

She Talks to Them Sometimes

Chana Cohen is a small thin woman. She raised her two sons magnificently, and in one week lost them both. There are no tears or high-sounding phrases from her.

Yair Cohen was the eldest. He worked with his father in a book-binding shop where he tried to improve the method of work so that it might be easier for his father, who was not in the best of health. The young man had spent his childhood in Ramat Gan (from which quite a few "Panthers" came) and there he received a well-rounded education. Before being drafted into the army he had begun to study engineering.

The family could not understand how Yair got to the front at all. He served as a store-keeper in Nachal (*pioneering army youth*) and on Yom Kippur he did not wait to be called. He left his talit (*praying shawl*) in the synagogue and went out to wait. His mother tells that since his release from the regular army he had not been called up for reserve duty Then how did he suddenly come to serve as an artillery-man?

No one came to inform them about how it happened. The only one who knows is the neighbor, a driver, but he is silent. In a letter written by Yair's commanding officer it only says that he fell in the holding action against the Egyptian army in the northern sector of the Suez Canal when the gun he was manning exploded. "*The explosion came in the midst of shooting*", says the letter.

The mother wrote to the officer and requested further details, but no answer was received. The family pieced together, from various stories, that Yair was seen "down south" looking for his brother who was in the regular army.

His sister Ruthie, a mathematics student, tells that Yair's talents in mathematics were outstanding and he always enjoyed working out problems with her. He always used to say that when he had time he'd study economics.

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Meanwhile he worked with his father. He was the type of person who would thank you "even for a glass of water".

The younger brother fell in the armoured brigade columns. On Yom Kippur Eve he completed half a year of serving at the canal, and he was about to return home. His letters home were full of homesickness, especially for his mother. He always inquired about everyone.

Amnon was an outstanding gunner. In a practice session he got 97 out of 100 points. He studied engineering; a subject that requires at least five years of study. Due to that he could have postponed his army service, but did not. He ended his studies and was drafted so that he might get to the Technion sooner.

Today, after the death of the two, the father's book-binding shop is in bad shape. The Ministry of Defence sent a cheque for 124 lirot! Still the family's spirits have not fallen. The mother tells that during the seven days of mourning the house was full of people, but today it is empty. Few people ever bother to visit now. She says that sometimes she finds herself talking to the boys who are no longer there, in order to keep up her spirits. She even continues to wash their clothes. *"They sent us a psychologist"*, she says, *"but I am more of a psychologist than he was"*. She is not like others who are in a state of shock over the death of one son. Her tears are shed in secret.

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