

Haim Hazaz

THE SERMON
& OTHER STORIES

INTRODUCTION BY

Dan Miron

The Toby Press

Yudka didn't talk much. He never spoke in public, never argued at meetings or at conferences, rarely opened his mouth when anyone else was around. He was reputed to be a man of few words. And though he was not what he was reputed to be, his reputation grew on him, so that in the end he quite lost the knack of saying anything coherent out loud, no matter how trivial or important it was. Which was why his comrades in the Haganah were surprised when they heard that he proposed to address a certain committee whose existence was a secret to all but a chosen few—especially since the committee had been convened that day solely to hear him speak.

The committee members, all stout and stalwart men, sat in a single row at a green table on either side of their leader. They stared at Yudka curiously, as though waiting to witness some prodigious event—all of them, that is, except their leader, who looked coolly down at the table, whether distracted or indifferent, it was hard to say.

The Haganah leader said a few perfunctory words of introduction and then fell silent so abruptly that it almost seemed as though he had not spoken at all and were alone by himself in the room.

Yudka sat as stiff as a board, a petrified look on his face. He could not remember what he had meant to say or how he had planned to begin.

It was hard to believe how frightened the man was. This stonemason who could smash a rock with one blow, who was not afraid to encounter the enemy singlehandedly on night patrols, had completely lost his nerve before a gathering of his own friends.

After what seemed a very long pause, the Haganah leader declared again to the green cloth covering the table,

“Comrade Yudka has the floor.”

Yudka cringed and rose to his feet. Beads of sweat appeared on his forehead.

“You wished to make an announcement,” the Haganah leader reminded him, regarding him crookedly from the side. “Talk. We’re listening.”

Some of the committee members glanced down or to the side; others stared off into space.

Yudka mopped his brow with a hand and said in the soft drawl of a Jew from southern Russia, “I didn’t come here to give a speech. I just wanted to say something important...what I mean is, I really shouldn’t say anything at all...do you know what it’s like to have to stand up and speak when you shouldn’t?”

He looked at the men sitting at the table. An injured smile trembled on his lips.

“But I must!” He stared at the walls of the room and his face clouded over. “I don’t understand a thing. I’ve stopped understanding. I haven’t understood for years...”

“What don’t you understand?” asked the leader gently, like a judge who is used to all kinds in his court.

“Everything!” cried Yudka excitedly. “Everything! But that’s nonsense. Let’s not go into it now. What I want to know is: what are we doing here?”

The Haganah leader didn’t follow him. “Where?”

“Here! In this place. In Palestine. In general...”

“*You* don’t understand?” scoffed the leader, lifting his two hands uncomprehendingly. “I’m afraid *I* don’t understand...”

“That’s a different kind of misunderstanding,” answered Yudka. “You just say that to make fun of me.”

One of the committee members smiled broadly and drummed with his fingers on the table. Yudka could feel him snicker, but he stared at the floor and pretended not to see.

“Get to the point,” declared the leader. “Stop arguing and say what you have to say.”

Yudka roused himself. “I wish to announce,” he said in a low voice, “that I object to Jewish history...”

The committee members looked at each other in astonishment. The man who had smiled before, now burst into uncontrolled laughter.

“I don’t respect Jewish history!” said Yudka again, as though unable to advance any further. “Except that it’s not a question of respect. It’s a question of what I said before: I object to it...”

The same man laughed again and this time the others joined in.

Yudka turned to him.

“You’re laughing at me,” he said, lowering his voice still more until it assumed an almost melodramatic tone, “because you took my wife away from me...”

A catastrophic silence descended on the room. The man who had laughed half-rose to his feet, then fell limply back in his chair and nervously dropped his eyes.

The Haganah leader struck a gong four or five times. Then, too taken aback to know what else to do, he struck it three more times.

Yudka waited for the echo of it to cease. “I imagine that he’s that way because...well, if I were in his place I’d laugh every time I saw me also...not straight in my face, but like that...it’s simply a different way of doing it. I couldn’t help it. I wouldn’t dare not to...because he can’t simply do and say nothing...that would insult me even more...much more! To say nothing of trying to talk with me about literature, for example, or having me break down in front of him and cry. I can’t explain it any better, but it’s perfectly obvious. I’ve thought it over and that’s my conclusion, though it really doesn’t matter very much...”

There was absolute silence in this room.

At last the leader raised his brows and said with a brusque, irritable attempt at humor, "Comrade Yudka, I have to call you to order. If you have something to say, please say it quickly and stick to the point. If you want to lecture about history, try the university."

"But it is to the point, it is!" Yudka reassured him with a smile. "I wouldn't know where to begin without history. Believe me, I've thought a great deal about it—all through the nights that I've been out on patrol."

The leader shrugged and gestured unfathomingly with both hands. "Then talk!" he commanded bluntly.

For a moment, as though he were the sudden victim of bad luck, Yudka almost panicked once more, just as he had at the outset. "You already know," he began, coughing an uncertain apology in his throat, "that I object to Jewish history. Have a little patience with me and I'll explain why.... In the first place, I must say that we really don't have a history at all. That's a fact. And that's also...how shall I put it?...in a word, that's where the skeleton tumbles out of the closet. You see, we never made our own history, the Gentiles always made it for us. Just as they turned out the lights for us and lit the stove for us and milked the cow for us on the Sabbath, so they made history for us the way they wanted and we took it whether we liked it or not. But it wasn't ours, it wasn't ours at all! Because we didn't make it—because we would have made it differently—because we never wanted it to be the way it was. Others wanted it, and they forced it down our throats, but that's something else entirely...And in this sense—but in all other senses as well...mark my words: yes, in all other senses—but in all other senses as well...you mark my words: in all other senses—we do not have a history that we can call our own. Does anyone think that we do? That much is clear then. And that's why I object to it, why I refuse to accept it, and why it doesn't exist for me. More than that, I don't respect it. I know that's not the right word...but I don't respect it at all! Above all, I object to it. That is, I don't accept it..."

A burst of emotion made him fidget back and forth like an animal dodging the harness.

"I don't accept it!" he repeated with the obstinacy of a man whose mind is made up. "Not one tiny bit of it...not one! Do you believe me? Do you? You can't begin to imagine how much I object to it, how much I disapprove of it, and how much I...I don't respect it. Look here, think for a minute: what is it about? Well, answer me: *what?* Persecutions, massacres, martyrdoms and pogroms. And more persecutions, massacres, martyrdoms and pogroms. And more and more and more of them without end.... That's what it's about, that and nothing else. In the final analysis it...it...it bores one to tears, it simply does! Permit me to bring a small fact to your attention. Everyone knows that children love to read historical novels. Everywhere else, as you know, such books are full of heroes and conquerors and brave warriors and glorious adventures. In short, they're exciting. Whereas here, in Palestine, no child who isn't a little bookworm wants to read such stuff at all. I know what I'm talking about; I've looked into it. That is, they read novels, but ones about Gentiles, not about Jews. Why? You can be sure it's no accident. Jewish history is simply boring, it doesn't interest them. It has no adventures, no conquering heroes, no great rulers or potentates. All it has is a mob of beaten, groaning, weeping, begging Jews. And you'll agree with me that there's nothing interesting about that...nothing! If it were up to me, I wouldn't allow our children to be taught Jewish history at all. Why on earth should we teach them about the shameful life led by their ancestors? I'd simply say to them, 'Look, boys and girls, we don't have any history. We haven't had one since the day we were driven into exile. Class dismissed. You can go outside now and play...'

"But all this is only in passing. I'll come to the point. Only please don't misunderstand me. I know that there has been heroism in our resistance to persecution too. I've taken that into account, but...but I don't approve of such heroism. Don't laugh at me...I simply don't happen to care for it. Had it been up to me, it's not the heroism I would have picked at all. In the first place—I hope you follow me—it's a heroism that was imposed on us. And where there is no freedom of choice, everyone is a hero, and you simply act that way whether you want to or not; it's nothing to make a big fuss over.

And secondly—this heroism of ours turned into our greatest vice in the end. Worse than a vice: a unique talent for abasement. I mean that! Because in the end the hero grew so proud of his ‘heroism’ that he actually took to boasting of it. Look at me! He began to say. Look at what disaster, at what humiliation, at what disgrace I can bear! Who else in the whole world is as good at it as I am?

“You see, it isn’t just that we accept our suffering. It’s that we love our suffering, all suffering...we actually want to suffer, we long for it...we can’t do without it. Suffering is what protects and preserves us...without it we’d have nothing to live for. Have you ever heard of a group of Jews that didn’t suffer? I never have. A Jew who didn’t suffer would be a freak of nature, half a Gentile, not a Jew at all...which is why I say that such heroism has been our greatest vice. Suffering, suffering, and more suffering! Everything wallows around it...not in it, mind you, but around it. There’s an enormous difference there. Yes, everything wallows around it: Jewish history, Jewish life, Jewish manners, Jewish literature, Jewish culture, Jewish folksong.... Jews taken singly and Jews taken *en masse*...everything! The whole world becomes cramped and narrow and upside-down. A world of darkness, paradox and negation: sorrow replaces happiness as an ideal, pain becomes the norm rather than pleasure, tearing down rather than building up, slavery rather than redemption, dream rather than reality, vague hope rather than real plans, faith rather than common sense—and so on and so forth, one paradox after another...it’s simply dreadful! A different psychology comes into being, a psychology of the night.... You see, there is a psychology of the night which differs from that of the day. Not the psychology of a man in the night—that’s something else; a psychology of the night itself. Perhaps you’ve never noticed it, but it’s there. I know. I feel it every time I’m out on patrol. The whole world behaves differently than it does during the day. Nature lives a different life. Every stone, every smell, every blade of grass—it’s all entirely different...”

“Yudka,” the Haganah leader interrupted him in a half-joking, half-begging tone of voice, “what you say is all very interesting, but have pity on us. What did I call a meeting of this committee for?”

“Wait, wait just a minute,” Yudka hastily replied. “I haven’t come

to the main point yet. You still don’t know.... I have a plan...you’ll see what it is soon enough. Bear with me just a little longer....”

“Let him talk,” said one of the committee members. “Give him a chance.”

“But...” The leader hesitated and then began to say something—only at that moment Yudka scolded distractedly, addressing no one in particular, “Be quiet!”

The leader bowed his head and reluctantly fell silent.

“I’m not disgracing. I’m getting to the root of things, to brass tacks...”

He stopped and looked bewilderedly about him. He seemed troubled, tired and confused, but there was something that kept driving him on. Soon he resumed, “I’ve already referred to the fact, and I ask you to keep it in mind, that we have developed a special, paradoxical, fantastical, *nocturnal* psychology, if you will, that is different from that of any other people. We love to suffer. It is suffering that enables us to be Jews, that maintains us and makes us appear strong and heroic, more heroic than anyone else on the face of the earth. And in fact I admit, I can’t help it, that we truly are heroic in a sense. Human beings, you know, abuse all kinds of fine words...so that in a certain sense, it does take heroism to suffer...just as in a certain sense it takes heroism to be ugly and abased...which is exactly the kind of people we are. We’re not warriors or conquerors or rulers. That’s the furthest thing from our minds. No, we prefer to surrender, to suffer endlessly with gratitude and love—while saying, of course: you will never vanquish us, you will never break us, you will never exterminate us! No power on earth can do that...because there is a limit to power, but there is no limit, none at all, to suffering. On the contrary: the more enslaved we are, the more superior we feel; the more we are humiliated, the more highly we think of ourselves; the more we’re made to suffer the stronger we become. It’s become our second nature; we need it as the air to breathe...how cleverly we’ve arranged it! It’s become our character, our personality—which when you think of it, explains everything: exile, martyrdom, the Messiah...that trinity that’s really one, that serves a single purpose.... How does it say in the Bible? ‘A threefold cord...’”

"...is not easily broken," One of the committee members supplied the missing part of the quote.

"That's it!" cried Yudka excitedly, seizing upon the verse. "Is not easily broken! Not quickly—which means never, never at all... These three things support each other. They reinforce each other, so that the redemption can never come...so that we keep wandering from country to country and place to place, generation after generation to the end of time...and always with new persecutions, and more suffering, and fresh troubles, and enemies and hatred all around...*oo-of!* How we love it and cling to it! It's our holiest, our most beloved, most intimate possession—holier than Jerusalem, more Jewish than Jerusalem, more fundamentally spiritual, more everything; there's simply no comparison. A paradox? But that's how it is...no, no, don't interrupt me!"

He looked anxiously around him, although in fact no one had made a move to speak.

"Let me tell you how I see it..."

He mopped his face and lips with one hand as though he had just climbed out of a bath, then dropped his voice and whispered confidentially, "The exile is our pyramid whose base is martyrdom and whose apex is the Messiah, and...and the Talmud is our 'Book of the Dead.' We started building this pyramid early in our history, as far back as the time of the Second Temple. That was when we started laying the foundations...exile, martyrdom, the Messiah...do you grasp the full profundity of this feverish, delirious, nocturnal hallucination? Do you? Just think of it, think! Millions of human beings, an entire people, wallowed in it and stayed there for two thousand years!"

"They sacrificed their life for it, their natural existence; they welcomed suffering for it, underwent all kinds of torment. You may say that it is preposterous, insane. But as a hallucination, that is, as a dream, it became our ideal...yes, our ideal...what a strange people! What a terrible and wonderful people! Wonderful to the point of total madness! Why, the whole world is not worthy of it; the whole world with all its heroes and warriors and writers and philosophers put together! What horrible darkness! What an immeasurable abyss...no, one could go out of one's mind just thinking about it!"

He mouthed the last words practically inaudibly and stood as though bewitched, his mouth wide open, his eyes staring straight ahead, the color drained from his face.

The Haganah leader invited him to sit.

"Have a seat." He pointed to an empty chair.

"What's that?" asked Yudka confusedly, rousing himself. "But it's not just a fantasy, not just a fantasy at all...that is, it is a fantasy too. But it's a fantasy that we had to have.... Why? for what purpose? but it did, I assure you, it definitely had to have...a fantasy, in fact, that had a very specific purpose, that was calculated and recalculated down to the last detail. Look, there's a very subtle point here, a single anecdote with enormous implications—I'm talking about the belief in the Messiah. What a typical Jewish fantasy, typical to the nth degree...the one myth that lived on after everything else, after the whole great drama of judges and prophets and kings, after the First and Second Temples, after all the wars and heroics and the rest of it...yes, the one thing that remained: an innocent little story, nothing more. It isn't much, you say? Well, you're wrong. On the contrary, it's a great deal. Too much. At first glance it may seem of no importance, a fairytale for children. But it isn't! It isn't for children at all. It has in it, I tell you, all the cunning of the wisest and most well-versed old men, a cunning that is infinitely subtle, tragic and abasing at once. (Oh, I admit, it's a marvelous, ingenious myth too—and one that apart from its symbolism and philosophy has its own bitter brand of Jewish humor...the fact that he is to come riding on an ass. This colossus, this great, universal figure, will arrive in the world not on a splendid steed, but on a jackass, a miserable little beast of burden!) It determined the fate of our people and the path that it would take for centuries, for an eternity, far more than all the scholarly debates in the Talmud. I'm not an expert on these things. In fact, I've never studied the Talmud at all. But it's clear that...that if not for this one myth, everything would have been different. If not for it, we would either have had to return to Palestine right away or to disappear from the world. In either case, we would have had to come to terms with things and do something about them—that is, to put an end to them in one way or another..."

The Haganah leader sought again to interrupt. The subject matter, he was convinced, did not pertain to the committee. Yet when he glanced to either side of him to consult with the others, they signaled him to let Yudka proceed. He deferred to them with a shrug.

Yudka failed to notice this exchange and went on, "Whereas now we no longer had to. There was no need to act or even to think about things in the least. The Messiah would do it all for us, and all that was needed was to sit and wait for him to come. On the contrary: it was forbidden to interfere, forbidden to try to make him come sooner. Incredible!" His voice shook. "Incredible! It became a commandment to remain in exile until God put an end to it. It had nothing to do any more with what Jews did or wanted, only with Providence, with the supernatural, with miracles from above...do you understand?"

He stood there baffled, looking at the committee members.

"Do you understand?" he repeated, in a downcast, puzzled tone of voice. "The Jews did nothing, nothing at all—they simply sat and waited... They imagined the Messiah in heaven—and it's terribly important to realize that this is a myth about the future, not about the past!—and they trusted him to make all the necessary arrangements for redeeming them, so that they themselves had nothing left to do at all... How could they have believed in such a thing? (And believed in it with such a passion! For two thousand years! Two thousand of them!) How do you explain the fact that men who were far from naive, far from fools, who were on the contrary very clever and not a little sceptical about things... in short, men who were thoroughly practical, even a little too practical for their own good... that such men should believe in such a thing... and not just believe in it, but base their whole life on it, their national, historical existence? Honest to God! They believed in it wholeheartedly... they had to, that's the whole point! And yet at the same time, you know, somewhere deep down, in some hidden recess of the heart, they didn't quite believe in it either, not quite—at least not that he was about to come now, right away, in their own lifetime—which was, after all, what mattered... Can there really be any doubt that they did not believe too, despite the fact that they believed with all their heart? Can there?"

"This is also a Jewish trait, very, very Jewish; to believe with all your heart, unwaveringly, with an almost insane passion—and nevertheless to not-believe just a little bit too, a tiny little bit, though it's that tiny bit that's crucial in the end... Perhaps I'm not putting it well. But that's how it is! I know I'm not wrong about it. How complicated everything is... Redemption is their great hope, their one desire, and yet at the same time they bind themselves, they manacle themselves hand and foot and they themselves sign the verdict, which they then go to all lengths to uphold, that they should never be redeemed until the end of time!

"Or else take... take this business of... of what's called the birth pangs of the Messiah. That's a chapter in itself, a very interesting one. Why, according to Jewish belief, do such great catastrophes have to take place before the Messiah can come? Why? Why can't he come without them? He's the Messiah, after all, he can do what he wants... Why can't he come joyously, bringing peace and all other good things? And get this: the catastrophes aren't going to befall the anti-Semites, or the nations of the world, but they're going to befall the Jews themselves! And they're not even meant for any purpose, such as the encouragement of repentance and such things, but simply for their own catastrophic sake, even though there's no need for them... whole oceans of catastrophes and all kinds of horrible disasters, until the Jews can't stand the grief of them any longer, until they're so crushed that they despair of redemption itself... what for? Is it a matter of theology? Of a realistic grasp of the world? Or is it perhaps something else that we don't dare admit to ourselves: the fear of being redeemed? It's mind-boggling."

He stood there, quite boggled, hardly conscious of where he was.

"I seem to remember having heard," he began again, smiling morbidly at no one in particular, "that some rabbi or saint, I don't recall which, was once quoted as having said about the Messiah, 'When he comes, I don't want to be there,' or something of the sort... Perhaps he was joking, or being cynical, or simply sounding off. But perhaps there's a great truth here, the revelation of a deep, dark secret... Tell me: how did this myth come to be created in the first

place? No, not come to be created...that's not what I mean...because in the beginning it almost certainly expressed nothing more than longing for the return of the House of David. What I mean is, how did it become the classic creation of a nation, the brilliant, immortal masterpiece, as it were, of the Jews? What made it more popular than any of our other myths, more accepted by all strata of our people, by rabbis, Talmudists and simple Jews, by scholars and near illiterates, by men, women and children alike? Why did it become the inner essence, the cardinal dogma of our faith, on which we based our lives through the centuries, our self-image as a nation, our historical perceptions, our political strategies, etcetera, etcetera? But it did! That's a fact. Which means there's some relationship between it and the spirit of the people it pervaded, a very fundamental relationship! A deep congruence, a perfect unity between it and the mentality of the people, between it and the will of the people, its will to live as it pleased... There's no doubt about it. It's perfectly clear."

He stopped for a moment, his face a dark yellow hue, as though it has begun to rust. There was silence in the room, a hushed, forlorn, expectant silence such as that when one waits for the first drop of rain after a lengthy drought.

"And so...so," he drawled, building up to his revelation, "this feverish, delirious, nocturnal fantasy...this fantasy that had a special purpose...I've already said that it was because...that it was because..."

He broke off, as if it were difficult for him to go on. Almost at once, however, he looked at them and blurted in a frightened tone of voice,

"Because they didn't want to be redeemed!" He couldn't get the words out fast enough. He stopped, as though expecting to be challenged, then recovered and repeated,

"Because they didn't want to be redeemed! That's the real meaning of the myth—the practical result of which was that they never *could* be redeemed, never could return to their native land. Mind you, I don't say that it was a continuous thing—although if it wasn't, it's even worse...And I repeat: they believed that redemption would come, they believed in it implicitly, prayed for it, dreamed of it—even though

they did not really want it. I'm convinced that there was no hypocrisy or duplicity here. You're dealing with something unconscious, deeply repressed.... It's no accident that the Jews so loved this particular myth that they fell under its spell like a band of starry-eyed poets. For two thousand years they warmed themselves by its heat and did nothing, and for two thousand more years they'll go on warming themselves by it and meditating on it and mourning and waiting and being secretly afraid of it without ever tiring of it. All of Judaism, all of Jewish life with its love for the holy land, and for the holy tongue, and for God's kingdom on earth, boils down to no more than that...

"But let's leave all that for now.... What I want to know is: what if there are good reasons for being afraid? What if Judaism can continue to survive as it always has in the Diaspora, while in Palestine...who knows? What if, by taking the place of religion, Palestine is a terrible menace to the future of the Jews, since it shifts their fulcrum of existence from something proven and established to something still transient and terribly unformed? What if Palestine should be the ultimate shipwreck, the final end of the line?"

An odd, weary, unbalanced smile played lightly over his lips.

"Well?" He looked at them as if waiting for an answer. "Suppose the religious Jews are right? Suppose their instincts are sound? You see for yourselves how even here, in our own homeland, they're against us, all those ordinary, observant Jews who live as Jews always have lived. Right on their faces it's written, 'We are not Zionists, we are God-fearing Jews! We want no part of a Jewish state. All we want is to be left to pray at the Wailing Wall in peace...' It's true, isn't it? Of course there are religious Jews who are Zionists too, but they hardly count; they're simply the pollyannas of the Zionist movement. I'm talking about the observant Jew in the street, the gut-Jew. And do you know what? Let me tell you: if I'm right, *if* I'm right, Zionism and Judaism are not the same thing at all but two entirely different things, perhaps even two contradictory things. Most certainly two contradictory things! At any rate, they're not the same. A man becomes a Zionist when he can't be a Jew any more.

"No, I'm not exaggerating. The first Zionists to come to this

land were very lukewarm Jews. And don't tell me that they came here to escape persecution—that's nonsense. They came because they were already shadows of themselves, because they were ruined, hollow men inside. Zionism begins with the destruction of Judaism, with the people's failure of nerve. That's a fact! The real truth about Zionism has yet to be told. It's much deeper, much more radical in its consequences than anyone thinks. Herzl barely sketched the outlines of it. Ahad Ha'am did even less, for all his grand Jewish thoughts. At most he advised the Jews who came here looking to build a new world not to forget to first found a local Talmud society, or to build a house of study and a Jewish cemetery...what's that?"

He paused to stare at one of the committee members, who seemed about to say something.

"It's nothing," grinned the man. "I just happened to remember something. I had an uncle, a witty, clever Jew. The Bolsheviks killed him. For doing absolutely nothing. He used to say, 'Ahad Ha'am is the secular rabbi of Zionism...'"

The committee members enjoyed the quip. The leader, however, felt called upon to deliver a rebuke. "Don't interrupt!" he said sternly.

Yudka stood there at a good-natured loss. It was impossible to say whether he had heard the interruption at all, or if he had, what he made of it.

"I'll be finished in a minute..." he apologized, smiling uncertainly.

He sought to pick up the thread again and coughed two or three times.

"So...in a minute I'll...what was it that I wanted to say? It was about...about Zionism! In a word, the last word about it has yet to be said...the...the hidden, ultimate truth. No one in the world has yet understood the real depth of it, no one has managed to explain... The things we're told about it, you know, are the most elementary, the most banal, the vaguest and emptiest phraseology..."

"Who says no one in the world has understood it?" jeered a committee member. "What about all those absent-minded, Arab-loving professors at the Hebrew University?"

"Professors don't live in this world," someone else put in.

"Ernest Figg..." The man whose name was thrown out was considered a prime example of such types.

"Ernest is no fig and Figg is not earnest," someone joked.

The Haganah leader rang his gong. "I'll thank you not to interrupt or to engage in private conversation," he declared. "Please continue."

"All right," said Yudka, unsure how to go on. "I certainly can't define Zionism for you. I'm not the man for it, even if my head hurts from thinking about it so much. But that's of no importance... This much is clear: Zionism is not a continuation or a cure for a disease. That's nonsense! It's an act of destruction, a negation of what's come before, an end... It's far from a grass-roots movement. In fact, it's not a popular movement at all, no more popular surely than the Bund, or Communism, or assimilation. On the contrary: it ignores the people, it opposes them, it goes against their inner grain, it seeks to subvert and deflect them to an entirely new path, to a certain faraway goal—it and the men at the head of it, who are the avant-garde of a different people... Please listen closely: not *new*, not *renewed*, but *different*. Whoever doesn't agree with me, I'm sorry to say, is either wrong or self-deluded. What? Suppose I'm wrong? But I believe that what we have in Palestine today is no longer Judaism already, to say nothing of what we will have in the future. After all, we haven't begun to see the end of it. I'm talking about Zionism's inner essence, it's hidden power—yes, I am. At least call it a different Judaism, if you insist on fooling yourselves and clinging to the name... but certainly not that which has existed for two thousand years, most emphatically not that. Which is to say... well, a 'no-thing', if you follow me? And nothing will help change any of this: neither bringing grandmother and grandfather over from Europe, nor a steady diet of Jewish sources fed to us like wheat-bran, nor Hebrew literature if it's still stuck in the past, in the shtetl, which is why it doesn't amount to anything. *Kaput!*

"Permit me to mention one little fact that doesn't bear on the matter directly but that still has circumstantial weight..." His lips cracked in a warped smile. "*Circumstantial*: what a lovely word, isn't it? So round and smooth... Well, it's known that Jews in this country

are ashamed to speak Yiddish, as though it were somehow a disgrace. They don't hate it, they're not afraid of it, they don't refuse to speak it, they're simply ashamed. But Hebrew...and oddly enough, with a Sefardic accent, which is foreign to most of them...that they speak with their heads held high, with a kind of self-esteem, even though it's much harder for them than Yiddish and has none of this liveliness, none of the juiciness, none of the fresh, spontaneous earthiness that Yiddish has. What is behind this? Can it be that they prefer to make life more difficult for themselves, just like that? No, it's very simple: Hebrew is not a continuation, it's different, it's a case in itself, there's practically nothing Jewish about it. Practically nothing...And by the same token, ordinary people here are embarrassed to go by ordinary Jewish names. They would rather be called Artsieli and Avnieli or something Hebrew-sounding like that. Haimovitz, you'll admit, is a very Jewish name—far too Jewish...whereas Avnieli—that's something else again, although the devil only knows what. The main thing is that it sounds different, not Jewish, so that they can feel proud of it.

"That's also the reason, of course, that you'll find so many rare biblical names among us: Gideon, Ehud, Yigal, Tirzah.... *what?* You say that there's nothing new about this, that Jews have always changed their names to assimilate? But elsewhere that was self-evident; we lived among strangers, surrounded by enemies, and so we had to hide, to stay out of sight, to pretend to be someone else. But here we're in our own land; there's no one but us, and surely no need to feel ashamed or to hide—and no one, for that matter, to hide from. What is one to make of it then? And yet there you are! Clearly it's the same thing...not a continuation but a break, the opposite of the past, a fresh start...

"I've digressed. I won't keep you any longer. I'm finishing: in a nutshell, the purpose. A different people, one above all that makes its own history by and for itself, rather than having it made for it by others.... a real history, that is, and not some communal ledger in the archives...that's what it's all about! Because a people that does not live in its own land and control its own fate has no history...that's my idea. I've said it once, I'm saying it again, and I'll say it over and over and over. Is that clear? Is it?"

He was muddled from so much speech and emotion. His

voice sounded tattered, and he had the look of a man who has lost his way.

"I've said a mouthful, everything...everything that was on my mind...there isn't any more. I don't want to add another word... enough!"

He noisily pulled out a chair and collapsed heavily into it. He sat flustered and livid, his heart and temples pounding wildly while he wiped the sweat from his face.

There was silence in the room, a silence as after a storm. The committee members sat without a word, feeling strangely ill at ease. There was something quiescent about them, as though they had been whisked away on a long journey and were currently suspended in midair.

At last the Haganah leader looked up and asked in as rough a tone as he could muster,

"Are you done?"

Yudka shuddered and jumped to his feet again.

"In a minute, in a minute..." he hastened to say in his fright. "I've talked too much, much too much...I didn't want to, it wasn't what I had in mind. It just came out by itself. God only knows...what rubbish! All kinds of little, unimportant things about Yiddish and Hebrew names...it was ridiculous, really unnecessary. I can see that myself...although sometimes, you know, it's precisely the little, unimportant details that come first to mind...not that it makes any difference. The main thing is...because that's what I wanted to talk to you about...only how did I want to put it...yes, the crux of it, my plan. I haven't been just wasting...not at all! Well then, the main thing, I'll have to ask you to be patient for just a little longer..."

The Haganah members perked up in their seats as if Yudka had just rescued them from some great distress—including their leader, who sat studying his fingernails.

"Say whatever you want," he said. "Just go easy on the philosophy..."