

**"Tracing Back my Own Footsteps": Space, Walking and Memory
in "Shiv'a Mehem" by Nathan Shaham**

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Absract

This article focuses on Natan Shaham's short story "Shiva Mehem" ("Seven of Them"). Written in 1948, the story presents the moral dilemma faced by a group of warriors caught in a minefield. Combining insights from various discourses (ecocriticism, postcolonialism and the emerging field of geocriticism), the article explores the theme of walking both in the story and in the wider context of Shaham's writing and the ideology of the 1948 generation. The exploration of the various aspect of the story's main image, the landmine and its effect on the body's movement in space, leads to viewing the mine image as a thematic and formal nexus connecting time and space, personal and historical time, past memory and the present. Through this powerful image that conveys the experience of the generation facing life in their own sovereign state, "Shiva Mehem" also illustrates the deep connection between Shaham's writing and his movement in or upon the land, both as a writer and as a warrior.

I. Walking

I will begin by bringing together three writers who reflect on the nature of walking. The first, a writer, philosopher, naturalist and walker, the prophet of today's environmental thinking, Henry David Thoreau, writes in his essay "Walking":

I have met with but one or two persons in the course of my life who understood the art of Walking, that is, of taking walks,—who had a genius, so to speak, for sauntering: which word is beautifully derived “from idle people who roved about the country, in the Middle Ages, and asked charity, under pretence of going à la Sainte Terre,” to the Holy Land, till the children exclaimed, “There goes a *Sainte-Terrer*,”

a Saunterer,—a Holy-Lander [...] Some, however, would derive the word from *sans terre*, without land or a home, which, therefore, in the good sense, will mean, having no particular home, but equally at home everywhere. [...] But I prefer the first, which, indeed, is the most probable derivation. For every walk is a sort of crusade, preached by some Peter the Hermit in us, to go forth and reconquer this Holy Land from the hands of the Infidels.¹

The second writer is Nathan Shaham on whom this essay centers. Born in 1925 and still writing, Shaham belongs to the "Palmach Generation" which participated in the 1948 War and wrote about it. In 1966, a few months before the 1967 War, he writes in the introduction to *Masa Be'ereztz Israel* (Journey in the Land of Israel), a travel book illustrated by Shmuel Katz:

A journey in your homeland is a journey to the past. Walking with a purpose is directed to the future, while in pure sauntering one walks and treads the footsteps of the past, and what the eyes see is not a picture but a narrative. A man tours places of past experiences, and while noticing the change in his country, he looks back at whatever had happened to him.²

Shaham returns to this travelogue in his 1991 essay *Bivritcha* (In Your Covenant):

¹ David Henry Thoreau. "Walking." In *Essays*. Jeffrey S. Cramer, (Ed). (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013 [1862]), 242-3.

² Nathan Shaham. *Masa Be'ereztz Israel* (Journey in the Land of Israel), Illustrated by Shmuel Katz, (Tel Aviv: Levin Epstein Ltd., 1966), 9. All translation of texts in Hebrew are mine, excluding "Shiv'a Mehem," which was translated by D. Briskman. *Masa Be'ereztz Israel* was translated into English (Nathan Shaham and Shmuel Katz. *Journey in the Land of Israel*. Illustrated by Shmuel Katz. English Version by I. M. Lask. [Tel Aviv: Levin Epstein Ltd., 1966]), but in the English version the introduction is slightly different.

I have found that wherever I go I trace back my own footsteps and my youth comes along. Therefore, I included in this book descriptions of landscapes I could no longer visit. I chose a title that brings together past and present – *Journey in the Land of Israel* rather than "Journey in Israel." My youth memories knew no boundaries.³

After the 1967 War, Shaham was able to revisit the landscapes of his youth, and he admits "[a]ll were overwhelmed with joy, even those who dreaded the political outcomes"⁴ of the war, and would denounce the "messiah claimants"⁵ that have risen in its wake.

The third piece is by Raja Shehadeh, writer and lawyer, and the author of *Palestinian Walks: Notes on a Vanishing Landscape*. The inspiration for the walks described in this book is the traditional *sarha* – favored by Shehadeh's grandfather, who would occasionally leave behind the "humid coastal city of Jaffa and the stultifying colonial administration which he served and whose politics he detested" to go wandering in the hills of Ramalah:

To go on a *sarha* was to roam freely, at will, without restraint. The verb form of the word means to let the cattle out to pasture early in the morning, leaving them to wander and graze at liberty. The commonly used noun *sarha* is a colloquial corruption of the classical word. A man going on a *sarha* wanders aimlessly, not restricted by time and place, going where his spirit takes him to nourish his soul and rejuvenate himself. But not any excursion would qualify as a

³ Nathan Shaham. *Dor Hamidbar* (The Desert Generation). (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Poalim, 1991), 219.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 225.

sarha. Going on a *sarha* implies letting go. It is a drug-free high, Palestinian-style.⁶

The juxtaposition of these three writers, presented chronologically, underlines their differences, and especially the difference in the degree of sovereignty they possess over the land they tread. Yet there are also similarities; all three share the feeling of breaking of boundaries, either actual or imaginary. Thoreau notes that unlike the farmer who keeps marking borders, witnessing their easement by the forces of nature, the saunterer-walker ignores them and feels at home everywhere. Comparing Shehadeh and Shaham in that respect, we encounter a painful dissonance. Shaham's memories of his youth knew no boundaries, and the 1967 War seemed to respond to his personal nostalgia (as well as to the national one) and opened up these boundaries. Ironically, the opening of these very borders engaged Shehadeh. His *sarha* is the attempt to revive this boundless roaming while acknowledging the boundaries that confine the open space of his childhood landscapes.

Sauntering means walking with no maps, yet rather than paving new roads, the walker treads the paths marked by former walkers. For Shaham, sauntering, unlike "walking with a purpose" is directed to the past rather than to a future goal. He traces his own footsteps in places he had been to in his youth and, at the same time, traces the land's past. Shehadeh walks the paths and footsteps of his ancestors, mainly his grandfather and great uncle. They mark a personal lane, laden with memories and emotions, and he is surprised and disappointed when he finds them marked in official maps. Even Thoreau, who avoids main roads and roads in general, sings the praises of the old Marlborough way in New England that nobody walks anymore. Walking then has to do with the past and the memory of walking in the past.

⁶ Raja Shehadeh. *Notes on a Vanishing Landscape*. (London: Profile, 2009 [2007]), 1.

Walking in an unmapped space which, at the same time, is marked by past experiences, suggests the space's connection to the knowledge of both culture and language, and hence to the sources of the writer's creativity. Thoreau aspires to regain a natural ignorance, and he mocks the urge to possess practical knowledge in order to gain power.⁷ At the same time, the wild for him is what attracts us in literature.⁸ It is the very source of language, and Thoreau's essay is a celebration of cultural knowledge. Shehadeh treats his own writing as the seventh of the six walks he describes in his book, while for Shaham, the desert as the longed-for destination of the Israeli walker is the source of the Hebrew language; walking in it, he approaches the fountainhead of his own creativity as a Hebrew writer.

The references to desert walks in Shaham's 1991 book of essays *Dor Hamidbar* (The Desert Generation) illustrate how walking in the land of Israel, and in the desert in particular, is connected to language and writing. Like writing, the desert experience is both collective and personal. As the title of the book suggests, the desert is the locus of Shaham's generation, who keeps walking to the Promised Land like nomads – "in the footsteps of the Bedouin shepherd, whose bare feet... step on the stones upon which Jacob put his head."⁹ However, it is also a personal and private space. The experience of walking in the desert in his youth "holds the threads that tie my language to my views and life story."¹⁰ "In the desert," he writes at age nineteen, "things are magnificent as nobody watches you... you never know who will benefit from your benevolence in marking the path."¹¹ Suggesting the intimacy of writing, here space itself seems to communicate a secret knowledge to the lone walker. Forty

⁷ David Henry Thoreau, "Walking," 272.

⁸ Ibid., 262.

⁹ Nathan Shaham. *Dor Hamidbar*, 10.

¹⁰ Ibid., *ibid.*

¹¹ Nathan Shaham. *Dagan Ve'oferet* (Wheat and Lead). (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Poalim, 1948), 251-2.

years later, Shaham looks back on this time: "When I first stood on the peak of a mountain, overlooking the mottled, twisted gorges in the mouth of the Pokra (*Zinn*) Canyon, I said to myself, 'here is the brain of the world underneath its cortex.'"¹² Again, it is an image of a concealed knowledge in an uninhabited land whose tongue "is spare, breathless, and reticent, the tongue of a nomad strangled by thirst."¹³ After walking in the desert year after year, he understands the nature of this knowledge: "It is not merely the source of language that I have tapped into, but also... a truth without which literature is but a leisure pastime."¹⁴ Thus, the desert is the space that connects Shaham to his generation, yet the signs revealed to him while walking are the secret code of writing, which is not "a gospel truth but a solo discourse."¹⁵ As such it keeps him somewhat aloof from his community.

For Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*,¹⁶ the open, nomadic space of the desert is the paradigm of the smooth (*lisse*) space. Free of the signs of territory, such as boundaries and lanes, the smooth space stands in opposition to the striated (*strié*) space of the state. These terms are not fully contrasted though, as there are signs of territory in the smooth space, and "lines of flight" break through the boundaries of the striated space. Deleuze and Guattari's intricate conception of space, marking and domination form part of their project of "Geophilosophy" (1991),¹⁷ which indicates the cross-disciplinary interest of the last decades in the experience of space and its textual manifestations. Walking has a special place in this tendency. In

¹² Nathan Shaham. *Dor Hamidbar*, 11.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁶ Gill Deleuze and Félix Guattari. "The Smooth and the Striated." In *A Thousand Plateaus*. Translated by Brian Massumi. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987 [1980]), 470-500.

¹⁷ Gill Deleuze and Félix Guattari. "Geophilosophy." In *What is Philosophy?* Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994 [1991]), 85-113.

fact, it is a meeting point of both the political and the environmental schools of thought – postcolonialism and ecocriticism – which cooperate in critical projects such as geocriticism and postcolonial ecocriticism (Wastphal,¹⁸ Tally,¹⁹ Huggan & Tiffin²⁰). The American frontier, the land of Israel and Palestine, the plains of Africa and Australia are all grounds for discussing the movement of the body in space (Stein,²¹ Murphy,²² Nicholson,²³ Morrison²⁴). This may be conducted with or without maps, on marked paths or by paving new tracks, as a way to set borders or to break free of them, as a means to control nature or to connect spontaneously to it; these are but a few of the tensions inherent in the act of walking. The interconnections of walking, language and literature are also a recurring theme in this critical and literary discourse. The Aborigines in Australia, reports Bruce Chatwin,²⁵ believe that the singing of their ancestors while pacing “dreamlines” or “songlines” is what created the earth. The ongoing movement and singing along these lanes confirm their successors' possession over the land, even as it preserves the land as it was and should be, thus freeing it from any sovereignty.

¹⁸ Bertrand Wastphal. *Geocriticism*. Translated by Robert T. Tally Jr. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

¹⁹ Robert Tally (ed.). *Geocritical Explorations: Space, Place, and Mapping in Literary and Cultural Studies*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

²⁰ Graham Huggan and Hellen Tiffin. "Introduction." In Graham Huggan & Hellen Tiffin (eds.) *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*. (New York: Routledge, 2010), 1-24.

²¹ Rebecca L. Stein. "Traveling Zion." *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 11.3 (2009), 334-351.

²² Joseph Murphy. "Walking Paths through Postcolonial Political Geographies." *Political Geography* 30 (2011), 239-40.

²³ Geoff Nicholson. *The Lost Art of Walking: The History, Science, Philosophy, and Literature of Pedestrianism*. (New York: Riverhead Books, 2008).

²⁴ Glenn Morrison. "Songlines 25 Years On: Walking and Encounter in a Postcolonial Landscape." *Encounters: refereed conference papers of the 17th annual AAWP conference, 2012*. <http://www.aawp.dreamhosters.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Morrison.pdf>. Accessed October 9, 2016.

²⁵ Bruce Chatwin. *The Songlines*. (London: Picador, 1988).

Thus, walking has a range of rich, sometime contradictory, meanings, involving memory and knowledge, marking and deciphering, domination and freedom, literary culture and personal creativity. Drawing on this recent discourse, let us return to Nathan Shaham and his 1948 story "Shiv'a Mehem" ("Seven of Them").²⁶ This shift will not be the last, as in the course of this essay, I will travel back and forth from a textual analysis of the story to its broader contexts. Walking and walking paths play a major part in the story's plot, metaphorical network and structure. Moreover, it is one of Shaham's well-known pieces; one he keeps referring to in interviews and essays – a meeting point of recurring themes in his long career as writer and essayist. The essays in *Dor Hamidbar* suggest a triangular connection in the heart of Shaham's experience: the bond with the 1948 generation, the writer's work, and the space of the Land of Israel. In "Shiv'a Mehem," this triangle is embodied in three aspects of the story's central image: the minefield. These aspects – the mine as a metaphor, dramatic object, and an object in space – comprise the three, following parts of the essay. The analysis of the metaphoric and dramatic functions of the mine image – important yet not exhausting the story's effect – will lead to the main part of my discussion. While focusing on space and walking, this part also addresses the other aspects of the image, summing up the topics of my essay.

II. The Mine as Metaphor: Shaham and the Palmach Generation

The focus of Shaham's 1988 autobiographic piece *Sefer Hatum* (A Sealed Book) is Shaham's father, the writer Eliezer Steinman. Steinman, Shaham recalls, kept worrying about his two sons who, like him, became writers and, like him – he suspected – were doomed to his fate of "separateness." He was therefore enthusiastic

²⁶ The story appeared in English under the title "The Seven," translated by D. Briskman.

about the comradeship of servicemen of the Palmach generation and "the miracle of friendship" that *he* had never enjoyed. "This is why," writes Shaham, "he was so agitated when he read, in the winter of 1948, my story 'Shiv'a Mehem,' which dealt with the disintegration of this very comradeship on a hill sown with mines." ²⁷ For Steinman, it was a manifestation of his separateness in his son, who "in the midst of the war dared to question the bond that makes all warriors friends with each other." Steinman was even more shaken when he heard the responses to the play that was based on the story, "Hem Yagi'u Mahar" (They'll Be Here Tomorrow), whose staging right after the war was considered by some "a knife in the back."²⁸ For Shaham, the play served as a decisive test to reveal "the true colors of my friends in the Palmach headquarter, their connection to the writer and his art, their tolerance and some other traits."²⁹ Shaham, in his turn, sees this story as a test for his own sense of separateness, which he suspects in hindsight might be his father's legacy, despite the differences in their personalities and life courses. Indeed, the vacillation between the I and the We, first person singular and first person plural (like the title of Shaham's 1968 book *Guf Rishon Rabim* – First Person Plural) is a recurrent theme in his writing as well as in critical treatment of his work.

"Shiv'a Mehem" is the story of Abbi, a warrior who was wounded in the war and is now relating the story of it to his friend, the narrator, while they both walk up a hill on a ridge that had been a site of a harsh battle. Abbi was a soldier in the platoon which fought there and lost their legendary commander. Seven mines had been planted on the hill, whose whereabouts the soldiers did not know, as the man who had placed them was killed and the map indicating their location was burned in a shelling.

²⁷ Nathan Shaham. *Sefer Hatum* (A Sealed Book). (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Poalim, 1988), 149.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 200.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, *ibid*

Each one of the already defeated and agonized soldiers was hoping for the explosion of another mine that would reduce his own chances of dying. The officers – one of whom is Abbi – decide to conceal the presence of the mines from the enforcement force which joins the platoon. Petrified with both terror and apathy, the soldiers watch a young woman operator who, ignorant of the existence of the mines, starts dancing in a sudden downpour. A moment later, following the sound of an explosion, "beneath the window... lay a very small corpse, scorched and footless, exposing forlorn naked parts in vain expectation of what would never be..."³⁰ The mines take the lives of six people, including an Arab war prisoner who was sent to his death. Another prisoner whom the soldiers hope will save them from another explosion dies a "wasteful dying"³¹ by the soldiers' fire. Abbi finishes his story, and while descending the hill, he suddenly reveals to his listener-friend that the seventh mine had never gone off.

The metaphorical meanings of the mine are explicit. They are stated in the story, in the play, in the introduction to the story collection, in other stories by Shaham as well as in interviews and in his autobiographical essays. In one of these essays (*Sharvit Haturai* [The Private's Scepter]), Shaham recalls the occurrence that had inspired its writing. It was during "The Sasa Raid" in February 1948 that he witnessed the merciless expulsion of soldiers who failed to assist in the evacuation of casualties. The experience had made him acknowledge the evil looming in the comradeship of the group, and stirred the questions that begot "Shiv'a Mehem," the most poignant of which was: "When will the mine that the war had sown in our heart

³⁰ Nathan Shaham. "Shiv'a Mehem" (Seven of Them). In *Ha'elim Atzelim* (The Gods are Lazy). (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Poalim, 1949), 47. English translation used here is from "The Seven." In *A Whole Loaf: Stories from Israel*. Translated by D. Briskman. Ed. Shlomo J. Kahn. (New York: The Universal Library, 1963 [1948]), 101. Following this footnote, all subsequent references to Shaham's "Shiv'a Mehem" will refer to the Hebrew original text followed by the English translation by D. Briskman.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 41; *Ibid.*, 96

finally explode?"³² It was as soon as 1949 that he realized that the mines were "the future seeds,"³³ the outcome of a society who had sown "mines instead of alfalfa."³⁴

In an interview held in 1962, Shaham revealed that what had motivated the story was a "nostalgia for the present."³⁵ In the midst of war culture, dominated by the value of comradeship, the story offered a look from the future, a realization that we were facing a change and were soon to be longing for this "miracle of friendship." Yet the shift from an era of sacrifice to an era of selfish individualism is not as sudden as it may seem; the seeds of evil were already sown in the past, and now are directed to one's own people rather than the enemy. At the beginning of the 21st century Shaham returns to "Shiv'a Mehem" and interprets it as a story about the transition from a society whose members are willing to sacrifice their lives for each other to a capitalist society ruled by competition and progress at the expense of others.³⁶ In a 2012 interview, just before he was awarded the Israel Prize for Hebrew Literature and Poetry, Shaham simply stated that when he was writing the story "capitalism had seemed to me like a minefield."³⁷ However, both the story and the play suggest that the "capitalist" divisiveness, following the foundation of the State of Israel, had merely altered the face of evil, and not created it.

Thus, the mine, according to Shaham, is a metaphor for time and change, experienced by the generation who had undergone the transition to a sovereign state,

³² Nathan Shaham. *Sefer Hatum*, 200.

³³ Nathan Shaham. *Ha'elim Atzelim*, 82.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁵ Galia Yardeni. *Tet-Vav Sihot Im Sofrim* (Fifteen Talks with Writers). (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1982), 162.

³⁶ Rubick Rosenthal. "Natan Bahem Simanin: Mihu Hatan Pras Israel Nathan Shaham?" (Who is the winner of the price of Israel Nathan Shaham?) *Ma'ariv NGR* February 23, 2012. <http://www.nrg.co.il/online/47/ART2/339/998.html>. Accessed October 9, 2016.

³⁷ Yaakov Brown. "Mesatet Begush shel Shayish" (Chiseling a Marble Block). *Makor Rishon: Musaf Letora, Hagut, Sifrut Ve'omanut*. April 20, 2012. <http://musaf-shabbat.com/2012/04/20>. Accessed October 9, 2016.

but still effective in our time. The change takes place both in the connection between individuals and their society, and in the goals and ideology that underlie military activity.³⁸ The reading of the story as an expression of a generational crisis is emphasized by its first publication in the collection *Keshet Sofrim* (Writers' Bow). Among the warriors-writers whose pieces were included in it were Moshe Shamir, Aharon Amir, Haim Hefer, Dan Ben-Amoz and Matti Meged. It was Meged who voiced, in his essay "Adam Bemilchamah (A Man in War) the sense of emotional and moral bewilderment that also informs Shaham's story. Meged's essay focuses on "the boundary" in the experience of a generation whose values and way of life had undergone a drastic change. This boundary constitutes a dividing line that detaches the warriors "from their intuition about good and bad in their deeds and destiny."³⁹

Each and every one of the characters in the story and in the play stands for another aspect of this experience of a dividing boundary or schism: the legendary commander, whose death indicates the disintegration of the comradeship, the narrator's sister, who had loved the commander and now toys with Abbi's feelings in an evil much subtler than the evil of war, and most of all – Abbi. Wounded in body and heart, a "fighter all his life... forged of the same mettle that had defeated his friends, and who had now learned to see life from a vantage-point below the earth's

³⁸ For this aspect of the change, see Shaham's introduction to the play: "The action takes place at the end of winter 1948. Israel's War of Liberation is entering a new phase. Hitherto operations have been made mainly confined to destroying the enemy's transport and lines of communication; now the objective is to occupy territory. For the first time Jewish soldiers are taking enemy villages and key points, and holding them against counterattacks," Nathan Shaham, *They'll Be Here Tomorrow*. Translated by Israel Shen. (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, Department of Education and Culture in the Diaspora, 1957 [1949]), 1. For the nature of the different 1948 "wars" see Uri Cohen, "Unraveling the Wars of 1948." *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society* 18.3 (2012), 120-35.

³⁹ *Keshet Sofrim: Yalkut Ledivrey Sifrut Shel Sofrim Hayalim* (Writer's Bow: A Collection of Writings by Writer Soldiers). (Tel Aviv: IDF Press, 1948), 94.

crust"⁴⁰. Abbi is caught between times. He knew the old generation and "how every man's son of them took in the tactical, strategical, political and public-opinion aspects of each and every battle line."⁴¹ Yet after the conquest of the ridge and the CO's death, Abbi's group became "seized with the notion that its duties are done with."⁴² The narrator treats Abbi as a witness and survivor who should be given the best conditions for conveying his experience and processing it while acknowledging the deep rift separating present from past. It is then important that they should go back to the location where this crisis had occurred which for Abbi is a personal crisis as much as a generational one.

The chasm between what follows the change and what preceded it is more explicit in the play and the two types of commanders it depicts (Jonah and his deputy, Avi). However, in the story, the symbolic aspect of the characters is much more ambiguous, and the conflict less pronounced. It thus leaves space for other veins of meanings, other than the theme of change, to surface. I will consider these in the fourth part of this essay, but let us first briefly review the relation of the story to the play.

III: The Mine as a Dramatic Object: The Writer's Work

The play preserved the kernel of the story, mainly by using the minefield as its location. Yet the plot and characters had been greatly changed. Thus, the narrator's sister becomes Noga, the deputy's sister and the lover of the platoon's commander (now alive). The play ends with Noga injured by the explosion of a mine,

⁴⁰ Nathan Shaham, "Shiva Meham," 44-45; "The Seven," 99, with a slight change to Briksman's translation.

⁴¹ Ibid., 45; Ibid., 99

⁴² Ibid., 35; Ibid., 89.

transforming the incidental death of the unnamed operator into a conscious sacrifice. Shaham had consciously sharpened the "the truth hidden between the lines"⁴³ of the story – that as much as war tightens the bond between warriors, it also creates situations where "the death of your friend is your salvation."⁴⁴ This message surfaces in the dialogue and the extreme dramatic situations. In fact, the dramatic element – which calls for a theatrical adaption – triggered the writing of the story in the first place. The story was "apparently" born, as Shaham recalls, "from a challenge put to me by an elderly poet"⁴⁵ who sat with him and his young writer friends, and taunted them: "your life is fascinating, but your stories are boring."⁴⁶ Instead of telling about their lives, he sneered, they were philosophizing, "indulging in thoughts as deep as the ocean, which hang on a plot as lean and dry as a bone."⁴⁷ Shaham reacted to the challenge by promising to write a suspense story within two hours. Not knowing what to write, he walked home, but on his way an idea took shape, inspired by a recollection of a story he had heard, of a platoon caught in a minefield. "Mines," he recalls, "seemed to me perfect objects for a suspense story... but what plot should I weave around them?" Yet "within two hours the story was finished – eight notebook pages of dense handwriting."⁴⁸ Shaham published the story "without changing a word,"⁴⁹ and it has become one of his well-known pieces, and the basis for a play considered a stepping-stone in the theater of the Palmach generation.

⁴³ Nathan Shaham, *Sefer Hatum*, 200.

⁴⁴ Ibid., *ibid.*

⁴⁵ According to Nurit Guvrin, it was Efraim Dror (Troche) who had challenged Shaham after hearing him talking on Haganah radio about his experiences in the "Sasa Raid." *Kri'at Hadorot: Sifrut Ivrit Bema'agaleya* (Reading the Generations: Contextual Studies in Hebrew Literature). Vol. II. (Tel Aviv: Gvanim, 2002), 137.

⁴⁶ Nathan Shaham, *Sefer Hatum*, 199.

⁴⁷ Ibid., *ibid.*

⁴⁸ Ibid., *ibid.*

⁴⁹ Ibid., *ibid.*

A mine is clearly a dramatic object suited for a suspense story or a play, a sort of gun that should go off by the final act. However, Shaham's picking up the gauntlet thrown down by an elderly poet was only "apparently" the trigger for the story. Rather, it was conceived after his personal encounter with the evil engendered by the group dynamic. Indeed, the metaphoric value of the mine image surpasses its dramatic force, and Shaham seems to avoid exhausting the dramatic potential of the plot in the story. Thus, the romantic entanglement of the narrator's sister, the commander and Abbi is framed by the narrator's interior monologue and is not part of the story's events nor does it receive story time. Likewise, the commander, whose life could make a "fascinating book,"⁵⁰ is removed from the story right after the exposition. Shaham has often stated his inclination for everyday, dull material, and his preference for the "space of realistic compromise" over dramatic conflicts and, this is, in fact, how he explains his choice not to keep writing for the theater.⁵¹ Despite the intensity of its core situation, the story's appeal lies in the tension of waiting rather than in the conflict it presents, and the very existence of the tension is more important than its final discharge.

Moreover, in the play, the conflict and the dramatic situation take place in the present, whereas in the story it is in the past, distanced by time and memory, and framed by another narrative level. This structural choice foregrounds the condition of

⁵⁰ Nathan Shaham, "Shiv'a Mehem," 36; "The Seven," 90.

⁵¹ Yaakov Brown, "Mesatet Begush Shel Shayish." More evidence for this tendency can be found in Shaham's essay *Mul Aron Hasfarim* (Facing the Book Shelf), where he states his preference for fiction which deals with nothing, yet "fascinates like a suspense story," and expresses his admiration for the rare talent of "breathing life into the deepest type of boredom." "Anybody can tell an adventure tale" but "boredom is a challenge for the writer." *Dor Hamidbar*, 344. In his novel *Sidra* (Series), this view is voiced by Adam, a director determined to make a movie about "average people, forcing the viewers to take interest in their wretched lives." (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1992), 16.

narration and especially the location of storytelling⁵². While the play places the minefield offstage, and confines the events to the headquarters' building, both levels of the story take place in the minefield proper. The location of the frame story underlies the connection of space to the process of storytelling and, implicitly, to the writer's work. Choosing a dramatic setting, such as a minefield, is but one aspect of the writer's work. A deeper aspect is revealed by the presence of the minefield in the space of narration, which has to do with Shaham's identity as a Hebrew writer, formed by movement in the land of Israel.

IV. The Mine as an Object in Space: Walking the Land of Israel

The frame story of "Shiv'a Mehem" is a walk taken by the narrator and his "traveling (*tiyul*) companion" (33;86) in a day of "light wind" and "white clouds" floating "in the blue heights" (*ibid*;87). Going up a ridge that had been a battlefield the previous winter, they ascend a hill, passing by oak and carob trees, a deserted army camp, a battery of sand-bags, fresh grass – a mixture of nature and war. "The mountains had shaded their landscape, transforming into military posts," writes Shaham in another story from that year (*Krum Ha'adama* [The Earth's Crust], [1948]),⁵³ which focuses on the metamorphosis of nature by war. In the war, he observes, the landscape bears the names and numbers of a strategic space, and the

⁵² I therefore disagree with Gershon Shaked, who describes the story as an "interrupted monologue," inspired by Brener's *Atsabim* (Nerves), where the "the witness narrator is not important and his only task is to make the protagonist talk." *Hasipporet Ha'ivrit 1880-1980: Behavley Hazman, Harealism Ha'yisraeli 1938-1980* (Hebrew Literature 1880-1980: In the Pangs of Time, Israeli Realism 1938-1980). (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz HaMeuhad, 1993), 333.

⁵³ Nathan Shaham. *Dagan Ve'oferet*, 62.

ridge in this story – Camp 617 – is no exception. Like other stories by Shaham (e.g. *Krum Ha'adamah* and *Hamakom Vehazman* [The Time and Place]⁵⁴), the title of "Shiv'a Mehem" refers to the name of a place and it is, in fact, an etiological story. In a hushed voice, carried by the wind, Abbi asks the narrator if he knows why they call the place "The Ridge of the Seven."⁵⁵ Abbi's story answers this question. When it ends, they both walk down the hill.

The walk that forms the frame story is not only what triggers the narration of the inner story and introduces the reader to its setting. In fact, Abbi and his friend are walking while reconstructing a story about walking. Mines are objects in space that affect walking, and their aim is to limit movement. The map that indicated the mine's locations drew a hidden route underneath the "the crust of the earth (39;94)." Now that it is lost, the warriors sketch in their mind "some pattern or other for the field of mines," guessing "where you might walk safely" (40;ibid). In their attempt to avoid the routes made for the enemy, they keep to their own paths which "were trodden down in the grounds" (45;99). Abbi recalls how the "sole of my foot trembled each time before I ventured to bring it down to earth... But all at once I pulled myself together and began to tread the crust of the earth with excessive firmness..." while "all eyes were stealthily glued to the fateful point of contact between the foot and ground" (39;93-4). With these limits put on walking, no spontaneous movement is possible, and whoever ventures to try it is doomed. The operator's dance of

⁵⁴ Both tell the stories of Arab places whose names were changed to Hebrew names. See Meron Benvenisty's analysis of the role of naming in the project of Israeli mapping. "Hamappa Ha'ivrit (The Hebrew Map). *Theory and Criticism* 11 (1997), 7-29; *Sacred Landscape: The Buried History of the Holy Land since 1948*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2000).

⁵⁵ It may not be a coincidence that Shaham wrote the story not long after the death of the seven guards (*notrim*) in Yazur, on January 22, 1948 (The moshav *Mishmar Hashiv'a* [The Guard of the Seven] is named after them). Among them was Eliyahu Shamir, told about by brother Moshe Shamir in one of the stories in *Keshet Sofrim* ("Sharona").

spontaneous joy in the rain seemed to Abbi like "the dance of death" (47;101), and this is what it ends up being.

The theme of walking in the two temporal levels of "The Seven" is notable especially when considered in the context of Shaham's 1949 collection in which it was included – *Ha'elim Atselim* (The Gods are Lazy). While the story's first publication, alongside other warrior stories in *Keshet Sofrim*, indicated Shaham's belonging to a generation in transition, facing life in a sovereign state, Shaham's second collection of stories characterizes this generation as a generation of walkers. In "A Note for the Reader" which opens this collection, Shaham suggests that his characters are always a version of "this human protagonist, whom both of us met the other night on the main road, walking."⁵⁶ In a second introductory text, titled *Holchey Regel* (Walkers), Shaham tells about his travels in the landscape of Israel from his childhood in Tel Aviv to his school and youth organization field trips and "the tracks of sweat and blood" during the war. Shaham watches the landscape as it changes "from matter to symbol" – "bloody ridges... the spring from which we drank the land's soul, the wadi, which turned gray when we abandoned each other,"⁵⁷ an earth that became "my big fellow's death mask."⁵⁸

Shaham's concept of walking as a generational feature is interpreted by Moshe Shamir (in 1992) as a movement of migration of displaced nomads (which, in fact, brings to mind the wanderer in Nathan Alterman's oeuvre). "At that time it seemed that everyone walked," Shamir writes, "gripped by the horror of displacement, of

⁵⁶ Nathan Shaham. *Ha'elim Atselim*, 9

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

transition, of fatherlessness."⁵⁹ Similarly, Shaham depicts his (desert) generation as one that, in a state of internal migration, never reaches the Promised Land. In Yigal Schwartz's reading of Moshe Shamir's fiction, this state embodies the attempt to preserve the "soteriological tension" and the gap between the actual space and the desired place, thus justifying and ensuring the continuity of the Zionist project.⁶⁰ However, for young Shaham, writing when "the war continues even though there is no more battle,"⁶¹ it seems too soon for this kind of metaphorical insight, in which walking is contrasted with settling permanently. At this stage, walking for him is an actual act, which introduces him to new terrains in the land of Israel: "Only few of us city dwellers would understand how my generation, whose distances were truncated, had celebrated when butting the borderline. Yet we made it so far, to a summit, and now we have the right to breathe deeply and *look around*."⁶²

Shaham's "Walkers" introduction opens with a motto by "Bennie" (with no family name): "All over the world, the scout looks for the enemy. The Palmach's scout is looking for his homeland." Bennie is Bennie Marshak, the Palmach's political educator, or *pulitrok*, who would later be described by Shaham as someone who had "the rare talent to endow some acts with strong moral validity that, in fact, could be reconsidered."⁶³ Referring to this famous quote, in a book about Bennie Marshak, Shlomo Shva writes:

⁵⁹ Moshe Shamir. "Pahad Yitshak" (Isaac's Fear). In *Sefer Yalkut Hare'im*. Shlomo Tanai and Moshe Shamir (Eds.). (Jerusalem: Mosad Biyalik, 1992), 35.

⁶⁰Yigal Schwartz. *The Zionist Paradox: Hebrew literature and Israeli Identity*. Translated by Michal Sapir. (Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 2014 [2007]), 142-220. Cf. Gideon Aran and Zali Gurevitch and their distinction between "the small place" and "the big place" (throughout their essay). "Al Hamakom: Anthropologia Israelit" (On Place: Israeli Anthropology). *Alpayim* 4 (1991), 9-44.

⁶¹ Nathan Shaham. *Ha'elim Atzelim*, 11.

⁶² Ibid., Shaham's emphasis.

⁶³ Nathan Shaham, *Sefer Hatum*, 107

The hike had a military goal: getting to know the terrain, practicing; but it was also an expedition to discover the land of Israel. The foot pacing the desert, the mountain, the Negev's loess soil, the eye devouring the wide open space, the ears absorbing the sounds of woods and fields; the mouth licking up the springs, the tales, the stories, the history, the Bible, the bonfire at night – all of these also were the hike. Poetically speaking, it was a *consecration* ceremony between the Palmach man and his homeland.⁶⁴

The hike allows for a physical, sensuous – even erotic – connection with the land. Shva's interpretation of Marshak's statement reveals an aspect of walking, often discussed in environmental thinking, as an "embodied experience" of space.⁶⁵ Walking is a physical, bodily encounter with the body or "flesh of the world" (to borrow Merleau-Ponty's expression). "The village," says Thoreau, is "a sort of expansion of the highway, as a lake of a river. It is the body of which roads are the arms and legs."⁶⁶ And on the other hand, "I would have every man so much a wild antelope [whose skin emits the perfume of trees and grass], so much a part and parcel of Nature, that his very person should thus sweetly advertise our senses of his presence, and remind us of those parts of Nature which he most haunts."⁶⁷ According to De Certeau,⁶⁸ the tour, created by the walking person transforms the impersonal place into an experienced space. The abstract lanes of the map become embodied in a

⁶⁴ Shlomo Shva. *Bennie Ratz* (Bennie Runs). (Tel Aviv: HaKibbutz Hame'uhad, 1981), 121, Shva's emphasis.

⁶⁵ Glenn Morrison. "Songlines 25 Years On: Walking and Encounter in a Postcolonial Landscape"; John Ryan. "Recalling *Walden*: Thoreau's Embodied Aesthetics and Australian Writing on Place." *Journal of Ecocriticism* 3.2 (2011), 43-57.

⁶⁶ David Henry Thoreau. "Walking," 250.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 261.

⁶⁸ Michell de Certeau. *The Practice of the Everyday*. Translated by Steven Rendal. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984 [1980]).

personal, dynamic, sensuous and spontaneous itinerary, straying – like Thoreau's walks – from the boundaries and routes imposed upon the subject by the state. However, while being sensuously assimilated with the wild, Thoreau revives in his sauntering the tradition of pilgrimage in America, "The New Jerusalem." Likewise, the bodily connection of the Palmach scout with the land is a "consecration," intensified by "the tales, the stories, the history, the Bible." Putting it in Shaham's words, walking "in the footsteps of the Bedouin shepherd" is also stepping "on the stones Jacob put his head upon" (see above, p. 5).⁶⁹ Both nature and culture are part of the hike on which the scout discovers his homeland instead of the enemy.

Nathan Shaham returns to Bennie Marshak's words some decades later in his essay "*Siyur Alim*" (Foliage Tour):

Foliage tour (*Siyur Alim*) is an expression I borrowed from military jargon to denote the journey from north to south in the US to watch the changing colors of autumn leaves. By a slight letter change from 'violent tour' (a homonym of 'foliage tour' in Hebrew), i.e. an initiated encounter with the enemy by a scout border patrol in order to locate it and assess its size – it came to denote the experience of observing an ever-changing nature.⁷⁰

Recalling his Palmach tours "with the objective of assembling 'village files,' and locating access roads, mountain trails and water recourses," Shaham argues that they "were for me a foliage tour rather than a violent tour. These were journeys in which I got to know my homeland, a token of a simple, innocent, uncalculated love for my

⁶⁹ Cf. Aran and Gurevitch: "The Bible verses mediated between the foot and the earth, the open Bible in the field preserved the tension between 'the' place and the place." "Al Hamakom: Anthropologia Israelit," 32.

⁷⁰ Nathan Shaham, *Sefer Hatum*, 107.

country."⁷¹ It seems that they even made one forget one's claim for the land, as they were full with "an enormous curiosity toward the 'enemy,' who in this very homeland had paved paths that never failed you."⁷² The goal of these trips was genuinely "to get to know the country, its nature, inhabitants, and the color change of the seasons."⁷³ While their goal was gathering military knowledge, they gave the traveler an opportunity for "self-knowledge where I kept testing the limit of my strength."⁷⁴ Moreover, the role of a scout exempts "the man of letters from the bad conscience of someone who has realized that he prefers the role of an observer in a generation called upon for an active service," as his job was merely "to observe and record." In that sense, the work of a scout is "similar to a writer's work."⁷⁵

The expression "violent tour" will reappear in 1991, when Shaham will use it to differentiate his generation, innocent in their romantic longing for unexplored territories, from contemporary hikers who presume to share their predecessors' walking ethos. "The same lofty words, taken from the same sources, inspired by the same covenant, are used in the last decade of this century by hikers who, arms in hand, pass by the Arab villages in order to escalate animosity and accelerate the last battle on Greater Israel."⁷⁶ By perpetuating the imperative to walk, these new settler-hikers hint to the Labor Zionists that they have "abandoned their [the Palmach's] values."⁷⁷ However, Shaham argues, although the settlers pretend to rekindle the

⁷¹ Ibid., *ibid.*

⁷² Ibid., *ibid.*

⁷³ Ibid., *ibid.* Cf. Shaham's interpretation of Marshak's quote to Moshe Shamir's. According to Shamir: "This statement is indeed a real jewel, a deep, subtle, pure truth – the truth of a generation who even when stepping on a snake, would know that this very snake and stepping on it are what define one's country and homeland." "Pahad Yitshak," 35. It seems that Shamir would not let go of the enemy even in a tour for the love of the country itself.

⁷⁴ Nathan Shaham, *Sefer Hatum*, 107

⁷⁵ Ibid., 108.

⁷⁶ Nathan Shaham, *Dor Hamidbar*, 217.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

passion of the past for walking, *his* generation had walked the enemy's trails "empty handed." If indeed history repeats itself here, he concludes, "the violent tour of the settlers... is a farce with the seeds of a tragedy."⁷⁸

Shaham's later perspective, an outcome of his encounter with walkers who while following the footsteps of his generation renounce the foliage tour and adhere to the violent tour, raises many questions: How should the Palmach's hikes be perceived in light of the ensuing trips at the end of 20th century?⁷⁹ Considering Shaham's feeling of "nostalgia for the present" and his premonition in January 1948 that "the future state is bound to fail me,"⁸⁰ how did he predict the act of walking in a sovereign state? Is there a "foliage tour" that is not a "violent tour"? What kind of knowledge is involved when traveling the land and how does one use it? "Shiv'a Mehem" seems to address these questions figuratively. The enemy's trails had filled the young Shaham with an "enormous curiosity" and they "never seem to fail" him,⁸¹ but what about the trails paved *for* the enemy under "the earth's crust," in "Shiv'a Mehem," in which an Arab prisoner marks trails for his enemies? What stands between the "uncalculated," spontaneous walk for the love of the land and the trembling of one's foot before venturing "to bring it down to earth," or the "excessive firmness" when one has resolved to overcome the fear "to tread the crust of the earth?"⁸² How do these two

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ For the tradition of hikes in the land of Israel, from the 1920s onward, as a means for territorial marking, see Rebecca L. Stein, "Traveling Zion," and Orit Ben David, "Tiyul (Hike) as an Act of Consecration of Space." In *Grasping Land: Space and Place in Contemporary Israeli Discourse and Experience*. Eyal Ben-Ari, Yoram Bilu (eds.). (New York: Sunny Press, 1997). The critical view of Stein, who links these hikes to the tradition of colonial trips, can be confronted with Nesiya Shafran's understanding of the Palmach's ethos of walking, in her book of trips to Petrah: *Hasela Ha'adam: Hamasa'ot Ha'asurim LePetrah* (The Red Rock: The Forbidden Trips to Petrah). (Jerusalem: Yad Yizhak Ben Tzvi, 2013). See also Aran and Gurevitch, 27-34.

⁸⁰ Nathan Shaham, *Dor Hamidbar*, 57.

⁸¹ Nathan Shaham, *Sefer Hatum*, 107

⁸² Nathan Shaham, "Shiv'a Mehem," 39; "The Seven," 94.

kinds of walking interact, and can they coexist? Who marks the paths, who knows about them, and who walks them? And how are these types of walking related to the task of the warrior-scout-writer?

Of the many issues suggested by the encounter of this story with the other texts I have mentioned, I would focus mainly on those that consider the issue of walking in the context of memory, knowledge and Shaham's identity as writer and former scout. Let us return then to the walk that forms the frame story of "The Seven," a story that opens with the narrator and his "traveling companion" going up the hill, and closes with them going down. This is a walk of remembrance, in the footsteps of warriors, who take part in it. The narrator encourages Abbi to talk, and Abbi appreciates the opportunity to tell his story: "Generally," says Abbi,

I have a particular affection for tracing back my own footsteps. My memory develops the more trifling details once photographed, and I can relive in imagination the powerfully expressive episodes in my life history. A second round. But now that I have come back to this spot, though the worst days in the war were spent here, something snaps in my consciousness, my fancy begins to conjure up a phantom variety of iniquitous folly, and I can't for the life of me put any memories of these days in order.⁸³

The remembrance walk, meant for "tracing back my own footsteps," is instead invaded by "a phantom variety of iniquitous folly." In the terms of trauma discourse, Abbi shares his feeling of the interrupted sequence of past and present, in which the structure of time collapses in on itself. The "iniquitous folly" of war, when warriors wished for their comrades' death, is still present in space. Abbi voices his personal

⁸³ Nathan Shaham, "The Seven," 88. "Shiv'a Mehem," 33.

traumatic fracture as well the sense of "boundary" in his generation's experience, in which the time of narration has been separated from the time of war, "not only by the passage of time, but by... the very nature of time."⁸⁴ However, this temporal cleft is also formulated in terms of space and walking. As in the time of war, Abbi wishes to keep to his own safe paths, already "trodden down in the grounds," but instead of a "second round," he is being diverted to the hidden, explosive trails in the margins of memory. Rather than tracing his own footsteps, he treads the lanes meant for the enemy. In "pure sauntering," says Shaham in 1966, one is "bound to tread ones own footsteps"⁸⁵ for "what a man sees in his homeland is not a picture but a narrative."⁸⁶ In "Shiv'a Mehem," treading the footsteps of the past issues no reliable picture, and the details "once photographed" cannot be developed nor unraveled in a narrative. They resist representation, repeating the inability to represent the space and mark its borderlines during the war, as symbolized by the loss of the map. This inability pertains, according to Hanan Hever,⁸⁷ to the play's main theme, which is the disrupted continuity of self vis-a-vis the other.

After Abbi's introduction, ironically dismissed by the narrator as indicating Abbi's inclination to psychology, he unfolds the events chronologically. Yet the end of the story disrupts the order of time – the past is dislocated, becoming the present, and the walk of remembrance turns out to be a walk in a minefield:

We began to descend the hill path. I thought about what I had heard,
and one point puzzled me:

⁸⁴ Uri Cohen. "Unraveling the Wars of 1948," 121.

⁸⁵ Nathan Shaham. *Masa Be'erez Israel*, 9.

⁸⁶ Nathan Shaham and Shmuel Katz, *Journey in the Land of Israel*, I.

⁸⁷ Hanan Hever. *Hasipur Vehale'om: Kri'ot Bikortiyot Bekanon Hasifrut Ha'ivrit* (The Narrative and the Nation: Critical Reading in the Canon of Hebrew Fiction). (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2007), 161-173.

'Something's wrong,' I told him, 'you said there were seven mines, but you only told about six of them.'

'The seventh hasn't exploded yet,' Abbi said in an undertone.

I was swiftly overtaken by a curious fright and slight shivers, which I checked by a mental effort. The surprise has stunned me, but more than by this, I was frightened to see a strange glint lurking in his eye.

But at the same moment I was struck by an another notion: possibly it was my imagination that had led me astray. I remembered that from the side of his right profile, at which I had been looking, I had been stared at by a glass eye.⁸⁸

What is the meaning of this end? Some readers (e.g. Shaked⁸⁹) assume that the glass eye implies that the victim of the seventh mine was Abbi, whose traumatic reaction to the events seem to prevent this injury from verbally emerging to the story's surface. In the first version of the story, in *Keshet Sofrim* (and in the English translation), following Abbi's dramatic revelation, the narrator wonders:

Why had he taken me there? Had he wished me to sense a bit of that dread they had been fated to bear, or had he in a spasm of despair determined to commit suicide in the presence of the brother of the girl he loved?⁹⁰

Shaham declared that from the moment he was challenged to write this story, he did not change a word in it, yet he did omit this paragraph from the 1949 book version, thus renouncing the dramatic potential it offered. Looking back on the story, Shaham

⁸⁸ Nathan Shaham, "Shiv'a Mehem," 47-8; "The Seven," 102.

⁸⁹ Gershon Shaked. *Hasipporet Ha'ivrit 1880-1980*, 333.

⁹⁰ Nathan Shaham, "Shiv'a Mehem," 47-8; "The Seven," 102.

keeps wondering: "Why had he taken him there? Had he wished him dead? Or had he wanted to convey something that words could not articulate?"⁹¹ This possibility, subtler than the ones offered in the original version, intensifies the effect of the mine image. It suggests that both the trip and the process of narration act out the trauma rather than working it through. They lead one to trace a deadly trail, rehearsing "the dance of death," in which a comrade is a potential enemy, and memory is but "a phantom variety of iniquitous folly."

However, Shaham merely suggests these explanations for Abbi's behavior, and leaves the gap open. He sustained the ambiguity by omitting these suggestions in the later version and by calling the place "The Ridge of the Seven," implying that, despite Abbi's announcement, all the mines were exploded. The reference to the glass eye stirs up even more speculations. Indeed, like any story, "Shiv'a Mehem" holds a range of possible bifurcations of the plot. Some were realized in the given story, some in the play, and some remain open, *in potentia*. The story thus embodies, in its form, the range of potential walking alternatives that the ridge holds: some latent, marked by someone who knew "where you might walk safely" (40;94), some are tentative and speculative, for this knowledge was lost, some were taken and proved to be lethal, and some are yet to be taken. The surface structure of the story, like the crust of the earth of the ridge, camp 617, conceals a buried knowledge. No one fully controls it, yet it is there to be discovered. Both actual and potential, the knowledge exists in the past, present and future.

The theme of knowledge and the control over it informs the very end of the story, when the narrator "remembers" Abbi's glass eye. It is the last in a series of injuries that unfold throughout the story. First we hear, in passing, that Abbi's right

⁹¹ Nathan Shaham, *Sefer Hatum*, 200.

sleeve is empty (36;90); then the narrator suddenly "remembers" that Abbi is crippled (37;91); when Abbi's profile contorted "with abhorrence," we learn that it had been "somewhat dislocated at the jaw by a shrapnel" (44;98). Later the narrator offhandedly mentions "the three remaining fingers" of Abbi's right hand, which he passes "across his brow" (47;101). It seems that as the horrendous events unfold, the evil that Abbi discovers in himself and his friends becomes more and more externalized, and like Dorian Gray's image, he becomes disfigured. This disfigurement is, in fact, an ironic twisted version of the "embodied experience" of walking the land of Israel. Instead of the hike, a sensuous, bodily, connection of the walker with his homeland – the foot pacing, the eye devouring, the ear absorbing, the mouth licking – we realize bit by bit that walking the earth claims one's own body – limb by limb.

The narrator, keeping from his readers the information of Abbi's injuries, as well as Abbi hiding from the narrator the truth about the seventh mine, are part of the power-knowledge game at the heart of the story. A dynamic of hiding and uncovering, guessing and knowing revolves around its main issue – the minefield which some are ignorant about. The crust of the earth is an encrypted text, whose code was lost. It is only by walking/reading that its secrets unfold. Years later, Shaham will describe the desert soil as "the brain of the world under its cortex."⁹² Also suggesting a knowledge latent in the earth, it is a benign version of the harsh image of the mines in "Shiv'a Mehem." Both connect the knowledge within the earth, and the ability to hold it and decipher its signs to the experience of walking. Both involve Shaham's identity as a writer and member of the Palmach generation.

⁹² Nathan Shaham, *Dor Hamidbar*, 11.

Reading the landscape as a strategic space, which bears names and numbers, is the scout's task. Being a scout in the information service did not only allow Shaham the position of the spectator. It was also similar, he maintains, to the work of a writer, who like a spy traces signs in landscape and people and records them. Yet can the narrator of "Shiv'a Mehem" – possibly modeled after the young Shaham – indulge in the position of an observer, listener and recorder? Can he maintain his sense of separateness which his father suspected him to have while his own feet are treading a minefield?

"Shiv'a Mehem" deals with the position of the writer-scout, even as it reflects the meaning of a trip, a tour and a walk in the "striated" landscape of the land of Israel. This landscape is a net of visible and invisible paths: the paths of the enemy that, surprisingly, never fail you, hidden paths that make your friend an enemy, and the explosive paths of memory which whoever ventures to walk keeps treading – with a trembling foot.