

# They Shared a Dream

| Amira Hass

Some of the people who attended the funeral of Yohanan Lorwin at the Givat Shaul Cemetery on Tuesday committed a crime by the mere fact of their presence: They had "stolen" across the border and entered Israeli territory from the West Bank, and traversed the few kilometers between Beit Sahour and the Jerusalem cemetery without the necessary passes from the Israeli authorities. Other participants, who had only just come from the burial of their friend Elias Jerayssi in the town of Beit Sahour, were accomplices to the crime: They had taken people with no passes into their cars and crossed the border with them to the third funeral of the day. At the first funeral, at noon, their friend Inbal Perelson had been buried in Petah Tikvah.

Lorwin, Jerayssi and Perelson were members of the Alternative Information Center - an Israeli-Palestinian non-governmental organization. They were swept away in a flash flood as they were hiking together on Monday in the Judean Desert. In contrast to hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, who endanger themselves daily entering Israel without permits, mainly to find work, the Alternative Information Center activists refrain from this routine violation. If they have no permits, they do not enter Israel, or even Jerusalem. Therefore, their meetings are held at the Center's offices in Bethlehem, and not in Jerusalem - since the Israeli and Jewish members have the right to move freely in all parts of the country, on both sides of the Green Line.

Lorwin, a religious Jew, was not prepared to miss the group's meetings even if they were held on the Sabbath - a convenient day for most of the participants. He would walk to Bethlehem from his home in Jerusalem's Katamon quarter. He knew the people of Beit Sahour - who now came to bury him - many years before he joined the Center. Lorwin had been a member of the Yedidya Congregation, made up of religious Jews like himself. They had set up a dialogue group with residents and activists of this Palestinian Christian town, which at the outset of the Intifada led a tax revolt against the Israeli occupation. Every Tuesday evening, he met with several other members of the Yedidya community to learn in a hanuta (study group).

Exactly at the hour the group regularly held its meeting, he was buried in the cemetery that spreads over what was once the village of Deir Yassin. In the dark, only the light of the flashlight held by a hevra kadisha (burial society) worker flickered on the shoes of the tearful people who silently encircled the gaping grave. The silence was broken by the uninhibited wails of Tewfik, a young man with a mop of curls and a keffiyah wound around his neck, the son of Jerusalem born refugees.

Becoming a part of the secular Jewish group at the Center several years ago was not easy for Yohanan, explains a woman who used to be a Center activist. But it was also difficult for the secular members of the group: American by birth, a bit clumsy and not a fluent speaker (in contrast to the eloquence of his writing and the translations he did in his capacity as deputy editor of the organization's publications in English) Yohanan unlike the others, was not prepared to define himself as an "anti-Zionist," and he never overstepped the limitations imposed on him by his religious faith. This past year, he began to feel more strongly that he belonged and was happier. People began to learn to accept his otherness.

At the end of the week before the fatal excursion, the Center held an internal seminar, which was intended to reinforce the solidarity between the activists. They spend hours writing publications in three languages, publishing them, preparing educational courses, and putting together site visits for journalists and diplomats in Jewish settlements beyond the Green Line, along the bypass roads and in the refugee camps. They never find the time to share more personal thoughts and feelings. The seminar took place at the Tantur guest house, on the outskirts of Bethlehem. A joint excursion at the end of the encounter seemed the best thing to do. Envious legends had evolved through the years about the boundless love for hiking embraced by the Center's founder Michel Warshawsky (Mikado). Around him formed a group of equally enthusiastic hikers - not necessarily members of the Center. "He knows every wadi in the country," they would boast of the man who for years headed the Israeli Trotskyite group "Lekem" (The Revolutionary Communist League), which supported a single state solution for Jews and for Palestinians. Yohanan leapt at the chance. Mikado's hikes usually took place on Saturdays. Since this was set for a Sunday, he could join "the first hike of his life."

By morning, most of the members of the center had lost their enthusiasm for the excursion, but it was Elias who pressed on and implored Warshawsky to set out for the hike together. "The sun is shining over Beit Sahour, and the weather is great," he said. For him, this was also a rare opportunity to spend an entire day with his son, 'Ahad. Elias was released from administrative detention in March 1998. For 27 months he had been detained in Israeli jails (without trial); before that - since the beginning of the Intifada he had led an underground

existence, far from his home and children, between Bethlehem and Hebron. "We were always afraid that he would be caught and killed by Israeli soldiers," reminisced one of his friends after his coffin was laid to rest in the Catholic cemetery at Belt Sahour. The cemetery is located on a hillside overlooking Jabal Abu Ghanaiyam (Har Homa). To save space, coffins are buried one on top of another, at graduated levels.

### 27 Months Administrative Detention

Before the Intifada, Elias was condemned to four years in prison for activities in the Popular Front. In the 10 months since his release from detention, he began to learn how to enjoy life. At Christmas, he went on his first vacation with his wife Linda. His first mission - the mission of all released prisoners - was to win the hearts of his children, to teach them to know him for the first time in their lives as a father and to enjoy being a father. He was quickly absorbed into the work of the Center, as a writer of articles and as editor of its publication in Arabic. In his society, as in Israeli society, people do not easily accept joint activity, mutual awareness and equality of Jews and Arabs, Palestinians and Israelis. He knew that in his milieu, the decision to work at the Center would be seen as crossing several red lines. Indeed, a short time before he joined, the Center had suffered a large shake-up, which led to the departure of a number of the Palestinian members to form a separate information, educational and legal aid center. But Jerayssi chose the joint Jewish-Arab organization. "I was once in conflict with the Jews. Today I am working with Jews and I am happy," he joked to his colleagues.

At his funeral, which was held at the Latin church in his town and looked like a Popular Front assembly, he and his two Jewish friends who died at the same time were eulogized by Abd al Rahim al Maluah, one of the leaders of the Popular Front. The Front also published mourning notices with the names of the three victims. Apart from members of the Alternative Information Center members, most of the Palestinians who came to Lorwin's funeral were or are Popular Front activists, former prisoners and detainees, one of whom was tried and punished for his membership in the united Intifada leadership. They were not only paying their last respects to Lorwin, together with a group of religious Jews and other new immigrants, but were also honoring Jerayssi's decision to belong to a binational group that seeks to realize a joint, supra-national dream.

"He died just when he began to learn to enjoy life," said one of his friends. In the community of Palestinian political activists - especially those on the left who oppose the Palestinian Authority - the talk of "the right to enjoy life" is evidence of the beginning of a change in the heroic ethos of sacrificing one's life and everything that is personal for liberty. It indicates a cautious crossing, full of self-appraisal, of a line between the fight to the death and the struggle for life, including living for the moment.

### She Loved to Dance

Knowing how to enjoy life and make the most of every moment was synonymous with Inbal Perelson. While for the past 20 years she confidently made her way through the realms of the strongly ideological left - from Hashomer Hatsair through Sheli, Campus, Maki (The Israel Communist Party) Brit Hashivyon (The Equality Covenant) and the Center, she never needed to learn "how to live." She never missed an opportunity to dance. She recently completed her doctorate in literature and at the same time was studying bibliotherapy at Tel Hai College. She edited the Center's Hebrew publications, and her friends never understood how she managed to do it all. Born on a kibbutz, she too loved to hike. Near the pile of sand by her grave, Orly Lubin, her teacher and her friend, related that Inbal had "a hypnotic love for life. She broke down all the boundaries, she shattered the stereotype that Ashkenazis can't study the Sephardim, that Israelis can't study the Palestinians, that academic research should not be mixed with the personal and the ideological." It was perfectly clear to Inbal that her reference group and the group to which she belonged went beyond the boundaries set by one's birthplace, and are determined instead by the degree of participation in the ultimate, sweeping dream of equality. It is easier to have fun with those who share the same dream, and the desire to enjoy life together led the five members of the Center and Jerayssi's son to the fatal trip in the Judean desert. On Sunday night, Lorwin was scheduled to study and dine with his teacher and friend, Rabbi Moshe Klivanoff. On Tuesday, the white bearded rabbi, his back doubled over in pain, delivered a eulogy for him in a voice soft with grief. He related that only recently, they had discussed the significance of Psalm 32. Yohanan accepted the literal meaning of verse 6: "For this let every one that is godly pray unto Thee in a time when Thou mayest be found: Surely when the great waters overflow, they will not reach unto him."