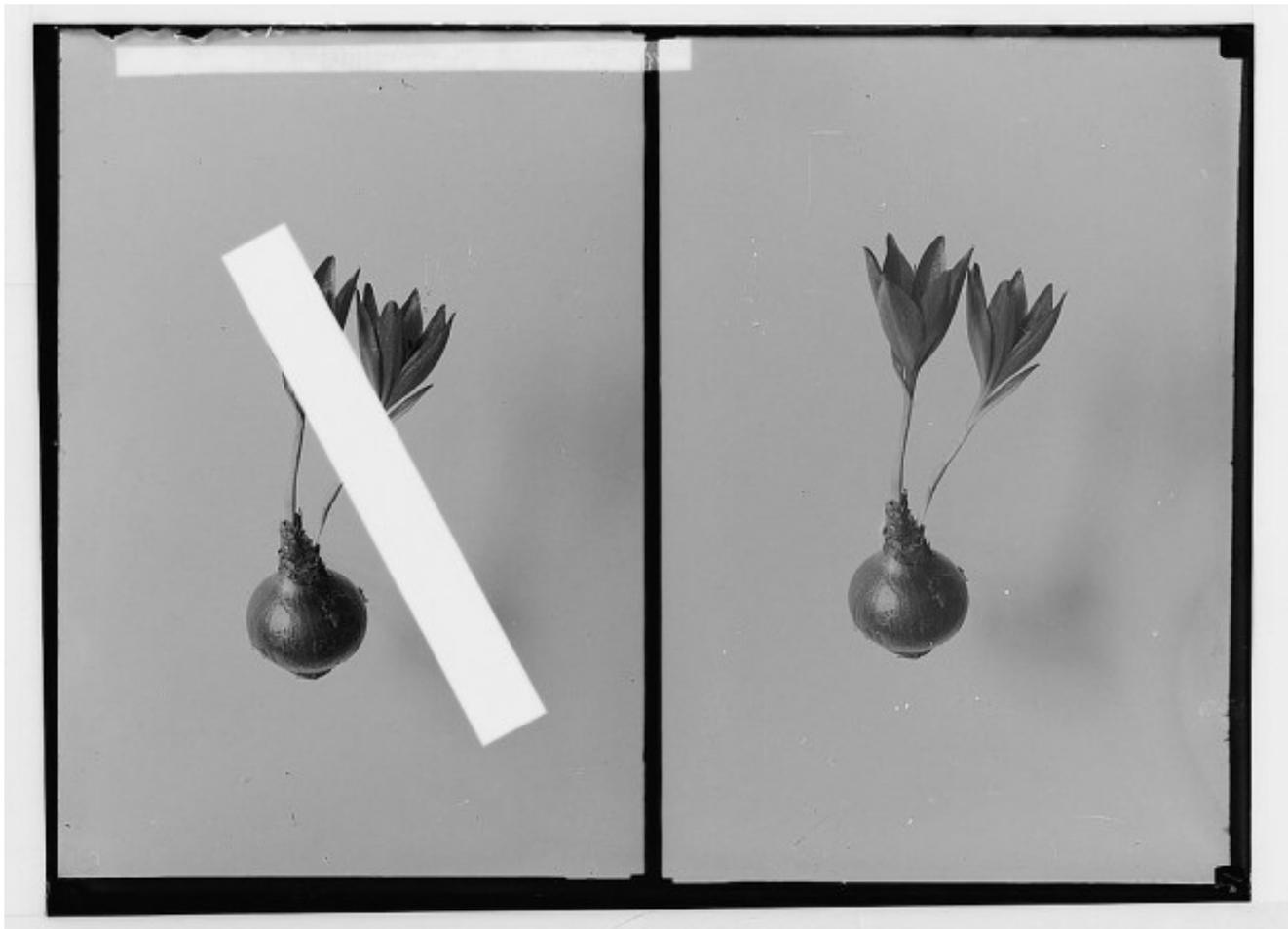


## To the Galilee

A new English translation of fiction by Nobel laureate S.Y. Agnon, for Lag BaOmer

By [S. Y. Agnon](#) | May 6, 2015 12:00 AM





Wild flowers of Palestine. Yellow amaryllis (*Sternbergia Clusiana* Gawl). (Matson Photograph Collection, [Library of Congress](#) )

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1.

After a few years in Jaffa and her settlements and in Jerusalem and her study halls I decided to go and see the Land—the **Kinneret** and **Deganya** kibbutzim and their inhabitants, who have added two settlements to the existing thirty-seven. I had too little money to hire a donkey to ride on or a wagon to travel in, but I had plenty of time, so I decided to make my way by foot.

I timed the trip to celebrate Lag BaOmer in Meron, because I still remembered something of what I had heard in my childhood about the spectacles and wonders witnessed on Lag BaOmer night at the tomb of **Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai** .

I placed a loaf of bread and some olives in my pack, took my walking stick, **and locked my door** . I placed the key on the windowsill behind the blinds, so if a friend came to visit and found me away he could still find the key, open my room, and find himself a place to rest. It was the custom in the

Land in those days that a person could always find lodging with a friend—if not a proper bed, then at least a floor to sleep on and a roof above his head.

I departed Jaffa and walked nine hours to **Hadera** . Arriving at night, I found a place to sleep at a roadside inn leased by an Arab. I bathed my feet in hot water, rubbed them with olive oil, ate some of my bread and olives, spread myself out on the straw up in the loft, and slept soundly until morning when I was woken by the shouts of the Arabs and the screeching of their camels.

I wanted to climb down from the loft but I could not find the ladder, which the innkeeper, fearing I would skip out on the bill, had removed. I called out for him with seventy different names used by Arabs, until I hit upon his name. He brought the ladder and I climbed down.



I went out to the courtyard and washed my hands and face, drank two or three mugs of black coffee, and paid the lodging bill, hot water bill, and coffee bill, then headed off to synagogue. As they say in the Land of Israel: If you wish to meet the founders of any settlement go to its synagogue.

I took my staff and pack and I walked to **Zichron Yaakov** , arriving toward the end of the day. While looking for a boarding house I found my hand grasped by that of **Reb Chaim Dov** , who said, “I just mentioned you and here you are!” I asked him how this came about and what he was referring to. He said, “I saw a man walking, and I said: There’s a Jew afoot. Come on home with me and we’ll have a hot drink, and if you don’t object to praying in Sephardic Hebrew, we can go to synagogue for the afternoon prayers.”

I went home with him. He set the table and served me a few cups of tea, fig jam, and a slice of cake left over from the Sabbath. To arouse my affection he reminded me of things I had told him when he had visited the **Hovevei Zion** office in Jaffa, where I served as secretary. He also told me of the things he had seen in Jerusalem, during the time when all of Jerusalem was still contained within the Old City walls.

On the way to synagogue I had wanted to find a place to lodge. Reb Chaim Dov asked, “Is the lodging you’ve found so disagreeable?”—Which lodging is that?, I asked him.—“The one where we drank tea.” I told him I feared that the geese would poke me with their feathers in the pillows, for surely they were cross at having been slaughtered, and their feathers plucked to fill pillows and quilts. Reb Chaim Dov, aside from being the town’s rabbi, was also its kosher slaughterer. He replied, “My friend, if had I a feather pillow it would already have been hocked at the pawn shop.”—“Do we have pawn shops here in the Land of Israel?”—“Neither pawn shops nor geese to make pillows of their feathers. But as for the mitzvah of welcoming guests, don’t fear that I’ll place rocks under your head. In any case, it’s already time for the evening meal. Come and we’ll eat.”

We sat and ate the food brought by the mistress of the house, and we spoke of all the things that occupied Jewish life in those days. Those things that are known are known, and those that are unknown are best left secret so as not to arouse Satan’s interest.

After breakfast I took my staff and pack and rose to set off on my way. Reb Chaim Dov, who had thought he had arranged to host his guest for the Sabbath, discovered that the guest was abandoning him and he would have to spend the Sabbath without hosting guests. He also regretted being unable to escort me on my way, as he had to remain at home to answer the many questions of Jewish law that present themselves on the Sabbath eve.

2.

I left Reb Chaim Dov and Zichron Yaakov and set out on my way. Because it was erev Shabbat, and I was hurrying to reach Haifa before sunset, I lacked the time to visit those surrounding, modest villages of **Shfeya** and Em HaGamal (that is, Umm el-Jimal, which is **Bat Shlomo** ).

Yet Shabbat reached me as I reached Haifa. I was told of an appropriate inn, went there, and asked if there was room for me. "For you and another twenty just like you." I laid down my pack and my staff and entered a large hall marked "Dining Room."

Although the Sabbath had already begun, there was no sign of the holy day in the hotel. I hadn't brought Sabbath clothes with me, so I dusted off what I was wearing and paced about the room thinking, "So here I'll spend the Sabbath."

The room was long and high-ceilinged. The windows were opened but covered by iron bars with flakes of rust on account of the humid Haifa air. By the light of the recently set sun they glowed bronze. There was no breeze.

The innkeeper's wife spread a cloth on the table and set down two tin candlesticks. She kindled and recited the blessing over two candles, then recited many prayers and petitions. I wished her Shabbat Shalom, she wiped her eyes, blessed me in return, and left.

I was left alone in the room. The Sabbath candles barely lit the large room. I took out my small siddur and welcomed the Sabbath in prayer.

Hunger began to press at me. Since breakfast I hadn't really eaten much. Looking out the windows I saw it was already night, yet looking at the door I saw no one arrive to set the table. I got up and went into the kitchen.

I found an Arab woman and asked her when dinner would be served. She looked at me as one who hears but doesn't understand. I asked where the innkeeper's wife was and the servant said, "Here she comes."

The hostess entered, saying to the servant, "This traveler wants to eat." She then asked me, "What, for example, would you care to eat?" I told her, for example, a Sabbath meal, with wine for Kiddush and two loaves of challah. "Wine I can provide, but not challah." Why not? "Why not? Because not even one slice remains from last week, and I didn't manage to do any baking for this Shabbat. But if you wait until my husband arrives, perhaps he found some at the baker's. In the

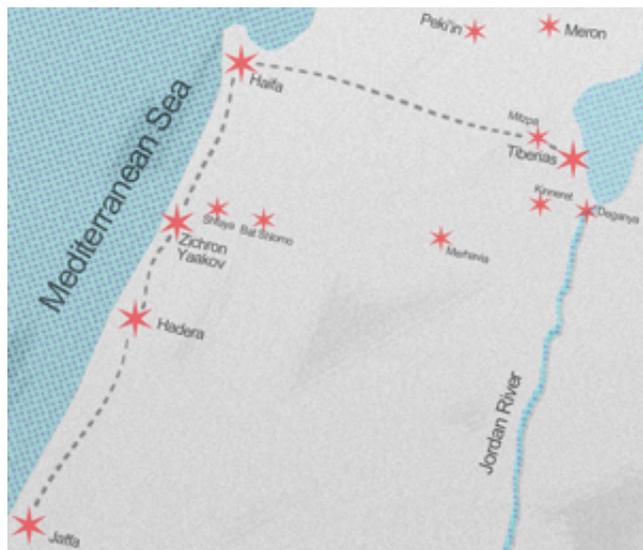
meantime, if you're hungry, I can give you sardines and plain bread."

I remained silent, saying not a word.

The hostess said, "When I was a girl, Sabbath in Father's home boasted more guests than we now host in an entire week. And each guest would find meat and fish and all types of tasty treats. Afterwards father would pay *them* for having allowed him to perform the mitzvah of welcoming guests. And now his daughter receives payment from her guests for each and every slice of bread they eat under her roof. A person moves to the Land of Israel to increase his mitzvot, and in the end he cannot keep even those mitzvot he would have fulfilled in Exile. I saw you looking at my tin candlesticks. Those aren't the same candlesticks I brought from my father's home. Those were made of silver but were sold off the first year we arrived here in the Land of Israel. The ones I lit tonight were purchased from a woman who returned abroad last year. In the meantime what did I use as candlesticks? Don't ask, my friend, don't ask. If my heart didn't break from embarrassment, the earthenware candlesticks I used at that time broke on account of my anguish. Now, thank God, we live like most of those in the Land of Israel—neither with comfort and wealth, nor with paucity and poverty."

I forgot my hunger and listened to the words of the innkeeper's wife, who spoke with me and with herself.

She went on, "We don't live in riches and honor, but you can understand from what I'm saying that I do not seek riches and honor. I've left those desires behind in the Exile. Yet I do have one regret. Back then I would awake each morning to the tune of the Talmud page my husband would study, as he sat learning from a large volume of Talmud. And now, *oy*, if only ... Here he comes."



[Click to enlarge map](#) (Tablet Magazine)

A tall, thin man with sunken cheeks and a trim beard entered. He greeted his wife with "Shabbat Shalom" and took out three or four large loaves of bread. She set aside two and placed another two loaves under an embroidered cover, which barely covered them. The innkeeper noticed me and said, "A Sabbath guest! We must greet him with 'Shalom'—but first we must give 'Shalom' to the heavenly angels," and he began pacing back and forth as he sang "*Shalom aleichem malachei ha-shalom ...*," to welcome the Sabbath angels into his home.

When he finished singing he welcomed me as well, saying, "I will bring the wine right away so we may recite Kiddush and eat. Surely you're hungry. I tarried too long in synagogue and then afterwards at the baker. And both for the same reason. There was a disagreement between the shul-goers and the baker—their wives complain that the baker's bread is crumbly, and he says they get what they pay for."

He took a ring of keys and opened a cupboard, removing a bottle of red wine. Raising the bottle to the light he filled a large cup, stood, recited Kiddush, drank, and gave his wife to drink, after which she set the cup on the table. "I'll pour for you as well," said the innkeeper. "You needn't fear, there's no one here to catch you performing a Jewish custom."

After the blessing over the bread the hostess went out to the kitchen and returned with the servant and whatever it was that they brought with them. She said, "Here in Haifa we have the Sea, which certainly contains fish, yet fish for Shabbat—we have none. What did I make? A certain dish that, if you wish, tastes like fish—even though there are none."

The innkeeper added, "There's a certain guest here at the inn who really knows how to sing. If he would eat with us he'd enhance our meal with delightful Sabbath hymns and melodies. However sitting with a man who lights up a cigarette between courses on Shabbat—well, even an innkeeper dependent on paying guests can't tolerate that! Back in the old country, where he was a cantor, he would never have dared to smoke in public on Shabbat, but here he acts wantonly since he isn't under the watchful eye of his townsfolk. A person can do whatever he wants in his own room, and I'll turn a blind eye, as long as the police don't get involved, but at my Shabbat table I want Shabbat to be Shabbat."

Another man entered and said with a pleasant voice and smiling face, "Shabbat Shalom!" Noticing me he added, "I see you've found a Sabbath guest. Have others come with you? Are you angry with me? Is that why you don't answer? Wait and I'll make it up to you with a good cigarette." The innkeeper said, "Isn't it enough, Reb Velvel, that you desecrate the Sabbath yourself? Why lead others into sin? Take something to eat and we'll have you join us as the third man for Grace after the Meal."

Velvel answered and said, "Whoever has filled his belly with Haifa's tasteless bread, and the other food Haifa fills guests' stomachs with, couldn't possibly eat even one more bite. But if you'd like I'll sing *Shir HaMa'alot*, the opening psalm to the Grace." The hostess asked, "Sing for us the tune you sang for the Rebbe from Galicia." Velvel answered, "Let me first tune up my voice with a cup of wine."

He drank and said, "You can't say that the wine of the Land of Israel isn't actually wine, but I'm uncertain if the food of Israel is actually edible. Madam, tell this good gentleman what the Rebbe said about my tune for *Shir HaMa'alot*. Rebbes are used to the presence of angels, so when a rebbe says that even the angels enjoy my singing it surely must be the case. **The men sent by Moses to spy out the Land** were fools not to bring back foods from the meal prepared for me by your Arab woman. Even Caleb couldn't have argued with them when they criticized the food of the Land of Israel."

The innkeeper washed his hands before reciting Grace, and the cantor sang the psalm. His voice was lovely. He neither cut short nor repeated a single word. His voice matched the lyrics perfectly.

The hostess said, "I could sit here listening all night long." Velvel asked, "Even before the meal had been served?" The innkeeper said, "Forgive me, Reb Velvel, but it's a shame that such a lovely voice

is found in a throat such as yours.” Velvel replied, “Silence, Reb Dov, silence. If God has given a Jew such a nice singing voice, all of Israel should rejoice in it.”

After the Grace the hostess brought tea and jam. We sat drinking and talking about the affairs of the Land, the weather, and the like.

The room was hot, and the air was stifling. Velvel stood up to open a window, only to discover that it was already open. He went to the next window, and found it was open as well, along with all the windows. “It’s amazing that the emissaries of the Land don’t mention among the praises of our country that the wind never once extinguished the Shabbat candles! Now, my friends, I’ll go up to my room and get into bed to enjoy a good Sabbath sleep. Too bad that the mosquitoes and flies don’t know the importance of Shabbat rest, for they act on the holy day as if it were no different from the six workdays. By the way, my dear guest, have others arrived with you on the boat?” The innkeeper answered, “The ship from Jaffa is delayed but we expect her at any moment now.”

3.

That night I awoke to discover another man sleeping in my bed. I jumped up with alarm, asking him what he wanted! He answered, “To go back to sleep is what I want.”

The innkeeper entered and said, “What should you care if another Jew should have a rest? He’s tired from his journey and wants to sleep.”

I replied that he should rest in peace on the bed. “What about you?” “I’ll stretch out on the floor,” I replied. The innkeeper said, “The floor is made of stone and gets chilly at night, you could catch cold. Doesn’t the Talmud state that one should never sleep on the floor? Also, you should be careful of scorpions, which crawl out of their holes at night with their deadly stings. But if you insist on sleeping on the floor I’ll bring you a pillow and blanket. See, the guest is already asleep—he was very tired from the trip. The ships that bring people to the Land are like the Land itself: They wear out their passengers.”

4.

In the morning I walked to a small synagogue in the lower city. Haifa was then still a small town with a small population, mostly Sephardic Jews. All of the other worshippers, except me, were Sephardim. There was one fellow—perhaps he was Sephardic, perhaps Ashkenazic, but in all cases he wore an Ashkenazic-style tallit.

5.

On my way back to the hotel from synagogue I met a certain man. He extended his hand, greeted

me, and asked, “Aren’t you embarrassed that you’re in Haifa and haven’t come to visit me?!” I explained that I had arrived in town right at the onset of Shabbat. “Where did you spend the night?” I told him on the floor of a certain hotel, to which he said, “You could have found a floor at my place, but with fewer mosquitoes than in that hotel. My room is small, but there’s enough space for a man and his friend. I’d be glad to show you some hospitality and repay the favor you showed me when I stayed with you in Jaffa at the annual conference of [Poel HaTzair](#) . Let’s go eat and drink a bit, then we can take a walk and see the city and all our friends here in Haifa. It’s true, I’ve since left the party, but I haven’t left my friends. A person can change his political positions, but never his friends! I still subscribe to the [Poel HaTzair newspaper](#) . Whether I agree or disagree with what’s published in it I still read the whole thing. Either out of habit or because there’s no newspaper in this country that isn’t a mouthpiece for one political party or another. Oh my, you must be hungry and here I am going on and on about philosophy and sociology. Let’s go eat before the olives and cucumbers get cold!”

We ascended and descended the ups and downs of Haifa until we came to a row of old houses. My friend took out a big key and opened a door that wasn’t readily opened. “This isn’t Jaffa,” he said, explaining, “Here you have to keep your door locked against thieves. Unfortunately the key is iron and it rusts. I’ve thought of having a brass key made, but all week long I’m busy earning a living, and on Shabbat when I’m free from work I cannot work because I swore to my mother on her deathbed not to desecrate Shabbat. She derived little pleasure from me in her life; I can at least make it up to her after she’s gone. I don’t know if there’s another world called the ‘World to Come,’ but when I saw her face shine when I promised her I’d keep Shabbat, it seemed to me that I saw a reflection of that World to Come.”

We entered a room with a table, chair, stool, and upturned crate covered with a colorful oilcloth, on which were piled some clothes. He moved the clothes and said, “We’ll clear a place here for the master of the house and seat our guest in the master’s place of honor. Now let me show you the grandeur and splendor of my palace.”

He drew aside a curtain, made out of old burlap sacks, and showed me a room full of junk, work tools, a long table, and cookware. He looked at me and said, “Go ahead, stand in awe! I’m the only one of our friends in Haifa, surely also those in Jaffa and Jerusalem, who can boast of having an apartment with two rooms. Now let’s take out all the hidden goodies in store for us and enjoy the Sabbath meal.”

He bent down and removed wine and almonds and placed them before me on the table, and then brought cups and two brass weights to crack the nuts. We drank wine and ate almonds, sitting and talking about our friends in [Merhavia](#) , Kinneret, and Deganya, who have expanded our borders with land and Jewish labor. We had seen some of them in Jaffa the previous Sukkot at the Poel HaTzair conference, and others we’d seen through their work in the kibbutzim they had founded. (If “all the children of Israel are friends,” how much more so all those in the Land of Israel are friends, whether from Poel HaTzair or [Poelei Zion](#) . When you start talking about any one person you discover how he is unique in his own special way. One idea, one thought, brought each of them to the Land, although each came to that idea or thought in his own way, and each

came by his own path to the Land.)

Suddenly my friend jumped up with alarm and said, "I forgot that you must eat! I'll bring our lunch right away, but I must first let you know that you won't find any of the 'geese, quail, and fish' mentioned in the Sabbath song. In fact you won't find any hot food here because of my promise to my mother not to light fire on Shabbat. If you want to know what we do have to eat, I can open a can of sardines, or we can start with salad, and then move on to the main course, rice with sugar, raisins, and cinnamon, which I made before Shabbat. Don't worry that there won't be enough for both of us, since I made enough to last me a few days."

He went out to the next room and returned with olives, cucumbers, oil, and a dish. He chopped the vegetables and mixed them together with olive oil, then garnished the salad with the large Zichron Yaakov olives, and fetched a big serving spoon, plates, and forks. We sat eating and talking about the Land and its produce, *the orange farmers dependent on the overseas markets*, and the vegetable merchants who import from the Arab growers. But we also made favorable mention of *Hana Meisel*, who, with her six daughters, established a farm for growing vegetables. It's doubtful that she'll be able to compete in the produce market, but it's still a good sign of a new initiative here in the Land.

We hadn't finished the salad before he brought the rice and cold cocoa. While we were eating and drinking he said, "If there really is a World to Come and a Garden of Eden and all those good things that believers believe in, my mother must be sitting there, smiling down at her only son, gladdened that he has kept the promise he swore to her and does not violate the Sabbath. Let's give her a bit of happiness and sing some Sabbath songs." He began singing, "*If I guard the Sabbath, God will guard me* ...," and one song after another. After all the songs were sung he added "*Master of all worlds* ..." in a tune he had heard in Syria. This friend was a sewing-machine repairman and would travel throughout Lebanon and Syria, and all the little villages cut off from the world. Time stood still as he told me fabulous things about those parts of the world and the people who live there.

After a few hours I told him how wonderful it was to sit and listen to all he has to tell, but that the time had come to return to my hotel. He said, "All this food is still here and you're already looking for another place? Even if they had prepared a big meal for you at the hotel others have surely come and eaten it already, for a boatload of Jews docked just last night. Ships come and ships go, these bring Jews to the Land and those ferry Jews away. If only 1 percent of those who arrived were to remain the Land would be overflowing with Jews. Maybe you met a certain Jew at the inn named Velvel Shumer? He was the cantor in our town. On account of disagreements between him and the synagogue leaders he left his position and came to the Land of Israel. Tomorrow or the next day he'll be returning to the old country and thus add one more set of lips defaming the Land, since he didn't find what he was looking for here. And what did he want? A pair of hands that never did a day's labor aren't suited to hold a hoe. And our synagogues aren't looking to hire cantors, since all Jews here are presumed to know how to lead the services. Tell me, what did you think of our meal? Wasn't it better than anything one can expect to eat at one of the hotels around here? Not out of commitment to *Tolstoyism* do I prepare my own food with my own two hands,

but because of my desire to settle the Land. Many of our friends have left because of the food in the local eateries, which causes all types of stomach illness. Now let's rest a bit, then we can walk about and see the town and her people, the Hadar neighborhood and the **Technion** , and if you have enough energy we can climb up **Mount Carmel** .”

Having been invited to stay I asked, What about you?—“What about me?”—Where will you sleep?, I inquired.—“Me? Oh don't worry, it's the nature of one's own home that he can always find a spot of floor between its walls. No matter how small my home may be it's enough for a man like myself. My friend, someone who's traveled to every spot in this land, and around foreign parts as well, is well trained to lay his bones down on any spot big enough to fit them. Anyone else would be glad to trade places with me, Shmarya Bengis.”

We hadn't a chance to even stretch out before he said, “*Oy*, what a shame, two friends meet and they waste their time sleeping. Let's drink a cup or two of cold cocoa, and by then it will have cooled off enough outside and we can set out to see the town.”

He filled the cups and began singing the praises of Haifa, nestled between the sea and Mount Carmel, and told me of the **new neighborhood of Hadar** , under construction. Six small, handsome homes had already been built, and six more were planned. Imaginative folks in Haifa foresee Jewish homes being built all the way up Mount Carmel. I can only wish it to be so. “The hottest part of the day has passed,” he said. “If you'd like, let's go and see Haifa.”

The hottest part of the day had passed, and a gentle breeze blew in from the sea. We strolled along the ascents and descents, one leading into the next throughout Haifa. **From one point we spotted the sea in all its glory, and from another point we eyed Mount Carmel** , covered in green bushes and crowned with a royal blue sky. Between the sound of the crashing waves and the noises of the city, the boats in the harbor called forth as well.

We passed the homes of the city, and through the Hadar neighborhood, the Technion, and the **German Colony** . Afterwards we ascended the mount by a path unknown even to the eagles.

That evening he brought me to the inn, where I gathered my belongings, paid my bill, and followed him back to his room.

We were both exhausted from trekking up and down the town and mountain. After our supper we went to sleep, the guest on the host's bed and the host stretched out on the floor.

6.

As I was about to blow out the candle Shmarya turned to me and asked, “Are you tired? Do you want to go to sleep?” I asked if he wasn't tired and ready to sleep. He replied, “Dead tired, but I can't fall asleep.” Why? He told me, “Let me sit next to you and I'll explain.”

I cleared my clothes off the chair next to the bed and told him to have a seat. Shmarya said, “No

need, there's another chair." I laughed and told him not to embarrass my chair by looking for somewhere else to sit.

He sat and said, "You mentioned that the innkeeper's wife had said that a person moves to the Land of Israel to increase his mitzvot and good deeds, and in the end cannot keep even those he was accustomed to perform in Exile. Isn't that what she said?" I told him that was it, more or less. Shmarya said, "It's the truth." I told him that from what I knew of his life I hadn't thought he had moved here on account of mitzvot and good deeds. Shmarya said, "Not on account of mitzvot and good deeds, but in order to work the Land of Israel. Maybe I mentioned to you that I was a villager back home, and I grew up working the land. Both my father's and mother's families as well. We had heard tales of Jews living off the land here. From that point on father would say, 'If only most of my days weren't behind me, I would sell my house and fields and take my wife and son up to the Land of Israel and buy myself a colony.' He became sick and died, but I have done what he did not live to do. I sold off my share of the inheritance and came up to the Land, but before I could purchase a plot of land I lost all my money. If you want to know how—some of the money at the hands of honest folks, and most of it at the hands of swindlers. I was suddenly left empty-handed and did as most of our friends have done, hiring myself out for work. The condition of our friends is well-known to you. So as not to discourage the Zionists abroad I never even hinted what's happened to me in letters to my mother or to my relatives. One day a letter arrived from mother, telling me that since my younger sister had wed and gone off to live in the city with her husband, there's no reason for her to remain behind with the *goyim* in the village. She asked me to purchase a small plot of land for her next to my colony, and build her a small dwelling where she could live out the remainder of her days, and at the end of a long life be buried in the Holy Land. So as not to delay her arrival, she asked that I begin construction right away, and she sent money to get started on building her a place with a bedroom and separate kitchen. I wanted to write to her and let her know all that has befallen me here, and how I've lost my money, but I didn't have the heart to disappoint her, so I told her I would do as she asked. One day a notice arrived from the **bank** that a sum of money had arrived for me and was awaiting my withdrawal to put to use. I told myself that it would be best to let mother's money sit in the bank. I won't lay a finger on it."

"One night I entered one of the regular restaurants where I take my once-daily light meal. While I was dipping my bread in sweetened tea a certain man sat down across from me and struck up a conversation."

What did he have to say? I'll tell you briefly. He believes it's a mistake for young men to run around looking for farming work. Not by farming alone is the Land sustained. We need craftsmen, and construction workers, and artisans, and metal workers. For example, he himself had arrived in the country to work in metal."

7.

On Sunday morning Shmarya and I went out to the market to find me a wagon ride to **Tiberias** . I

had walked the whole way from Jaffa to Haifa. If I had found a companion we walked together, if not I walked alone. Before the war a man could walk alone in the Land of Israel with no fear, certainly if he were near to the Jewish settlements. However, from Haifa to Tiberias there are no Jewish settlements except for Merhavia, and if you walk to Merhavia there's no chance you'll find someone to travel with from there to Tiberias.

We found one man who asked if we were looking for a wagon to Tiberias and told us he was at our disposal. I asked him how much it would cost. Shmarya cut in and told the wagoner, "Name your price for one passenger only." He said, "I don't ask for a thing, and my oxen can't tell one coin from another. Get ready, we leave in one hour." He went to wherever he went, and Shmarya and I went to collect my belongings.

I mentioned to Shmarya that I noticed the wagoner failed to name a price. He replied, "If he asks for too much at the end it's up to you to bargain with him. You'll offer less, he'll ask for more, in the end you'll reach a compromise and part in peace."

In less than an hour we'd returned to the market. The driver arrived with his wagon hitched to two oxen and told me to hop aboard. I said goodbye to my friend and got on the wagon with the wagoner. I no longer remember if he held the reins in his hands or not.

As the wagon set off he handed me a small siddur and said that he'd already recited the **Traveler's Prayer** that morning, but that since I hadn't yet said it I should do so now. "The oxen know the power of the prayer, and accordingly do their share of the journey's work."

When I returned the siddur to him I sat looking around. The Land is beautiful in every direction, and a man can't decide where to gaze first.

The oxen trod with ease and the wagon traveled lightly. I told the wagoner that if we kept up this pace we'd make it to Tiberias in time to recite the afternoon prayers. He explained that he lived in **Mitzpa**, but if I wanted he could bring me all the way to Tiberias. However, if I wanted to spend the night with him in Mitzpa, there was a bed for me and he could take me the rest of the way in the morning. "One shouldn't say such things out loud, but were it not for the holiness of Tiberias I would tell all our Jewish brothers there to leave the fleas behind and join us in Mitzpa."

While he was speaking the oxen stood still, not budging, while he continued to talk. I pointed out that the wagon had come to a halt. He nodded his head and said, "The wagon isn't moving because the oxen have stopped." I suggested he show them the whip. He said, "The animal knows its master's soul, which is accustomed to recite the afternoon prayer at the earliest possible time, so they've come to a halt. Do you think that they think I've forgotten the time? No, indeed, but they've stopped a bit early to give me a moment to prepare myself before I pray."

He got off the wagon, went to the oxen, patted their heads and horns, and spoke something to each of them. Since his words were spoken in a whisper I could not hear what he said.

He took a pitcher of water from the wagon, washed his hands, and said to me, "A pitcher like this is usually used to hold brandy. Since I don't drink anything except water that's what I fill it with—

for drinking as well as washing my hands before and after meals, and before prayer. If you'd like, have a drink, if you'd like, wash your hands and pray. Most people recite the afternoon prayer right before sunset, some on time, others a drop late. I have a strict custom to pray at the first opportunity once the afternoon begins, which I learned from our forefather Isaac, who was the first to pray in the afternoon, as it says, 'And Isaac went forth to pray in the fields in the afternoon .' Now obviously, since his prayer was answered, and Rebecca his bride arrived, and there was time for him to bring her home to his mother's tent, and marry her—all before sunset— clearly he must have been praying early in the afternoon. Now, my friend, that we've shared some words of Torah, let's stand and pray." He wrapped a sash about his waist and prayed.

When he finished he gave some food to the oxen. While they ate he stood by and said to me, "You see, my friend, they chew their cud like the kosher animals described in the Torah. Now, since they've eaten, let us eat something as well."

He opened a satchel, turned down its edges, and said, "Let's sit on this rock and eat. Take a look in the bag and you'll find some almonds, nuts, dried fruit, and seeds. Tonight at home we'll have bread. It is written in the Torah, 'Eat meat in the evening,' but what shall I do, being a vegetarian? Moses loved all Jews and he'll forgive me for transgressing his command. I see you've brought bread and olives. Have bread if you wish, but I only eat it once a day on weekdays."

At one o'clock in the morning we reached Mitzpa. After bringing the oxen into the barn and giving them their feed, he brought me to his own shack of a house, prayed the evening service, and then served us supper. In the morning he brought me to Tiberias, where he was headed to fetch his wife who was being treated at the hot springs there.

As we parted company I asked how much I owed him for the ride. He looked at me kindly and said, "My friend, you want to give me money and I don't wish to accept it. If you want to sue me over this disagreement in the rabbinical court they'll find you in contempt, so let's just call it even—you won't pay me money and I won't accept any money."

8.

A year later I traveled once again to Tiberias. I strayed from the path to go to Mitzpa and visit my friend. I arrived in Mitzpa but could not find his shack. When I tried to ask about him I discovered that I did not know his name. Either he had never told me his name, or he had told me and I had forgotten it. We remember the names of all types of people for no reason at all, but we can't remember the name of a man such as this?! My daughter, from my earliest memory I recall each and every person who ever did me a favor, and as I remember each person I remember his name. But it's astounding that this man, who brought me to Tiberias, and with whom I traveled for a day and night, whose bread I ate, and whose water I drank, who gave me a bed to sleep in, and in whose home I was a guest for the night, and his image stands before me in my mind's eye—he's the one whose name I can't remember?

One night around Lag BaOmer I sat in the study hall in **Peki'in** , resting my head against the wall out of sheer exhaustion, hoping to sleep. Suddenly I heard people entering the building. I realized that it would be impossible to sleep here, since they were coming to recite the **midnight prayers in mourning for Jerusalem** and in hope for Redemption. I thought I could walk to my friend in Mitzpa, and he would offer me a bed to sleep in. I rose and left, but had no strength to move. I stretched out on the ground, placed my head upon a rock, and was overcome by sleep. I said to myself that if I lay down for too long I'd never reach Mitzpa, but even if I did get going I still didn't know the name of the one to whom I was walking, and could not inquire where to find him. I washed my hands in order to **inquire of Heaven what this dream meant** . Before I could receive an answer I woke up and realized it had all been a dream.

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***Translated from Hebrew by Jeffrey Saks.*** Saks is the founding director of ATID. This original translation is forthcoming in a new anthology of Agnon's short stories, *Forevermore: Stories of the Old World and the New*, edited by Jeffrey Saks, to be published by the Toby Press in 2016 as part of its ***S.Y. Agnon Library*** , featuring the writing of the Nobel laureate in new and revised English translations. Saks' courses given at the Agnon House in Jerusalem are broadcast at ***WebYeshiva.org/Agnon*** .

*Shmuel Yosef Agnon shared the 1966 Nobel Prize in Literature.*

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