, turned on the laser and started… pointing the light on the kids face, on his body, all over, screaming "get in, get in." Some of the neighbors shook the child and pushed him in the direction of the entrance, and on his way, just before he went in, he passed between me and the senior officer, and the officer just… wham! Slapped him from behind, a serious blow from the hand of a senior officer, and that's it, the kid sort of crawled in, and his mother closed the door. The same senior officer lit a cigar, and then we heard the explosion.

*

I personally, sort of had this inner process, which made me kind of confront myself. I found myself in situations that I didn't know how to cope with. It had me checking myself all time to see how I held on to my values, how low I could go, because once it becomes a routine, you reach a situation where you can't control it, it's your routine, it's your day-to-day, you just get orders and you carry them out without giving them a second thought, it's like, you're at your post and you say to yourself, "Shit, today I don't mind getting killed, like, today I… don't mind getting killed, it's my duty to be here and that's what I'll do."
Q: Simply burns into your consciousness…
Yes, exactly, you just become like a robot, I don't know how to explain it. There's a stage where… either routine or fatigue when you no longer have the strength to be patient, you have no strength to… Someone comes and throws a remark which he shouldn't like, "What do you want from me?" which is legitimate in his opinion, and even in my opinion, that person lives there, you know, it not… It's a street where they're allowed to pass, and a soldier comes and stops him and checks him and searches him and his kids are there and his family is there, and its humiliating for him, and there's a stage when you just don't care anymore, old man, not old man, you check them all…

*

If there was any shooting or any chance of anything happening then, with the permission of the company commanders or one of the platoon commanders, we would get into an APC [Armored Personnel Carrier] and simply go, one or two APCs, towards Abu Sneina, the goal was deterrence. In my opinion, there was no real potential there for capturing someone or anything like that. We'd go up to Abu Sneina with coverage, to all kinds of spots in the area. What I remember from those incursions into Abu Sneina … deterrent firing at cars, alleyways, shops, without any particular target. Go in, make a lot of noise, get out. I think we were part of a system, and our judiciousness didn't work very well. It worked very well when it came to basic humanity towards humans, I think, especially in our company, but not when it came to the little things, at least the things that are little to us, but apparently aren't so little. Whether it's going in and maybe escaping our daily routine, and instead of doing eight-by-eights [eight hours on-duty eight hours off-duty] maybe getting a little action, going up, shooting a little. There was no concept behind it, as I see it, that we were actually going up there to make an arrest or anything.

*

The thing about these stories is that they're a matter of daily routine, and there are lots more like them. And these stories were an integral part of my daily routine over a six month period of active assignment which was total, your whole life. It's eight-by-eight. No day and night. It's constant. And even when you're sleeping, it's very likely they'll call you up, and you really live these events. I knew that as a soldier there was no… I didn't agree with all these things. It really hurt me inside. There were many incidents that hurt even more than these. And I told myself that… my justification for being there was that afterwards I would take action to change it. The most serious problem meanwhile is that as a soldier who has not been there for a month now, I notice about myself that while two months ago that was all I thought about and I was burning up inside, that is, I really wanted to take action, I couldn't live in that situation. It's not that I was at my house surrounded by grass and neighborhoods with French streetlights and a car waiting outside… I was living in poverty, in my daily life… where people dig through the garbage, and there are mice everywhere, and rats, and it really bothered me. And now, much as I said it would go on burning inside me, I notice that gradually I'm starting to forget about it. And if at first I couldn't enjoy a show calmly, or be with a girl, I couldn't relax because I kept saying, just a minute, there's someone in the… post now, or someone needs to do eight hours of duty now and he has someone sick trying to get out of the Casaba to an ambulance and he has to detain him for an hour. So now I notice that it feels less urgent to me, like the rest of the people in the country, who, after all, don't live this reality, and it's really easy for them not to think about it and to detach themselves, but the problem is still there.

*

There was another house called… that overlooks the entrance to Abu Sneina, at the time there was no IDF unit sitting inside Abu Sneina, today there is, so what the company commanders and two companies did was to take… two reinforced APCs once every week or so and go up there in a kind of armored caravan… to Abu Sneina. There's a route that's more or less… that's the entrance to it, and then you go up to Abu Sneina and come down again to Gross Square. It was kind of like a violent patrol. I mean, they'd go in two reinforced APCs taking along... the APC equipment… they'd also take a grenadist, who launched detonated grenades, and that's it. They'd go out on a kind of violent patrol, to demonstrate our presence. One night I was in… in that house, we got a report that they were coming in, everyone jumped to their posts so we could cover them so they wouldn't get shot at from the rooftops or anything, because at the time there were a lot of armed men around… precision shooting, automatic weapon fire at IDF posts, at us. And then all of a sudden we heard an enormous explosion and everyone got scared, we thought something had happened, right away everybody looked into their sights, tried to see what was going on… and then one of the company commanders just said, "It's okay, it's okay, it's me. Somebody just parked their car here, so we launched a grenade at it. So he knows not to park here again." Or suddenly you'd hear laughing over the radio, again, another explosion, we hear, "Good, tomorrow morning he'll find his shop remodeled." All kinds of stuff like that, you know, to make the IDF presence felt.

*

One incident I remember from Hebron that I want to relay, from the Abu Sneina neighborhood, we were driving the armored jeep and there was a curfew just then…

During the curfew we ran into a line of cars, three-four cars all decorated, at dusk, and it was actually a wedding, a whole family going to a wedding. I was with the deputy company commander of the operations command in the jeep and as soon as he saw the wedding caravan, this glee: we're onto something good here. I don't know if glee is what I'd call it, but a sort of sense of come on, we can deal a good blow here, in terms of what he's going to do. We get down out of the jeep and of course stop the car, people get out of the cars, Palestinians, dressed in their finest clothes, you see the groom, you see the bride, the father… as soon as they get out you can see the panic on their faces that just like that the happiest day of their life… something can turn sour. They get out of the cars and an argument ensues with the deputy company commander. He won't let them go on, he wants to dismantle everything, to send them home, takes the car keys, and actually after they plead, the bride cries, the groom's father, everyone there is really begging, you can see on their faces how worried they are for this significant day in their lives, and on the other side you can see the deputy commander looking at them and not seeing human beings. Just like that. Because when you come and see a wedding that's going to start any minute, and it's for real, the most important day in a person's life, that he's going to get married, and everything's ready, you see them coming out with the baqlawas [pastries] in hand, and all the food, everything is ready, you see all of them dressed up, the kids, everything, and an entire family looking on this spectacle of an IDF officer taking their car keys and hanging them all out to dry there and canceling [the wedding], for me it was to see… how the IDF sees the Palestinian population.

*

When I served in Hebron, for the first time in my life I felt something different about being a Jew. I don't know why. I can't explain it, but I felt something a little different regarding what it is to be a Jew, the Tomb of the Patriarchs, the ancestral city, it did something to my soul on the one hand. That was my initial feeling there. At first I really felt there, I don't know if defending the state, but defending Jews who are part of the State of Israel, and a city where the controversy around it is, in my view, a little different from cities where there are Arabs, other cities, because it's the city of the forefathers, and there's the Tomb of the Patriarchs there and all that. But from day to day… the truth is, its not from day to day, it was there that I suddenly realized: I was standing at… along the worshippers route… route, and I was standing there with... It was a day when there was some terrorist attack. Suddenly, out of the blue, a group of about six Jewish women landed on us, with about six-seven girls, little girls, and simply started running around, started kicking stalls and turning them over, and we were just two people and we didn't know what to do and they started going wild and spitting on Arabs and spitting at elderly people. There was Mohammad who… didn't do a thing except just sit there, he was just there, he simply didn't do a thing, and they just came and kicked him and spit on him and yelled at him to go away and overturned stalls. I remember we came to the worst moment, when one of the women simply picked up a rock and shattered a window of two meters by two meters, of a barber shop that was there. And she just shattered its front window to bits. A man comes out, and I simply find myself on the one hand trying to take the rock away from her so that she won't throw it and shatter his window, and on the other hand defending her, so that they won't beat the shit out of her, and suddenly I find myself facing a Palestinian and telling him, "Watch out!" I look up, and see a

mountain of a man about two meters tall at least, and a 1.63 meter soldier in front of him and all he has to do is land a blow and knock me to the floor, but he won't do it, because I'm armed and he knows he'll really get it if he does that. So on the one hand you say to yourself fuck it, I'm supposed to guard the Jews that are here. On the other hand these Jews don't behave with the same morality or values I was raised on. I reached a point in Hebron where I didn't know who the enemy was anymore: whether it's the Jew whose going crazy and I need to protect the Arabs from him, or whether I need to protect the Jew from the Arabs who are supposedly attacking…
There are a few things that stayed with me. One, I think my definition of a Jew has changed a little. I used to think that anyone who defines himself as a Jew is a Jew, as far as I'm concerned. Today I'm not so sure. After I saw Jews that… I don't know if my definition of Jews even makes any difference with regard to the fact that… they're also human beings, but they don't act like… Jews who went through a holocaust, they themselves didn't go through a holocaust, but I'm sure that some of them are from families that survived the Holocaust. If they're capable of writing on the Arab's doors "Arabs Out" or "Death to the Arabs," and drawing a Star of David, which to me is like a swastika when they draw it like that, then somehow the term Jew has changed a little for me with regard to who's a Jew. That's one thing. Another thing that has stayed with me from Hebron? I think of myself as a little injured maybe, I don't know. Not physically injured. More emotionally injured.

*

I admit that Hebron is not divisible into periods, for me, its like one long line. As far as I was concerned, I wasn't sensitive enough to it at the time, to when curfews were imposed, when curfews were lifted. It only affected me when I would go on guard duty. All I knew was that before going on guard duty… I'd ask: is there a curfew? Is there no curfew? There's a curfew? Cool, I'll enforce it. No curfew? Cool, be on your way. Most of the time there was a curfew.

*

Once I was in... in Hebron, when from a gate near our post, that leads to the Casaba and from which it is forbidden to enter or exit, out came a man in his 50s or 60s with a few women and small children. I always think of him as the head of the family, without knowing whether the women with him are his wives, sisters, or what. He's the one heading this clan coming at you, and you walk up to him and say in Arabic: "Waqif, mamnu` tajawul, ruh `al beit" [Stop, there's a curfew, go home]. And then he starts to argue with you. They almost always argue. In short, go on, get the hell out of here, there's nothing you can do about it. I don't like doing this, but enough. Just go home. And you argue and argue, and he gets real bold, like he believes that he'll get through in the end. He's not trying to weasel his way through, he really believes that one way or another he's in the right. And that confuses you. You remember that actually you're in his favor, and you would like to let him pass, but you're not supposed to let him pass, and how dare he stand there in front of you proud and all… and the argument goes on and on. Finally the patrol shows up, and from an argument of two soldiers with ten people, it becomes an argument between ten soldiers and ten people, and an officer who, naturally, is less inclined to restrain

himself. In short, weapons are cocked, aimed with a hint, not straight at him, at his legs. Go on, “Get the hell out of here, enough talk!” And I was standing closest to him, about a meter or two from him. He was all dressed-up, wearing a suit and a kaffia, he looked really respectable. And I’m standing there with my weapon like this, close to the chest, trying to defend myself, protect myself. I don’t know, I was afraid that he was going to try something now. And really the atmosphere was charged, more than usual. Then he sticks out his chest, and both his fists are tightly closed. Then I… my finger moves to the safety catch, and then I see his eyes are filled with tears, and he says something in Arabic, turns around, and goes. And his clan follows him.
I’m not exactly sure why this particular incident is engraved in my memory out of all the times I told people to scram when there’s a curfew, but there was something so noble about him, and I felt like the scum of the earth. Like, what am I doing here?

*

That morning, a fairly big group arrived in Hebron, around 15 people or so, of Jews from France. They were all religious Jews, French Jews, they didn't really know Hebrew, and spoke half English, half Hebrew, and half French. They were in a good mood, really having a great time, and I spent my entire shift following this gang of Jews around and trying to keep them from destroying the town. In other words, this is what they were busy doing for hours. They just wandered around, picked up every stone they saw off the ground, and started throwing them in Arabs’ windows, and overturning whatever they came across. A gang of Jews from France simply came along, to the area we were responsible for, and did whatever they wanted. And there’s no horror story here… he didn’t catch some Arab and kill him or anything like that, but what bothered me about this story is that along came a gang of people from France, and I have no idea how in tune they are with what's going on here, and without… maybe someone told them that there’s a place in the world where you can just, I don't know… that a Jew can take all of his rage out on the Arab people, and simply do anything, do whatever he wants. To come to a Palestinian town, and do what ever he wants, and the soldiers will always be there to back him up. Because that was actually my job. I guess I could have tried to keep the rock from being thrown, something I can't do, of course. I couldn't run after them all the time, not successfully at least. But my real actual job was to protect them and make sure that nothing happened to them. And that’s how the job was also explained to us. Not to stop them. To try and stop them. But mostly to protect them.