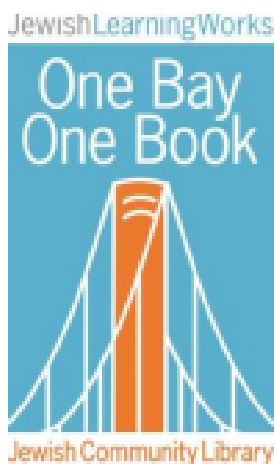


# Jewish Community Library

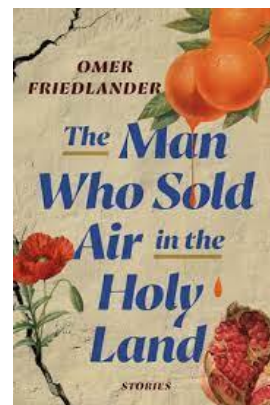
A program of Jewish Learning Works



The Jewish Community Library's  
Guide to

## *The Man Who Sold Air in the Holy Land*

by Omer Friedlander



Vivid characters spring to life in Friedlander's insightful storytelling, taking the reader from the narrow limestone alleyways of Jerusalem, to the desolate beauty of the Negev Desert, and the sprawling orange groves of Jaffa. Just in time for Israel's 75th anniversary, Friedlander's poignant and imaginative stories illuminate the intimate lives of people striving for connection, where real life moments of fragile intimacy mix with notes of the absurd.

One Bay One Book is a year-long conversation connecting Bay Area readers through discussions and events centered around a single title and its themes. We hope these stories will serve as a starting point for discussing such questions as:

- How do nuances among its diverse peoples shape the story of Israel?
- To what extent do mythical, historical, and personal connection to a place affirm or distort identity?
- Across generations, what are the impacts of fear and vulnerability, obligation and gratitude, exile and inclusion?
- How does the act of selecting which stories we tell affect our self-understanding, our audience's expectations, and the course of history?
- Are short stories an Israeli language of national expression?
- In what manner do short stories and longer fiction differ in conveying psychological complexity, meaningful connection to characters, and the narrative arc?

The following material is intended to enhance the experience of *The Man Who Sold Air in the Holy Land*. Incorporated is a [Book Group Discussion Guide](#) developed by the author and publisher. We encourage book group participants to explore the many valuable links related to *The Man Who Sold Air in the Holy Land* available on the Library's [OneBayOneBook.com](http://OneBayOneBook.com) website. (Click on Discussion Resources to find background context, book reviews, interviews with the author, and more. )

## A Letter to Readers from the Author

For a while I was preoccupied with figuring out why I wrote this story collection in English, my second language, rather than in Hebrew, my mother tongue. Hebrew is a fascinating language because it was used for prayer and ritual for two thousand years. It was a holy language, and it was considered sacrilege to even ask for a glass of water in Hebrew. It was revived as a spoken language only in the 19th century, and the gap between biblical Hebrew and its modern day equivalent is probably not as large as Chaucer's English and today's English.

As Amos Oz says, Hebrew is a minefield of biblical allusions. When you're writing a domestic scene about a son asking his parents for pocket money, you have to be careful not to bring in Isaiah and the Psalms and Mount Sinai. It is like playing chamber music in a cathedral, he says: there are a lot of echoes.

But Hebrew is also constantly changing and adapting. Many of the new slang words introduced into the language comes from military jargon, which is so prevalent in day-to-day life in Israel. As Yehuda Amichai writes, "To speak now in this weary language, a language that was torn from its sleep in the Bible... A language that once described miracles and God, to say car, bomb, God."

My decision to write in English, whether conscious or not, has to do with me feeling like both an insider and an outsider in Israel. I've never felt like I truly belonged in Israel, even though I was born in Jerusalem and grew up in Tel Aviv. And yet, even though I feel like a stranger sometimes, it is still my home, the place where the people's way of laughing and being friends and getting into arguments is most familiar to me. Writing in English allows me a certain distance that is necessary in order to be more probing and ironic, to see all the strangeness in particularity of a place, with its many contradictions and complexities.

## Discussion Questions about the Collected Stories

In his acknowledgments, Omer Friedlander cites the words of Israeli writer and peace activist David Grossman: "Every one of us has a kind of official story that we present to others, to strangers we meet, or even to people we know. . . . But if we are lucky enough to find a good listener, a sympathetic witness, then they will make us tell not only our official story but the story underneath it." Friedlander adds that his wish for this collection was to "unearth the hidden stories of individuals beneath the fossilized official narrative." Did you see that aim working through these stories—and to what extent do you think Friedlander succeeded in achieving what he set out to do?

How did these stories change or augment your understanding of what it's like to live at the center of conflict? How does Friedlander show us the experiences of people on both sides? To what degree do you think this collection overall is political?

Many of these stories reckon with the effects of change—to culture, language, geography, and heritage. How do you think the characters throughout the collection reconcile the old with the new, tradition with progress, the dead with the living?

Author Omer Friedlander is a twin. How do various sibling relationships play out throughout the collection?

Why does the author use the term, "the Holy Land?" What does it mean to you?

# “Jaffa Oranges”

## Summary

Enduring but suppressed remorse permeates the narrator’s memories of his place amid Jaffa’s treasured orange groves in the 1940s. His conflicted feelings about the affectionate-yet-resentful relationships between Muslim orchard owners and Jewish harvester families resurfaces when a tenacious young British Palestinian arrives to unearth the legacy of her family’s forced exodus from Jaffa. Darker memories threaten to burn through the mists of time, scorching a new generation. Friedlander exposes the deeply personal legacy of love and hurt smoldering among Palestinian Arabs and Jews.

## Discussion questions

Why do you think the narrator can’t confess his crime to Khalil’s granddaughter, even though part of him desperately wants to? How do you think she would respond if he did?

## Historical background and context

[Relations between Tel Aviv and Jaffa 1921-1936: A Reassessment - Journal of Israeli History](#)

[1921 Jaffa riots 100 years on: Mandatory Palestine's 1st 'mass casualty' attack | The Times of Israel](#)

[Geography of Israel: Jaffa](#)

[Jaffa orange - Wikipedia](#)

[Jaffa Oranges: A Political Allegory | Arab American Tribe](#)

## Jewish Community Library resources related to “Jaffa Oranges”

Cohen, Hillel. *Year Zero of the Arab-Israeli Conflict: 1929*. Brandeis University Press, 2018.

Hajaj, Clair. *Ishmael's Oranges*. Oneworld Publications, 2014.

Helman, Anat. *Young Tel Aviv: A Tale of Two Cities*. Brandeis University Press, 2010.

Kadman, Noga. *Erased from Space and Consciousness: Israel and the Depopulated Palestinian Villages of 1948*. Indiana University Press, 2015.

LeBor, Adam. *City of Oranges: An Intimate History of Arabs and Jews in Jaffa*. W.W. Norton, 2007.

Sakal, Moshe. *The Diamond Setter*. Other Press, 2018.

Film: Rozenbaum, Marek. *Jaffa*. Film Movement, Bizibi, Transfax & Rohfilm, 2010.

# “Alte Sachen”

## Summary

In picturesque Tzfat, the steep hillside home of ancient Kabbalists and centuries of their mystic acolytes, Friedlander reveals a modern incarnation of the ageless Jewish and Arabic tradition of junk collecting. It is not dishonorable work. Despite everyday encounters with foul-smelling and filthy stuff, there are treasures among the rough stuff—including opportunities for two maturing brothers to explore faith, friendship, self-reliance, and what matters most after their father’s death in the IDF.

## Discussion questions

Many characters in the stories in this collection process grief through repetition, from the brothers of “Alte Sachen” replaying their father’s voice on a cassette to the mother in “Checkpoint” repeatedly washing her late son’s military uniform. How do these acts of repetition (are they, in fact, a type of ritual?) help the characters? Where do you think the line falls for them between “healthy” repetition and perhaps less healthy fixation? Do you think it’s possible to truly move on from losing a parent or child?

## Historical background and context

[Word of the Day: Alte Zachen - Haaretz.com](#)

['Alte Zachen' Cart Now a Thing of the Past | Israel National News](#)

[Old Call for Old Things – The Forward](#)

## Jewish Community Library resources related to “Alte Sachen”

Klein, André. *Alte Sachen: From The Life Of An Arab Scrap Dealer In Israel--A Middle East Short Story* (available for download through the Library’s eBook program [here](#))

Film: Kadar, Jan. *Lies My Father Told Me*. Ergo, 2009.

# “The Man Who Sold Air in the Holy Land”

## Summary

Simcha, “the man” in Friedlander’s featured story, lovingly spins fantastical illusions, impractical schemes, and captivating adventures to shelter his daughter from the truth of his destitute circumstances. Conspiring together to ward off reality has its limits, however. (The reality on the ground has been grim: In the last decade, exorbitant housing prices, poor employment prospects, and widespread personal insolvency among Israelis sparked a grassroots protest movement of tent cities erected in upscale locations across the globe—including New York’s Central Park.) All Simcha’s creative pipe dreams have one objective: Keep his child close at any cost.

## Discussion questions

The title story is about Simcha, a man rich in imagination but poor in actual resources. How does Simcha’s imagination enrich his and his young daughter Lali’s life? How does it hinder him—and does it hold them both back? When is it appropriate to retreat to a fantasy world—and at what point must we set foot into the real one? How far would you go to sustain the deception of self-sufficiency?

“For the first time, Simcha wondered if, when they sold bottles of air to tourists, she had been the one humoring him, rather than the other way around,” Friedlander writes. What do you think of the dynamic between this father and daughter? And what about her mother, and Simcha’s wife? Did you see any reversal in roles in the story—does the child become something of a parent by the end, or does the imagination prevail?

## Historical background and context

[The Pros and Cons of Air Power – The Forward](#)

[Over 2.5 million Israelis live in poverty, among them 1.1 million kids, report finds - The Times of Israel](#)

[Israel tourism rebounds in July, still well below pre-COVID levels | Reuters](#)

[Show's over for Tel Aviv's Dolphinarium eyesore | The Times of Israel](#)

[Why Does Israel Have So Many Startups? - IEEE Spectrum](#)

## Jewish Community Library resources related to “The Man Who Sold Air in the Holy Land”

City Guide. *Tel Aviv*. Crossfields, 2006.

Cohen, Nahoum. *Bauhaus Tel Aviv: An Architectural Guide*. Batsford, 2002.

Ginzburg, Ira. *Tel Aviv City Stories*. Citikat Stories, 2018.

Senor, Dan, and Singer, Saul. *Start-Up Nation: The Story of Israel’s Economic Miracle*. Twelve, 2009.

Zeira, Joseph. *The Israeli Economy: A Story of Success and Costs*. Princeton University Press, 2021.

# “Checkpoint”

## Summary

The Jewish injunction, “May their memory be for a blessing,” is intended to console the bereaved. How does an Israeli mother cope with looping recollections of missed opportunities, failed connection, and the forever consequences of her child’s combat death? The narrator in “Checkpoint” muses about futile government policies, militarism, and strained relationships as she serves as a civilian observer at high-intensity border crossings. Does putting herself at risk offer subliminal compensation for the death of her son? A chance one-sided conversation with a young soldier who comes to her assistance offers an unexpected unburdening of long-repressed anguish, leading her to the possibility of personal peace.

## Discussion questions

In “Checkpoint,” the narrator wonders about the future of children on both sides of the long-term civil conflict. “I wonder how long it will take for him to harden, become bitter and angry, how many more humiliating days spent waiting at the checkpoint . . . until he begins resisting with a group of other boys from his village, throwing rocks at passing settler vehicles, and confronting soldiers with riot gear and tear gas cannisters and rubber bullets, until he’s hauled off to prison for throwing one stone too many,” she says of a Palestinian boy. Of an Israeli boy: “How long until he becomes resentful and inflamed, driving down the highway, his car pelted by stones thrown by Palestinian boys from the side of the road . . . how long until the child picks up a gun himself and, vowing revenge, takes the law into his own hands?”

How do you feel about the way the story depicts the conflict? What do you think it’s saying about the cycle of violence, i.e., how it begins and how it continues? Do you think turbulent futures are inevitable for these children? Why or why not?

## Background and context

[Israeli Women and Checkpoint Monitors Concerned about the Dignity of the Palestinians | Machsomwatch](#)

[Israel's Checkpoint Princesses - Al-Monitor](#)

[Group monitors Israeli checkpoints for abuse \(video\)](#)

[8 years later, fallen soldier’s family returns to Israel, now with deep connections - The Times of Israel](#)

[United in grief: the Jewish and Palestinian parents who are pleading for peace - The Jewish Chronicle](#)

[For Parents to Fallen Soldiers, Overcoming Grief Begins With Decision to 'Move On' - Haaretz.com](#)

## Jewish Community Library resources related to “Checkpoint”

Film: Shamir, Yoav. *Checkpoint*. Amythos Films; Eden Productions; Choices Video, 2005.

# “The Sephardi Survivor”

## Summary

The Shoah is Israel’s eternal tragedy, a living undercurrent coursing through social, political, and religious relationships and national policies. Although the unending impact of six million deaths ripples through contemporary generations of Jewish communities worldwide, Friedlander shines a light on Israel’s cultural emphasis on Ashkenazi suffering and the consequent impact on those who do not share that background. In this story, two elementary-age children of Mizrahi heritage scheme to convince an elderly European-Israeli to play the role of their relative for Bring Your Family’s Holocaust Survivor to School Day.

## Discussion questions

In “The Sephardi Survivor,” two brothers attempt to “kidnap” an old man in order to pretend they are related to a Shoah, or Holocaust, survivor. What is this story saying about the ways we—somewhat counterintuitively—sometimes wish to be more intimately connected to tragedy and trauma? Did you understand the boys’ impulse, however misguided it may have been? What does it say about their own sense of identity?

How do you interpret Yehuda’s adoption of new mannerisms at the end of the story. What does he mean when he says, “It’s never too late to change your story?”

Why does the Holocaust appear to be solely associated with Ashkenazis in the minds of the children, when Sephardic communities in Greece, the Balkans, Italian, and North Africa suffered terrible losses, too? Is this a fault of Israeli education, the mass media, Jewish selective memory, or racial injustice in the Holy Land?

## Historical context and background

[Holocaust Survivors and the State of Israel - Yad Vashem](#)

[Sephardim During the Holocaust](#)

[One-third of Israeli Holocaust survivors live in poverty, advocates say - PBS NewsHour](#)

## Jewish Community Library resources related to “The Sephardi Survivor”

Boum, Aomar, and Sarah Abrevaya Stein. *The Holocaust and North Africa*. Stanford University Press, 2018.

Krakis, Frederick J. *Legacy of Courage: A Holocaust Survival Story*. 1stBooks Library, 2003.

Kolonos, Jamila Andjela. *Monastir Without Jews: Recollections of a Jewish Partisan in Macedonia*. Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies and Culture, 2008.

Levy, Isaac Jack. *And the World Stood Silent: Sephardic Poetry of the Holocaust*. University of Illinois Press, 1989.

Molho, Ren. *They Say Diamonds Don’t Burn: The Holocaust Experience of Ren Molho of Solonika, Greece*. The Judah L. Magnes Museum, 1994.

Sarid, Yishai. *The Memory Monster*. Restless Books, 2020.

Sukary, Yossi. *Benghazi-Bergen-Belsen*. CreateSpace, 2016.

Film: Kirschen, Bryan, and Zaraysky, Susanna. *Saved by Language*. SBL Productions, 2014.

# “The Sand Collector”

## Summary

A young Jewish Be'er Sheva teen, who revels in the Negev's beauty and isolation, encounters a Bedouin boy in the dunes shortly after Israeli forces have withdrawn from the Sinai. Fascinated by his family's heritage and lifestyle, she returns again and again to the place they met. Their deepening friendship arises from mutual love of the desert. It is the perfect place to roam clandestinely—for her, as a curious and independent spirit, for him as a smuggler. Can their relationship flourish in such a forbidding landscape?

## Discussion questions

In “The Sand Collector,” Salim shows how he feels about Israelis altering preexisting names in the region, saying “We had our own names for our places,” he says, “and you changed them all.” How does this illustrate the impact of evolving language and the deeper meanings we seek to retain? Can you think of other places in the world whose names were changed by settlers, invaders, or outsiders—even though people were already living there? How does this illustrate the link between colonization and language?

“I hated how he kept saying ‘you’ and ‘your government,’” the narrator of “The Sand Collector” says, “as if I were the one personally tearing down his home.” How much responsibility do we bear for the damage our country or our fellow citizens inflict on others? In situations like these, what can—and should—a single person do?

## Historical context and background

[‘In our teens, we dreamed of making peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Then my friend was shot’ | The Guardian](#)

[Jewish, Palestinian-Israeli teens cooperate better after learning people can change, Stanford researchers say](#)

[Hebraization of Palestinian place names - Wikipedia](#)

[Palestinian names aim to keep occupied cities in memory](#)

[What’s in a \(Town’s\) Name? – The Forward](#)

[Israel's war on smuggling: Bringing order to the Wild South](#)

## Jewish Community Library resources related to “The Sand Collector”

Rifa'i, Amal, and Odelia Ainbinder. *We Just Want to Live Here: A Palestinian Teenager, an Israeli Teenager—An Unlikely Friendship*. St. Martin's Griffin, 2003.

Rabinyan, Dorit. *All the Rivers*. Random House, 2017.

Film: Shalaby, Mahmud. *A Bottle in the Gaza Sea*. Film Movement, 2013.

Zenatti, Valerie. *A Bottle in the Gaza Sea*. Bloomsbury, 2008.



# “Scheherazade and Radio Station 97.2 FM”

## Summary

In the midst of the First Lebanon War in 1982, a handful of credulous Israeli Reserves paratroopers is tasked with taking down West Beirut’s propaganda broadcasts—subversive tales cloaked as children’s programs. The radio station’s enchantress-announcer beguiles the soldiers, their individual fates bound up in the storied irreality of war.

## Discussion questions

Tales of Scheherazade are ubiquitous in Middle Eastern folklore. According to [Bristy Chowdhury writing in ArtUK](#), “Even though not entirely thematically suited for young ones, most children brought up in South East Asia and the Middle East are familiar with these stories. Some of the most popular tales are familiar across the world, including those of Sinbad the Sailor, Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, and Aladdin and his lamp. Though Aladdin, as we know the story, is not part of the original 1001 tales, the motifs presented within his story – magical flying carpet, wish-granting genie – are heavily represented in other tales. In an early example of a 'framing device', it is Scheherazade's story and narrative that binds together the rest of the 1001 stories.”

How does Friedlander juxtapose Israel’s pre-1980s mythology of strategic and tactical military superiority with the inescapable seduction, and ultimate folly, of war in Lebanon? What are well-known Jewish tales of sorcery and magic? How do they differ in symbolism and intent from 1001 Nights, and how might that dissonance affect the soldiers’ failure to appreciate their peril?

## Historical context and background

[Background & Overview of First Lebanon War](#)

[How Hezbollah Came to Dominate Information Warfare - RAND](#)

[Scheherazade: the story of a storyteller - | Art UK](#)

[40 years after the First Lebanon War, Israel's wounds still aren't healed - Times of Israel](#)

[Timeline: 1982 Siege of Beirut - NPR](#)

## Jewish Community Library resources related to “Scheherazade and Radio Station 97.2 FM”

Friedman, Matti. *Pumpkinflowers: An Israeli Soldier’s Story*. Algonquin Books, 2016.

Leshem, Ron. *Beaufort: A Novel*. Delacorte Press, 2008.

Schiff, Ze’ev and Ya’ari, Ehud. *Israel's Lebanon War*. Simon and Schuster, 1984.

Serwer-Bernstein, Blanche L. *In the Tradition of Moses and Mohammed: Jewish and Arab Folktales*. Jason Aronson, 1994.

Timerman, Jacobo. *The Longest War: Israel in Lebanon*. Knopf, 1982.

Yermiya, Dov. *My War Diary: Lebanon June 5-July 1, 1982*. South End Press, 1984.

Film: Bouzaglo, Haim. *A Time for Cherries*. United King Films: NMC United Entertainment, 1991.

Film: Cedar, Joseph. *Beaufort*. Kino, 2008.

Film: Folman, Ari. *Waltz With Bashir: A Lebanon Story*. Sony Pictures, 2009.

Film: Maoz, Samuel. *Lebanon*. Sony Pictures, 2010.

# “High Heels”

## Summary

A tale of mischief and balance, cunning and heroism, “High Heels” is a perilous pas de deux off the Holocaust-era ballet stage into the sensitive soul of a Tel Aviv teen. Sroch is the bored only child of barely-making-it custom shoemakers and a buildering (a portmanteau of building and bouldering) enthusiast. Buildering is a worldwide extreme urban climbing sport, demanding intense concentration, lithe agility, calculated balance, and quick reaction at precarious and foreboding heights—typically performed illegally across abandoned buildings and construction sites. Sroch’s family owns a legendary pair of stilettos attributed to Polish-Jewish Franceska Mann’s near-mythical heroism in fatally stabbing her Nazi assailant. When Sroch’s new buildering “friends” discover the secret, their “dance” becomes similarly treacherous.

## Discussion questions

Holocaust-era ballerina Franceska Mann personifies bold initiative and theatrical daring-do in an off-balance world. How does Friedlander use her story as metaphor in Sroch’s dangerous dance confronting the menace he faces? What risks are worth taking?

Physical relics of Jewish heroism are few and precious, carrying beautiful and tragic memories. What treasures does your family preserve; why are they important to you? Jews typically place great (possibly greater) value in words, both oral and written. Compare how you value material objects versus stories handed down.

## Historical context and background

[The extraordinary story of Jewish ballerina who gunned down SS beast before being murdered – The First News](#)

Snopes Fact Check: [Franceska Mann](#)

[Shoe designers: Israeli cobblers find there's no place like home - The Jerusalem Post](#)

[Israel's once staid footwear market is now fashion-forward - ISRAEL21c](#)

[FAQ – Buildering](#)

[How Buildering Works | HowStuffWorks](#)

## Jewish Community Library resources related to “High Heels”

Keydar, Ya’ara. *A Walk of Art: Visionary Shoes*. Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, 2017.

Nahshon, Edna (ed.). *Jews and Shoes*. Oxford University Press, 2008.

Singer, Margot. *Underground Fugue*. Melville House, 2017.

# “Jellyfish in Gaza”

## Summary

When Aba’s unit disappears into Gaza, his twin boys develop elaborate rituals designed to ensure his safety and keep their panic at bay. Their immediate world, proximal to the Gaza border, is chaotic, the future unknowable. Playtime becomes an exercise in bargaining with unseen forces, performing elaborate (and painful) acts to offset imagined terrors—invocations of a terrorized secular people seeking benediction in a holy land. Even Aba’s return is a mixed blessing.

## Discussion questions

Children (and adults) who experience dire psychological and physical conditions, including unrelenting threats of terrorism and fear of national annihilation, might create solemn performative acts as coping mechanisms. The narrator’s and his twin brother’s elaborately compulsive rituals are designed to stave off genuinely catastrophic possibilities. How is prayer similar or different? What is the benefit of such rituals or prayers for the person offering supplication? Does it matter whether they are addressed to a holy entity or something else? How do Israeli secular communities channel their hopes for a better world? How are Israel’s and Gaza’s children’s psychological suffering and future mental health linked; Are the impacts of habitual stress from the conflicts similar or different?

## Historical context and background

[The Psychological Effects of War on Children - BORGEM](#)

[How Palestinian and Israeli children are psychologically scarred by exposure to war - ScienceDaily](#)

[Prayer May Reshape Your Brain ... And Your Reality - NPR](#)

[How Prayer and Meditation Changes Your Brain - Vice](#)

[Life-hack: Rituals Spell Anxiety Relief - UConn Today](#)

[The surprising power of daily rituals - BBC Future](#)

## Jewish Community Library resources related to “Jellyfish in Gaza”

Belasco, Daniel. *Reinventing Ritual: Contemporary Art and Design for Jewish Life*. Yale University Press, 2009.

Biale, Rachel. *Growing Up Below Sea Level: A Kibbutz Childhood*. Mandel Vilar Press, 2020.

Kati, David. *A Child’s War: Fifteen Children Tell Their Story*. Four Walls Eight Windows, 1989.

Myerhoff, Barbara G. *Remembering Lives: The Work of Ritual, Storytelling, and Growing Older*. University of Michigan Press, 1992.

Ochs, Vanessa L. *Inventing Jewish Ritual: New American Traditions*. Jewish Publication Society, 2007.

Seligman, Adam. B. *Ritual and Its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity*. Oxford University Press, 2008.

Stargardt, Nicholas. *Witnesses of War: Children’s Lives Under the Nazis*. Knopf, 2005.

Yehuda, Avner. *The Young Inheritors: A Portrait of Israel’s Children*. Dial Press, 1982.

# “Walking Shiv’ah”

## Summary

The Friedman brothers, soldiers Aharon and Avraham, are their Ima’s favorites; their sister Rachel, not so much. When the army’s bereavement messenger arrives at the family’s door to announce the death of A. (Aleph) Friedman, confusion tears at the women’s grief. Determined to establish which cherished son has died, physically infirm Ima requires Rachel’s accompaniment on the alternately laborious, frightening, and revealing week-long trek to unravel the military bureaucracy’s perplexing missive.

## Discussion questions

Jewish mourning is a nearly year-long, ritually prescribed journey designed to accompany and bolster the bereaved during their most vulnerable grief. The period of shivah begins with burial of the deceased. Typically “during this period, the mourners are treated with the utmost care and respect. Their needs are met by the community — both their physical needs, such as meals, and their spiritual and emotional needs,” according to [MyJewishLearning.com](http://MyJewishLearning.com). How do Rachel and her Ima traverse the symbolic steps of shivah?

Israel is haunted by heartrendingly frequent casualties, honoring more war dead every Yom Hazikaron with nationwide mourning. How does “Walking Shiv’ah” view the psychologically numbing compromise most Israeli families make: survival as a nation depends on the submitting their children to latent armed conflict. Is it patriotism, apathy, faith, love, or something else? Explain your insights. How does the “community” of Israel through which Rachel and Ima Leah walk disregard their humanity, mocking the intent of shivah? Discuss the possible symbolism of Rachel-as-contemporary-Israeli, reluctantly burdened by the damaging expectations of her mother’s crippled generation, even as she grudgingly sacrifices her free-spirited youth and clear-eyed vitality. What are the implications for Israel’s evolving self-image and national identity?

## Historical context and background

[Traditional Jewish Ritual and Mourning Practices | JCFS Chicago](#)

[Timeline of Jewish Mourning | My Jewish Learning](#)

[Ask the Expert: Mourning Missing Persons | My Jewish Learning](#)

[How the IDF chief rabbinate determines death of a soldier whose remains are not found - The Jerusalem Post](#)

[Families have been notified](#)

## Jewish Community Library resources related to “Walking Shiv’ah”

Gellis, Michael B. *A Practical Guide of Jewish Practices from Dying Through Shivah*. B’nai Brith International, 2003.

Rojstaczer, Stuart. *The Mathematician’s Shivah*. Penguin Group USA, 2014.

Tropper, Jonathan. *This is Where I Leave You*. Dutton, 2009.

Film: Elkabetz, Ronit. *Shiv’ah*. United King Films: NMC United Entertainment, 2009.

# “The Miniaturist”

## Summary

Abandoning everything precious except their lives, desperate Jews from Iran and far-flung Arab countries came to Israel, often to flee hostility awakened by Israel’s newly established independence. Many had been prosperous and respected members of their origin countries’ middle class, their children’s prospects bright. Conditions upon their arrival in the Holy Land, however, were grim. They were sequestered in hot, dirty, and crowded refugee camps scattered across Israel’s 1950s barren landscape, with no outlet to earn a living and little to stimulate their minds. The language and social conventions were alien. Adinah’s newly arrived family reels from the refugee camp’s harrowing hardships, but she discovers friendship, admiration—and jealousy. Art appreciation becomes a bridge to discovering her Persian past and distorts her future.

## Discussion questions

Imagine the desperation that drove Adinah’s family from a comfortable life into the unfathomable. Do you think expectations of living in “the Jewish Homeland” consoled them as they left, and continued to offer solace after arrival? Why?

How did Adinah’s family cope with its new circumstances? Where do her father and her mother find hope? Are children inherently more flexible, or is temperament more relevant when faced with life-altering changes?

Were you surprised to learn about Israel’s segregation of Jewish refugees from Iran and Arabic-speaking countries, housing them in desperate conditions far from Israel’s burgeoning cities where they might have been able to support themselves? Do you think Israel’s founding political leaders sought to segregate newcomers along racial lines? Why or why not? Adinah’s family carries a class-based discriminatory mindset from Iran, too: ““That girl isn’t your friend,” [her father] said. ‘We don’t talk to her family.’” How has the legacy of separateness persisted in Israeli society? What are the implications today?

## Historical context and background

[Persian Jewish manuscripts](#)

[Illuminated Judeo-Persian Manuscripts - IranNamag](#)

[These illustrations from the Judeo-Persian epic ‘Fath Nama’ are a work of art](#)

[Iranian Jews in Israel - Wikipedia](#)

[Daring Exploits of the Man who Brought 120,000 Jews to Israel - aish.com](#)

[The Mass Migration to Israel of the 1950s | My Jewish Learning](#)

[Fact Sheet: Jewish Refugees from Arab Countries](#)

[Absorbing the Exiles | My Jewish Learning](#)

[The secret story of Israel's transit camps | Ynet News](#)

[Trailer for film \*Ma'abarot\*](#)

### **Jewish Community Library resources related to “The Miniaturist”**

Amir, Eli. *Dove Flyer*. Halban, 2010.

Friedman, Matti. *Spies of No Country: Secret Lives at the Birth of Israel*. Algonquin Books. 2019.

Ginor, Fanny. *Socio-Economic Disparities in Israel*. Transaction Books, Rutgers University. 2019.

Goldin, Farideh. *Leaving Iran: Between Migration and Exile*. Athabasca University Press, 2015.

Green, Henry A., and Richard Stursberg. *Sephardi Voices: The Forgotten Exodus of Arab Jews*. Figure.1, 2021.

Julius, Lyn. *Uprooted: How 3,000 Years of Civilization in the Arab World Vanished Overnight*. Valentine Mitchell, 2018.

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