

#830 10-26-90
Shabbat October 13, 1990

I'm at home on my first leave. I'll probably be back home again a couple of days before the formal end of our miluim, though things can always change when it comes to the army. One of my main tasks of today and tomorrow is to do some catching up on this journal, to type up my hand written notes, and get as much of this in the mail as possible. What I'll be printing here is everything that I have that's related to these miluim, starting with the letter that I wrote and left with Tzippi with instructions to send were I to end up in jail. As is clear from the journal, things developed differently.

Yom Kippur, Shabbat, September 29, 1990

Dear Family,

While my first letter of today is printing I'm already starting on this letter which I'll put in an envelope but will have Tzippi mail only a week from now, if called for.

I admit to having been purposefully evasive in that first letter. Tomorrow my g'dud is off for a month in Tulkarem, in the west bank, and as of today it looks as though I'll be going to jail instead of being with them.

About four months ago I sent a letter to the commander of my g'dud explaining to him that I could no longer see myself taking part in the occupying activities of the Israel Defense Forces. I explained to him that I of course still see myself as someone who has been trained to act in Israel's defense and is ready to take chances (and make sacrifices) when called upon to do so. But I explained that a tour of duty in the occupied territories was clearly not a defensive measure for Israel's security but would instead be a means of continuing a no win situation which could lead only to more war and destruction. I wrote that though in the past I've felt that refusal to serve in the territories wasn't a political solution to anything, I'd come more and more to feel that for me serving in the territories was a way of closing my eyes and saying there's nothing there ("he wasn't there again today/ oh how I wish he'd go away") and in the end, via my actions, I was actually legitimizing the continued occupation which I oppose.

I'd written that letter when I'd expected that we'd be going to miluim during the summer. My g'dud commander phoned me after receiving the letter and after about ten minutes on the phone we agreed that we should sit and talk, but since he explained that we wouldn't be going to miluim until October we delayed our conversation. After I got the call-up notice in the mail I contacted him again and about three weeks ago I met with him at his place of work for around two hours. As I knew that he would, he tried to convince me that I should serve. He argued that I could be effective as a calming influence on more hot-headed elements in my unit. I told him that that might well be true, but that I was afraid that we'd already gotten beyond the point at which that really made much difference. We agreed that I'd think about the things he said (and that he'd think about what I had to say) and then in the middle of this week I called to tell him that I was sorry to disappoint him but that I'd decided that I couldn't serve in the territories.

During this past week I spoke on the phone with a number of people who had some sort of contact with the issue of refusal to serve in the territories and I learned a good deal about what it means to sit in a military prison for a month. Apparently, beyond being pretty boring, although there's a great deal of time to read and write, it's nothing special. That doesn't mean that it's something worth looking forward to, but neither is it something to be overly afraid of. A couple of the people I spoke with were quite supportive and let me know that I was making the right decision.

I admit that it's hard for me to be 100% sure about my decision. In the past I've argued against refusal to serve in the territories, though for quite a while I've felt that for me at least it's the only alternative. I've been careful not to suggest that someone who doesn't refuse is somehow morally inferior to me, and so far on the kibbutz those people who are aware of my decision have been in the least accepting and often times quite supportive.

I don't think that I'm going to change the world by refusing, but I'm quite convinced that I'm not going to do so by serving either; neither do I think that I could have any influence on other people by being some sort of watch dog. I continue to hold on to the perhaps naive hope that through a public action such as mine perhaps a few people will be compelled to think once again about the reality of the

occupation. Israel (and kibbutz as a part of Israel) has become a very business as usual oriented place and people are happy to forget that we're surely (and perhaps no longer even slowly) committing suicide. So even though I'm not sure that my action can really change anything, perhaps it can cause some people, at least for a short while, to think once again about what's happening.

As I wrote at the beginning of this letter, I'll be putting it into an envelope and putting it aside for Tzippi to mail if called for. Various things can happen tomorrow. Though I doubt that this will happen, I might be convinced by my g'dud commander, or by other people in my unit, to serve. Or perhaps I'll be offered some other sort of work that I can do instead of serving in the territories. Though I don't really want to be a martyr I've got to admit that prison is for me in some ways a preferable alternative because it's a way of accepting the ultimate rules of the game. The law demands of me that I serve where I'm sent to serve. If I refuse then I'm called upon to pay the price of that refusal, and I've got to be willing to pay that price.

Whatever happens, if you receive this letter you'll know that I've decided to go to prison (and have been sent there) and if this letter isn't sent then I'll be keeping you informed of whatever else it is I'm doing. For now,

Love,

Tuesday, October 2, 1990

I hadn't expected to be sitting at home at present, but seeing as how that's the way things are, I might as well make the best of it. So I'll do some catching up.

Sunday morning, as planned, I reported to my unit. In a short conversation with my g'dud commander I reported to him that I hadn't changed my mind since our last conversation and instead of getting into a lengthy talk with him he suggested that I leave for the offices of our khativa (a rather lengthy ride) so that I'd be able to take care of things that same day. Before leaving I sat and spoke with my plugah commander for around fifteen minutes. I didn't think he'd be able to convince me of anything, but I thought that in the least I should listen to what he had to say. He suggested that I serve only within the confines of the plugah's lodgings and in that way not be called upon to do anything that I'd find distasteful. I thanked him for his offer, but turned him down.

Actually, before leaving for the offices of our khativa I didn't feel that I'd been told anything that even came close to making me change my mind, other than a short reminder that one of the members of my plugah (a religious kid, around 26 years old) told me when he saw me arriving. He reminded me of an agreement we'd made a couple of years earlier (which I'd forgotten) that I'd serve in the territories and he'd participate in evacuating settlers from the territories if things came to that.

I left the meeting point of the g'dud at around 11:00 and didn't get to the offices of the khativa until around 3:00. I reported to the second in command of the khativa, reporting that I was refusing to serve in the occupied territories and that thus he had to court martial me. He told me that he didn't have time then because he had to be at a meeting somewhere else and that he'd court martial me the next morning at 8:00. I asked that he make time for me that day, but he refused. I stayed the night, visiting with a couple of other miluimnikim who were serving there, doing guard duty. They were pleasant people whom I had a nice time talking to. I can't say that they were overly supportive about my refusing to serve in the territories, but they certainly understood the idea and accepted it. Of course they were probably the minority. The standing army kids who were also at the base had no idea of where I was coming from, but then I didn't really establish contact with them anyway, knowing in advance that they wouldn't identify with me.

That night I had little to do. I read the Shabbat papers that were scattered around and slept very well. In the morning I reported for my court martial and discovered that the second in command of the khativa hadn't arrived that morning. I waited for him for over an hour, and he didn't arrive, but the first in command did. I knew that our khativa commander could sentence me to five weeks in military prison as opposed to the four weeks that the second in command could so I didn't offer myself up to him, but after a while I decided that it wouldn't make that much difference and I told the master sergeant who was there that I was still waiting and he brought me before the khativa commander. We

spoke for around twenty minutes and then he told me to report back to him in half an hour, which I did. At that time he told me that he didn't want to court martial me and that he'd spoken with the mazkir of Hatzor and had decided to send me home for two days to reconsider my decision. He himself is a kibbutznik, as I knew, and on the one hand that was something positive, whereas on the other hand, I guessed, correctly, that if he was opposed to refusing to serve in the territories, as I had no doubt that he was, he'd also be particularly against kibbutznikim refusing. He let me know this, but told me that we'd meet again Wednesday morning after I had a chance to reconsider and to speak with various people at home.

It was clear to me that he'd made a smart move. I couldn't fairly refuse to take two days to think things over, and I knew full well that the pressure would be on when I came home. So from yesterday afternoon until now I've been thinking with myself and out loud with others, trying to reach some decision. Some people have advised me to stick to my original decision whereas others have told me that refusal isn't going to accomplish anything and that there's no point in it.

It's been many years since I last thought that being consistent was a particular virtue. I'm mature enough to change my mind. But on the other hand, I'm not really sure that there's any reason to do so. I'm also mature enough to admit that I've been wrong, though in this particular case, if I do change my mind it won't be because I've been convinced that I was wrong but because I've come to the conclusion that the price I'm paying isn't really worth what I'll be accomplishing. That's a pretty fatalistic way of looking at things, but that's the way I see them at the moment.

Friday, October 5, 1990, 09:30

Welcome to the Battle of Algiers. I've got time to write at the moment, and maybe I can do some catching up. I'm presently sitting in the outpost of my plugah which sits right above, and immediately next to, the refugee camp of Tulkarem. Wednesday morning, when I left to meet my khativa commander, it was fairly clear to me that I'd probably not end up in prison — at least not at this stage of the game. At present it's a question of how long I can take this.

The refugee camp of Tulkarem is located just to the east of the town of the same name. I'm not sure of it's exact size, but it's approximately 400 x 600 meters, with around 12,00 residents. That gives it a very high population to area ratio (around 50,000 people per square kilometer, or 13,000 per square mile — those are the calculations, though they seem rather unbelievable), and it looks that way. There are perhaps four or five passageways that can be called streets, and the rest are mostly narrow alleys. The buildings look both half built and half torn down — as is, I suppose, to be expected. Actually, things look much too much as you'd expect them to — as though they've always been this way, and always will be. There's really nothing surprising — not the trash, or the cats scavenging in it, not the flat roofs with their water drums and antennas, not the laundry hanging out to dry or the occasional garden — about the only color in a very drab panorama. Nor the feeling of being no more and no less than an occupying army.

Tuesday evening Tzippi called from the orchestra telling me she could get home that night — I arranged to pick her up at the road at around 23:00, though she didn't arrive until 23:30. We then decided that both of us were hungry and drove into Gedera to a restaurant for a light meal. It was perhaps the first time in at least a week that we were able to simply talk about all sorts of things without the everpresent undercurrent of my upcoming decision hanging over us. It was the first time in a long time in which I could feel really relaxed.

As I more or less expected, when I met my khativa commander Wednesday morning, and learned from him that as far as he was concerned I could change my mind at any time and request to be court martialled, I chose to return to my plugah. He had offered me the alternative of serving at our g'dud's headquarters which would mean that I wouldn't have to have any contact with the civilian population here. Numerous people at home had urged me to accept such a compromise, primarily because they didn't think that my sitting in prison would accomplish anything. Of course I never claimed that my sitting in prison would accomplish anything — only that I saw no other alternative for myself. I explained to him that I would feel very uncomfortable separated from my plugah, letting them do the dirty work while I kept my hands clean. After all, the occupation continues irregardless of who's doing the dirty work.

There's something else involved in my decision — still tentative, but becoming more and more

definite, simply through the normal process of habit. I have to admit to a rather insatiable curiosity. One of the things that kept me questioning my decision of refusal was the fact that I'd never served in the territories before, and I wanted to know what it was like. So at present I'm getting a chance to see what things are like here, and as though I didn't know beforehand, I don't like it.

Which brings me back to the Battle of Algiers. For the two days I've been here so far things have been relatively quiet. Which means that only about once a day we chase after the wind, and the rest of the time we try and maintain the impression that we rule the territory that's we're policing. It's really very simple — as one member of my plugah, who identified himself as a leftist, explained to me today: They live here and don't want us here, and we don't want to be here but can't leave because if we did, it would be showing them that they can win, and we can't leave unless we've got the upper hand and are in a position of strength. And I add — when we're in a position of strength, the resulting euphoria will forever blind us to the simple fact that we won't stay in that position for long. Thus the very simple situation boils down to something even simpler — more of the same.

Hamas rules the streets at night — so they claim, and there's very little reason, other than good old IDF pride, to doubt them. Wednesday evening, shortly after dark, Hamas activists started yelling in very passable Hebrew that Israel might think that it was strong, but that it was afraid to go out into the streets of Tulkarem at night. They kept it up until our officers decided that letting them continue would actually create the impression that we were powerless against them. So the chase was on. I stayed at our outpost, listening rather aloofly to the play by play — taunts and rocks on the part of Hamas, followed by tear gas and shock grenades by our troops, a bit of silence, more taunts and more grenades until the inevitable stand-off was reached, after which our troops returned. They were of course upset that they couldn't prove their physical superiority, and they of course blamed this on having one hand tied behind their backs: "If just once we could go in there with live ammunition..." or "one bulldozer would flatten the place..." and the like, and we'd show them who's in charge.

It's actually quite fascinating to see how my fellow soldiers relate to the population we're occupying. It's very hard to remain indifferent to them — after all, they're clearly belligerent toward us. So the response becomes one of increasing animosity and every little act of theirs is seen as something indicative of how vicious, or perhaps simply of how dumb, they are. We watched one man emptying his very full wheel barrow. He'd devised an impressive means of loading especially large amounts of trash so that he didn't have to make too many trips to the dump. But rather than respecting his initiative, the person who pointed him out to me remarked only on the "primitivity" of his methods. On my way to my g'dud on Wednesday I hitched a ride with a kid of around 22 who lives in the area. He made a point of telling me that no harm would be done if I killed a couple of people during my tour of duty. During our ride he'd yell out the window things like "I hope you all die", though when he passed women, who were on the whole traditionally dressed and definitely weren't attractive to him, he'd yell "I'll screw you all", somehow getting his signs mixed and thus missing the rather strange connection he seemed to be making between sex and procreation. Screwing them, after all, might lead to at least some of them becoming pregnant, whereas he claimed that he wanted them all dead, not a new generation of them. In general it's fair to say that even though our troops are sexually very indifferent to the women here, they can't keep themselves from seeing them in terms of sexual conquest.

Shabbat, October 6, 00:30

I'm on duty once again — until 03:00, so I've got some time to write. Around noon, toward the end of my last time guarding, my khativa commander, accompanied by my g'dud commander, arrived for a short talk with me. Though I had a long list of thoughts that I'd jotted down to myself while waiting for him Wednesday morning, I knew that I was expected to make things rather short. I stressed two elements in my decision — that too many people had told me that I wouldn't be accomplishing anything by going to prison, and that my ability to stay here was basically a question of how long I could hold out here. I admit that I've got a rather extraordinary ability to adapt to unsavory situations, but staying here is certainly putting that ability to the test. My khativa commander took the opportunity to tell me not only that I'd made the right decision, but that I'd made the only possible decision. He explained to me that you can argue with "significances" and with interpretations, but you can't argue with facts. He then added that if you first recognize the facts you'll have less problem with

their significance and interpretation. And the facts are... (sort of like, "the envelope please... and the winner is...", and about as suspenseful and as predictable) that the IDF serves in the territories, and I serve in the IDF, meaning that I should face up to the unavoidability of my being here. He undoubtedly took my silence on this issue to be a sign of understanding and of agreement, whereas it was much more a case of compliance and of being worn-out to the point of simply giving in already. One more success for the status quo.

I arrived by my plugah at around 15:00 on Wednesday. I met numerous new people in the unit, and was warmly greeted by the older members. Word spread fairly quickly that I'd arrived and just about everybody wanted to speak with me — some wanted to know how I'd reached the decision I'd reached, while others wanted only to tell me that our job here really wasn't so bad, and that once I'd go inside the refugee camp (or get my first shower of stones) I'd understand. I almost invariably tried to explain that it really didn't matter what the specific character of the work was — it's occupation, and by definition the occupation is bad. Last night I was on guard duty from midnight until 3:00 with a left oriented religious member of the plugah (he sees himself as a terrible anachronism, and we've become quite friendly over the years, partially because of how he sees himself, but probably mostly because he's a nice and interesting guy). He of course doesn't think that refusal to serve accomplishes anything, nor is he overly happy about the need to return territories. But that doesn't really make much of a difference — our conversation was a good one, and much more in depth than what I'd expected. I had a similar conversation Tuesday, upon my arrival at the g'dud, with the former second in command of my plugah who's now an officer in the g'dud in general. Though I'm more extreme than he is, he let me know that he basically sees the occupation as I see it, but thinks that refusal is more problematic than playing along — and of course he thinks it better that the good people do the dirty work since they'll at least try and do it cleanly. He doesn't like my response that a clean person doesn't make dirty work cleaner, but instead dirty work makes a clean person dirtier.

Shabbat, October 6, 11:30

My first day was filled with various conversations — greeting people who were surprised and pleased to see me, explaining over and over again that I was far from sure what I was doing here, but that I'd been worn-out by the constant doubting and questioning of what to do. Actually, I allowed myself to mostly mope around that first day. I took out the easiest book I'd brought along with me, a South African detective novel which was very well written and convincing, and which allowed me to keep my mind off other issues that I simply preferred not to be preoccupied with, and I plowed through it. Only after finishing it did I think about writing.

Actually it's particularly interesting to see how the subject of refusing to serve in the territories makes everybody want to talk to you. When I was at the offices of my khativa (have I told this story already? I've told it out loud to numerous people and don't remember whether or not I've written it) I met with the adjutant officer (that's the translation the dictionary gives). He wanted to talk with me and tried to convince me that refusing to serve was wrong. I spoke with him pleasantly, not being in much of a rush, and after about ten minutes of various arguments he exclaimed "I don't understand you — I've been talking with you ten minutes and I still haven't convinced you." I apologized to him but told him that I'd thought about my decision quite a bit longer than ten minutes.

Motz'ei Shabbat, 20:15

Kohelet said that to every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven. He was no doubt right, and here the time for throwing stones is about 17:00. For the past few days at around that time kids congregate to throw stones at one of our outposts, and of course that provocation leads to the regular response from us, and for around half an hour we've got a bit of excitement. It may be a bit of excitement, but it's still rather boring since it's clear from the start how things are going to develop and end. One person just called it "cops and robbers", others call it "cat and mouse". If it were just a game it might be an acceptable way to pass the time, but the problem is that after each stand off the Israeli soldier feels more and more frustrated — and that doesn't suggest that a peaceful resolution to the problem is going to be reached. He'd much rather use his rifle the way he was trained to use it.

Tuesday, October 9, 04:00

It feels like ages since I last sat down to write — and for that matter, since I last sat down quietly to think to myself. When another member of our plugah went on leave Sunday morning I inherited the job of "work manager" — trying to fairly divide up the various tasks that have to be performed here. We have various posts that have to be guarded, and we have to enter the refugee camp at assorted times, and my job at present is trying to arrange the various tasks in such a way that nobody gets the feeling that he's being screwed over. Of course there's always at least one person who no matter how preferentially you deal with him is convinced that he's getting a bum deal. And we're faced with a situation in which our jobs are constantly changing so that it's close to impossible to arrange things for a full day in advance. No matter what the plan, something new always comes up.

But all that's totally secondary to what's been happening here. I'd rather report things chronologically because in that way I'll not only give a picture of how I've adapted to the situation, but also perhaps review things better in my own mind. But it's a function of the situation that immediate issues have to be dealt with immediately — and old baggage gets left behind and forgotten. And to jump even further ahead of myself, the events of the past day have caused many people here to ask out loud whether or not they make me reconsider my political views. I have no problem answering in the negative — but getting pelted with a barrage of stones, and having very little available to you in the way of response, is — according to the conventional wisdom, supposed to convince you that brute force is the only solution. When we got back to our outpost this evening, after a full afternoon of street fighting (more on that later) I was pleased to discover that two religious members of our plugah wanted to hear my "solution" to the situation. Not that I was about to convince them, but that today's events also caused them to perhaps do a bit of rethinking.

It's a good feeling for me to finally sit and write again. It's a sort of quiet, and a time to think, that I've been in need of, and have missed, these last two days. (I've called Tzippi every day and have tried to think out loud to her, but I don't really like talking on the phone.) But it's now 05:00 and my replacement for my two and a half hours of personing the field radio is arriving, and I'm definitely in need of sleep as well (and far from sure that I'll get much today) so I'll quit for now and go to sleep.

Tuesday, 08:00

If it's now a bit after 8:00 then that means that I slept almost three hours — my longest continuous sleep since Shabbat. And if I wasn't awakened until now, that means that so far it's quiet in the refugee camp. These are positive signs, though I know that they don't mean much. While personing the field radio last night one of the things I permitted myself to do was to prepare the new guard duty list until the evening, assuming as I did so that the present quiet would continue and that we wouldn't be presented with any so far unplanned activities. Of course I knew that things really weren't going to go that way, but I suppose that doing so was a way of trying to force consistency on a situation which I knew couldn't be consistent. Whatever, while writing this paragraph (while still in bed) our new assignments started arriving.

Tuesday, 10:00

I don't want to sound superstitious, but I admit to feeling a bit uncomfortable writing about the fact that at the moment everything is quiet. At present two units from our plugah are touring inside the refugee camp, "reminding" the residents of the curfew that we imposed on them yesterday — everybody stays indoors. They've been there now around 45 minutes, and even though most of us expected that our presence would cause things to flare up, which would in turn force us to use our wide variety of anti-riot equipment against them, which would of course cause them to throw more stones, in a continuing spiral of violence, the quiet is holding, and we're hopeful that things will stay that way. If they do, for purely selfish reasons we'll be very happy. We'll be able to get some rest.

Tuesday, 13:00

Only a minimum of problems so far today, which means that most of us are getting a well

needed day of rest. I've spent too much of my time on various paper work but that's also a sort of social activity which helps the time to pass comfortably. My job as work manager gives me a good deal of contact with our new plugah commander, and this was a good chance for the two of us to get to know each other — last year he was second in command and we didn't have much contact.

I haven't seen today's papers, nor heard much of the news. All that's really clear to me is that yesterday in Jerusalem there was a bloodbath, and that that disturbed the relative quiet that we've had in the occupied territories of late. Most of the people here are pretty oblivious to what a bloodbath means — "so twenty Arabs got killed, so what?" — and see no reason to question the behavior of the police. As though twenty deaths is Standard Operating Procedure, irregardless of whether or not there was a real provocation.

First reports of what happened in Jerusalem started arriving here around noon and it soon became clear that we were going to have to enforce a curfew. Monday evening and night a group of six of us entered the refugee camp twice for planned quiet tours, and we didn't meet with any problems. We walked mainly on the main streets, and except for a few times when dogs barked and howled we hardly even felt the sweat that comes with the excitement of danger.

Wednesday, October 10, 09:30

It's remained quiet, but I haven't had much of a chance to write because I haven't had my guard duty in a place where I'm able to comfortably write. I've been busy, but moreso with my administrative jobs than with being an active part of our occupying army. Exactly what difference it makes whether you're an active or a passive part of the occupation really isn't very clear to me. I spend a good deal of time thinking about that question, though inevitably I find myself reaching banal conclusions such as "you just can't win", and conclusions such as that don't exactly justify long hours of thinking.

I'm sure that there are significant points in the continuity of happenings here — things which merit being reported on — that I've forgotten, basically as a result of too many things happening in too short a time for me to relate to them all.

The main issue that should be reported on is that of imposing the curfew (still in effect) which we were called upon to do Monday afternoon. The army reached its decision about the curfew shortly after reports of what had happened in Jerusalem became clear. It seems that the decision was reached by the early mid-afternoon, though we weren't called upon to impose the curfew until after 16:00 — when there were less than two hours of daylight left. Though I don't like the idea of curfew, I'm not sure that "considering the circumstances", those magic words that are used to explain just about everything, the decision was wrong. Probably the over riding consideration was that the incident (I want to write massacre, but I don't know the facts, do I — but the word incident is so lacking of any connotations, is so "neutral", as to sound almost pornographic. After all, twenty people were killed by the police.) would undoubtedly cause rioting in the territories, and that the rioting would force the army to respond which would cause more and spiralling violence. Thus, in order to ensure that as few people as possible would be hurt, curfew was imposed. There's something that seems to me rather fundamentally racist in the assumption that the reaction of these people to twenty of their "brothers" being murdered should be rioting, but at the same time it's also quite logical. We're dealing with a population that has consistently been prevented from developing any political leadership and which nobody wants to listen to. Rioting in such a case seems to be a natural logical means of expressing frustration and of trying to get attention. Whether or not it's ultimately effective in the end isn't really at question at the moment, seeing as how nothing else is effective either.

Of course imposing curfew isn't exactly a non-violent activity, especially when the residents of the Tulkarem refugee camp know what happened in Jerusalem, and they have a gut feeling that the same thing can happen to them. So when we entered the camp a bit after 16:00 on Monday there were many people who quickly responded to the announcements of curfew and who obediently went to their homes. And there were many who took our entrance into the camp as an invitation to start some street fighting. So for about four and a half hours we fought, if that's what it's called. There's no question that it was war, though a strange sort of war. We didn't use any live ammunition, nor did they. Our job was to show our presence in the streets and "convince" people by that presence that they should obey the curfew. we used a large amount of tear gas and some other, basically ineffective, anti-riot techniques. They threw stones, bricks and just about everything, and when we were within their

range it was definitely a frightening barrage. And of course according to the higher ranking military minds in charge of this operation we couldn't just pack up and leave, because that would suggest that they'd beaten us. So we had to "brave" our way through the camp until we got back to our outpost — whole, though exhausted. And both sides could claim victory, though of course it was really a standoff — though that's perhaps really a victory for them.

I've often been on the receiving side of tear gas, and I don't really adjust well to being the sender. On the other hand, it depends on the direction of the wind. A couple of times during our imposing of the curfew we got a taste of our own tear gas when the wind changed, or when one unit sent a canister in the general direction of another, or simply when somebody didn't check how the wind was blowing when he shot a canister. It doesn't really matter which side you're on, the effect is the same.

After Monday evening's curfew one new member of our plugah approached me in my capacity as work manager and told me that he'd be happy to do extra guard duty instead of entering the refugee camp. I asked him if he had a particular reason for this preference and he told me that he was afraid. I assured him that all of us were afraid and that none of us enjoyed having stones and bricks rained down upon us. I didn't feel too comfortable adding that I found it a bit strange that he, as a religious, right-wing member of the plugah who thinks we're not doing anything wrong in the territories, should want to pass the dirty work on to someone else. After all, there are many too many others who without fear (and definitely without qualms) are more than happy to take his place and perform the tasks at hand — with much more force and violence than this kid is capable of.

While I'm at it, I've been saving a different story about this kid. Somehow we ended up next to each other in the same tent, and we talk about numerous things, often when I'd rather get some sleep or write. While showing someone else here the books I brought with me he took one to read as well — a sort of retelling of the wandering in the desert after the exodus. As he read the book — more a novella — he'd frequently turn to me and exclaim that it was very strange — it was sort of like the exodus story, but not consistent with the truth of the Bible. I had to try and explain to him that literature often deals with seeing known things in a different light, giving a new and different understanding or interpretation to what we know. Not being used to reading literature, this was apparently a strange concept for him, and in the case of literature based on the Bible, bordered on sacrilege.

Thursday, October 11, 03:00

I didn't note the hour each time I added something to what I wrote yesterday. Sometimes I wrote only a few lines per hour with long breaks, even in mid-sentence, while at other times I was able to follow a thought from beginning to end. At present I'm sitting at a roadblock about 400 meters from our outpost by foot, and about two kilometers by car via the road we took because we had to go around the refugee camp. Three of us from our plugah volunteered to spend the night here (from 23:00 to 06:00) because if we had to change shifts in the middle of the night that would mean that for too many of us we wouldn't have a worthwhile rest between guarding shifts, whereas for some strange reason, if we guard here the entire night, things work out very comfortably for everyone. And it's no secret that we're not awake for the full seven hours. There are six of us here — three from our plugah and three from a unit from the standing army situated by us who switched with members of their unit in the middle of our shift. Four of us have to be awake at all time, meaning that I had no problem getting about two hours sleep during this shift. So tomorrow morning, when I get back to our outpost I'll shower and crawl into bed, hoping that the heat and the local population will let me get some sleep.

Throughout the day yesterday the curfew held. One unit patrolled in the morning and returned after demonstrating our presence — a quiet tiyul. As the day wore on the refugee camp became more and more restless. At first kids started playing around in the streets, and slowly but surely people started congregating into demonstrations. They hung Palestinian flags (called PLO flags in Israeli jargon) from lamp posts and started building roadblocks. Other outposts that had better views of what was happening reported to us that they saw kids in the streets playing "Palestinians and Israelis" — one group would throw stones at the other which would run after them.

Sunday, October 14, 1990, 14:00, at home

In addition to getting a lot of sleep and doing some visiting, my major project of yesterday was

typing up my journal notes. By the evening the transcribing was finished and now I'm able to start catching up on writing.

My permission to leave for home came at 10:30 Friday morning. The previous evening I'd spent three and a half hours at the same roadblock where I'd spent the entire night the evening before. Late Thursday afternoon we were called upon to patrol the refugee camp for around two hours, from 16:00 until 18:00, and I was among the people who entered. It had been two days since I'd last been inside. I would have been willing to forego the pleasure this time as well, but the other medic who's at the outpost with me had gone inside consistently for a couple of days and I thought that he was due for a break so I replaced him. The curfew had held through most of the day but toward the late afternoon kids started demonstrating, and when things became a bit too big for us to continue saying that we didn't see anything happening we had to enter the camp and show them we're in charge. There was very little different or special about this particular tour. We were taunted and stones were thrown at us, but on the whole things calmed down and we were able to say that we'd accomplished our mission and then get out again. The Palestinian kids kept their distance when they taunted us and our kids started yelling back, inviting the Palestinians to prove that they were really brave by coming within rubber bullet range. If all this sounds absurd, it most certainly is, but when you're in the middle of it there's very little you can do besides grinning and bearing it.

To some extent we're trying to find more elegant ways of dealing with the disturbances we're supposed to take care of. We've now started entering the camp with a camera (and sometimes with a special photographer) which just might get pictures of the main troublemakers. We also go onto the rooftops in order to get a better view of what's going on. But of course you don't really have to have my political views in order to realize that in the end there's very little that can be done. A few days back we caught someone who was trying to run away from us. Chances were good that he'd been throwing stones and that means that he can be put on trial for something or other (or at least detained). But after a short time we let him go — there was nothing to be accomplished in the long run, and probably not in the short run either, by holding him.

But this doesn't mean that our soldiers don't remain frustrated. One of the younger, and definitely less intelligent, members of our plugah was on guard duty at a post outside the camp but with a view of the street nearby, about fifty meters away and ten meters above the street. He contacted us on his field radio and told us that a kid on the street was taunting him, calling him "maniac", and asked if he had permission to shoot him. This of course was a good topic for a laugh, until we realized that he was actually serious about this. A kid had insulted him, so it made sense to him that he could kill him. So we wander around in the streets trying to maintain some sort of order and the Palestinian kids on the street try and show us that under the prevailing circumstances they're as in charge as we are, and if things keep up this way without any major changes for the worse we'll all feel that we've gotten through this month successfully.

Wednesday evening was Simkhat Torah. Our tours of the refugee camp ended a bit before nightfall and when they got back to our outpost our g'dud's rabbi had already arrived with a couple of Torahs. Things were set up for the festivities which took place as best they could under military conditions. Our unit danced around with the Torahs in a very joyful mood for around an hour, and of course the religious members of the plugah found every opportunity to invite the non-religious among us to join in. Even though I've been divorced from this holiday for many years, if we hadn't been under military conditions I might well have joined in. After all, I have nothing against the celebration of holidays, and although I prefer to find secular ways to celebrate them, I can understand how Simkhat Torah is sort of unavoidably "religious" (though of course I believe that my secular culture is based on Torah and don't feel bothered by that). But it wasn't only the religious aspect of the holiday that kept me (and very few others) from joining in. There was some sort of connection, unspoken but still very obvious, that was being made between the holiday and our being where we were. For the religious kids it was an obvious connection between Torah and the holiness of the land of Israel, and as I watched them dancing around it definitely seemed that those who were non-religious among us, and not necessarily right-wing, were passively yielding to this connection whether they wanted to or not. So I didn't dance.

The dancing and singing were loud and boisterous, and it was only after about fifteen minutes that we realized that a similar celebration was taking place inside the refugee camp as well. When we'd left the camp it was quiet, though it was clear that the residents had quieted down more in a sort of

truce than in surrender. Apparently, when they heard our celebrating they took the opportunity to make some noise themselves. It became a rather large demonstration and higher brass contacted us and told us to prepare another visit to the camp. Our plugah commander answered that from experience we'd learned that if we left them alone they'd calm down, and that's what we did and what they ultimately did as well. When our dancing stopped we were able to hear the street better. One of the things they yelled, via bullhorns directed toward us, was that they were putting us under curfew and that we couldn't go out at night. There's something that rings very true about that statement. We certainly didn't want to go out at night to meet them, knowing that the result would be detrimental to both sides. So in a way, that's the best way to describe the present situation in the Tulkarem refugee camp. Both the camp itself and the plugah in charge of policing it are under curfew.

When I left for home I hitched a ride from the military authority we're stationed next to. The first car that stopped for me asked where I wanted to get to — "To Israel" I answered. It caused a bit of a double take. On the field radio I'm known to ask what a "PLO flag" is when someone reports that they see people flying them, and then, when it's described I remark "oh, you mean a Palestinian flag". One outpost, when reporting on a demonstration in the street, reported that they saw a youth with what was definitely a grenade. This was outrightly absurd since at the distance from which they were looking they could hardly see that the kid had a rock, let alone to distinguish between a rock and a grenade. I asked for better identification — what color shirt was the kid wearing. The person reporting to me said he couldn't tell the color of the shirt, but he was sure that the kid had a grenade. It's things like this that make it hard to take this entire situation seriously.

I have various notes which I jotted down to myself but didn't get around to writing about, and perhaps now I can do that catching up.

In general, we're not really at an outpost like what we're used to on the Lebanese or Syrian border. We're looking into the refugee camp, but our view is blocked by a building, and even if we could see much, one alleyway is pretty much like the next and identifying a kid running into one alley has little significance in the long run.

It must be fairly hard to remain under curfew all day. The people here live in very small homes which have many people living in them and I can imagine numerous situations in which parents will become upset with their kids and yell "please go out into the street and play for a while", which of course they're not supposed to do under curfew. While manning the field radio Wednesday afternoon (which is also the spot from which we look out onto the camp) I saw a couple of kids riding bikes around and around in small circles on their rooftops and one kid flying a kite from the roof. As far as I know there's nothing in the curfew that keeps them from doing something on the roof, and these seemed to be pretty normal ways of passing the time.

One of the interesting things about being here as opposed to other places we've been stationed is that our field radio is hardly needed for military communications. Only rarely, and mostly when a group of us are touring the camp, do we have to use the radio in that way. The rest of the time it's more or less free for day to day business — one outpost will ask for more ice, another will contact to ask when one of the people there is getting leave. In general it's almost become a telephone, and we talk on it very freely. Sometimes this leads to the strange situation in which a group of us touring the camp will be reporting on the radio that we're having stones thrown at us while at the same time two outposts are using the radio to tell a joke.

On the whole this isn't the sort of place I'd like to live, and I doubt that the residents of the refugee camp are overly pleased with living there themselves. On the other hand, they seem to be getting along. There seem to be very few birds that fly around, though many people grow chickens and doves. Many homes are decorated with planters and I have to admit that most of those I've seen suggest that the people here are doing a better job of growing plants than I do. There are many smells which are definitely distasteful, and the drainage runs rather openly in the streets. But sometimes we pass along some jasmine which is very pleasant. The roosters crow not only at the break of dawn. Actually, they seem to crow throughout the night without caring at all about whether dawn is approaching or not. The leftist religious member of our plugah, when we were guarding together one night, reported to me with a pleasant laugh that our g'dud's rabbi, when he was guarding by us a couple of days earlier, remarked that it was fascinating to him to hear the roosters crowing at dawn, just like it says in the Talmud that they do. My companion remarked that some people can make themselves believe anything.

What we do hear before dawn is the mu'azin — the town crier who calls people to prayer. He calls numerous times during the day and night, though those of us awake at 04:00 hear him particularly well. Actually, there are a number of mosques in the vicinity and each one has a crier, and we get quite a nice stereo. I'm one of the very few people who's able to appreciate this music. Most of the others find it very nerve wracking. In many ways it's quite similar to Jewish liturgy, though nobody would be caught admitting to that.

When we have our daily briefing one of the things which is often said is that we're to approach everyone here as though they're the enemy. Perhaps this is very logical, not only from a military point of view. Occasionally when patrolling the streets I establish eye contact with a young child and we're able to smile at each other, but since it's clear that they see me as the enemy, and for good reason, it also makes sense that I'll see them in the same way. Of course there's a difference between seeing them as the enemy and hating them. I'm sure that there's a good deal of hate that the people whom I'm with feel. Those of us on the left are often accused of loving the Arabs, as though that's some sort of crime, and we often respond that it's not loving our enemy that makes us want to reach a compromise, but rather a belief in the need for us to defend ourselves effectively. But I've discovered that hate has become more and more the expected emotion. Indifference doesn't get points anymore. Anything less than hate, like expressing out loud the thought that these people ultimately want to live their lives in peace, is becoming illegitimate.

Sunday, 18:00

While what's been written so far is still printing I'll try and get around to the final catching up I've got to do before going back to the army tomorrow. At home I discovered that I had much more time to think than I had while at our outpost. Or at least to indulge in a different sort of thinking. While at the outpost it's hard to develop any distance from what's happening, though of course that's part of the objective of writing a journal. One thing flows into the next and without realizing it you've become an integral part of everything that's happening, so much so that it's hard to stand outside and realize just how absurd everything is. That's what happened to me when I arrived home. When I had a chance to think quietly about what I've been doing for the past two weeks, and to report to Tzippi and to other people, I realized that I've allowed myself to become caught up in a situation that I'd ordinarily relate to as bizarre and as ridiculous but that through the day to day process of getting used to it somehow become for me a logical reality. Though at no point along the way did I start to think that Israel was justified in what it was doing, or, more importantly, think that the army's behavior was beneficial to Israel, somehow I did start to think that it was logical. In other words, I argued with it on the basis of whether or not it was right, but not on the basis of whether or not it made basic down to earth sense. It was only when I got home that I realized just how much it simply doesn't make sense. Somehow, nobody seems to be questioning the fact that ultimately nothing is going to be accomplished by our continuing the cat and mouse game we're enmeshed in with the refugee camp of Tulkarem. About the only thing that can come out of this situation is that it will continue, with each side becoming more professional at playing its part — unless of course things escalate, which they'll undoubtedly do. And I'm a part of this, even though I wanted not to be. I thought that by going to prison I would be able to in some way say that I wasn't willing to be part of something that was wrong. Perhaps it even makes more sense to be in prison as a way of saying that I'm not willing to be part of something that's ridiculous. But it seems as though so far I've taken part too much for me to be able to detach myself at this stage of the game.

Numerous people have spoken to me since I've been home. Some are still interested in convincing me that serving was the right decision to make. One person repeats over and over that my being where I am acts as a calming influence on other people in my unit — if I weren't there people in my unit would act more inhumanely. I've given up arguing with him. Yes, I can think of one instance in which my being at the roadblock and dealing intelligently with someone who didn't have his identity card with him probably kept him from being detained for a day or two, but I've got at least a handful of other instances in which my objecting to someone's behavior while we were inside the refugee camp went almost totally unnoticed.

And I'm quite convinced that there are more examples of good people behaving badly than "bad" people learning to behave in a proper manner. At one point, when imposing the curfew, a group of

paratroopers were with us. One member of that unit, a kid who was later identified to me as the leftist of his unit, used exaggerated force on someone whom he had ordered to remove a roadblock. My intervention, and that of one other person from our plugh had absolutely no effect and only led to an argument on the street. And after all, this guy was a leftist who was only doing his job in the way he'd undoubtedly been taught to do it.

One thing I've been rather surprised to notice while home is just how much sleep I've been getting. Though I haven't been sleeping much since last Shabbat, I didn't feel as exhausted as I apparently was. This may simply be because of the fact that I haven't been sleeping enough, but my guess is that it's also because of the emotional strain.

This is my first (and I hope, and perhaps intend, only) time serving in the territories. I'd heard stories, and in many ways what I'm seeing is consistent with the stories I'd heard. In other ways it's different, but the intifada has gone through numerous stages over the past three years and the different stories relate to different periods. Now was supposed to be a relatively quiet period, but the Iraqi crisis and then the events in Jerusalem of this past week have caused things to flare up a bit. Tulkarem may also be a hotter spot than others because Hamas is known to rule here rather than the PLO. And what are things ultimately like? Can I reach any conclusions after two weeks? Not really. Occupation is occupation, and if nothing else, it's clear that we're an occupying army. Perhaps we're humane enough so that we're occupying without too much force, and perhaps we're sane enough to understand that force isn't going to solve the continuing problems. In that respect, at least, even the right wingers here who are willing to think logically reach the conclusion that there's really no point in using more and more force. We could respond to each incident of rock throwing and taunting by returning to the refugee camp and forcefully reestablishing order, though by now most of us have learned that that doesn't accomplish anything.

But realizing that more and more force isn't going to solve the immediate problem doesn't help people come to the conclusion that there's really only one alternative and that's to get the hell out of the territories. In a bit more than two weeks at least I personally will be able to get the hell out, but that won't solve the ongoing problem either. Neither, of course, does sitting in jail, though I'm not really sure that I'm pleased with the decision that I made.

Love,
Jon

Rec'd 10-5-90

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Tuesday, October 16, 09:15

At least one conclusion that can be reached from my returning from leave is that whatever it is that has to be done here, it can be done just as well (and for that matter just as poorly) without me. I returned about 24 hours ago to more of the same — as though I hadn't been away at all. I've presently given myself a few hours of quiet in the only way that I can be sure of them — I've assigned myself to guarding at a one-person lookout that we're responsible for 24 hours a day. I ordinarily don't arrange myself here because I should be available for any last minute changes that have to be made, but I'm sure that things can work out fine for at least a few hours. Actually, this isn't really the best time to be here because a very strong (and warm) wind is blowing which makes it a bit uncomfortable to be here, but on the other hand, it's just as uncomfortable to be anywhere else.

Curfew was lifted at 04:00 this morning. That means that from where I'm now looking into the refugee camp I can see numerous sorts of daily activities — shops are open, people are walking on the streets, cars are going by. A long line of people are waiting by the entrance to the military authority — probably for permissions of various sorts — and most of the people will probably spend most of the day waiting. A couple of kids have attached strings to plastic bags and are trying to fly them, but the wind is too strong, and too erratic, for them to be successful. A couple of kids, whom chances are good were throwing stones yesterday, are throwing a ball back and forth between them. It's a regular day in the Tulkarem refugee camp.

We had a bit of excitement yesterday, but of the sort that suggests that we're our own worst enemy. Something, probably an electrical short, caused one of our tents to burn down at around 13:30 yesterday afternoon. A fire is never a pleasant sight, and that's especially so when in addition to the equipment inside the tent there was also a sizable amount of ammunition. That was a potentially very dangerous situation which we were lucky didn't spread. But the ammunition in the tent went off, and though nobody was injured, what must have sounded like quite an attack caused the people in the refugee camp to start demonstrating very vocally. And that of course caused us to send in a few people to calm things down. Later in the afternoon things flared up again — I don't know what the cause was

this time — and rocks were thrown right into our outpost. It wasn't very pleasant. After all, when you patrol the streets of the refugee camp you sort of expect rocks to be thrown at you, whereas when you're resting in your tent you expect things to be quiet. I guess that rocks reaching us at the outpost is part of what's called "bringing the war home".

The fire caused us to be without electricity for most of the evening and night, and that, along with the wind which had started that morning, and the sand and dust that came with it, tired me out more than is normal. I didn't have to guard during the night, so at around 21:00 I went to sleep. The wind kept me from sleeping as well as I would have liked, but I guess that if I got up at 07:30 that means that I slept well.

Wednesday, October 17, 20:45

It's been a very long day, and for that matter a very long two days since I last wrote, and a lot has happened. But without a doubt the most significant thing that deserves to be written about is my participation in one of the more senseless and pointless aspects of the occupation. When we've said in the past that the occupation oppresses the oppressor as much as the oppressed, I understood this to mean that we become slaves to our occupation such that we can't permit ourselves to live as we'd like because we're busy occupying. That's still true, but I now understand how that sort of statement contains not only tragedy, but also farce.

Today was "paint over the wall slogans" day. In the heat of the day, from around 09:00 until 12:00, two groups of us patrolled the refugee camp, arbitrarily selecting whomever we saw on the street and commanding them to find paint or whitewash (or anything else that could serve the same purpose) and to paint over the slogans on the walls. There's hardly a wall in the entire refugee camp that isn't covered with slogans. We can't read them, so of course we can only guess (with good reason) that they say something against us. So we have them working hard in the sun, with us sweating just as heavily as we oversee their work, erasing slogans in order for them to have more room to write more — so that we can make them erase these new slogans as well. I'm sure that somebody will come along with the suggestion that we should tear the walls down, under the assumption that without walls there won't be any slogans on them. Brecht wrote a poem about this sort of thing, and each time I read it in the past I smiled at the irony of the oppressor thinking he could somehow stop the march of history. But I wonder if Brecht understood that what's involved here isn't only irony, but a sort of farcical tragedy — almost all of us involved in carrying out the order of erasing the slogans thought it was a dumb and worthless idea that achieved nothing more than causing the local population to hate us even more. But we carried out the order. One person gave the excuse that he carried out the order more humanely than someone who might be in his place, another explained that nothing made much difference anyway. The officer I was with — a leftist from a Hashomer HaTzair kibbutz of course, argues with me that we should send kids from our kibbutzim to serve in the territories so that they'll learn just how dumb the occupation is. I can only argue in return that they'll also learn just how little self-respect we can have. I tried to refuse, and for a wide assortment of reasons didn't succeed in doing so, or as I don't mind saying, I gave in to pressure. And now I have an additional experience of occupation that I can tell about.

Friday, October 19, 08:00

That last long paragraph was finished, from about the middle, on Thursday at about 15:00. I had time to write, or more exactly, thought I had time. Things didn't become hectic, there were simply other things that had to be attended to.

We had the first rain of the season yesterday evening. Our outpost isn't well equipped for winter, and we've been trying to make that fact known to whatever higher ranking brass shows up around here. In general, we've got the strange feeling that the army doesn't care about us. Usually conditions in miluim aren't something to write home about, but even when we're far away from the center of Israel we get the feeling that the army is concerned with the conditions we're serving under. Here it's as though the people responsible for the conditions are in their cars and heading for home by 15:00 — leaving the dirty work to us.

But though this is a feeling commonly held by everyone here, it's really secondary to the

overriding fact of the occupation. Somehow it creates a feeling of business as usual — we complain about the conditions instead of about the basic reason that we're here. Yesterday at lunch we (should I add "finally"?) got into a lengthy political discussion. I'm not sure exactly how things developed, but I think that the second in command of our plugah asked me whether after being here two weeks I still felt like refusing. I explained to him, as I've explained numerous times to others since I've been here, that it's really not a question of what we're doing here, but of the fact of the occupation in and of itself.

Shabbat, October 20, 00:45

I thought that I was going to have a chance to write yesterday morning, but as always seems to happen, something came up. This time it was being on alert for what I guess should be called "mosque hour". Friday is the Moslem Shabbat and people go to the mosque both to pray and to hear a sermon. The army has apparently learned that after those prayers disturbances can break out, and the "solution" to that problem is to have soldiers stationed inside the refugee camp before, during and after the prayers. Somebody thinks that this calms things better than not being there at all.

We lined the main street for about half an hour before the prayers, standing and/or sitting, preferably in the shade, and then stationed ourselves on a roof during the prayers, deciding that we could go back to our base when people had quietly dispersed. Nobody from the mosque congregated into a demonstration, though a couple of groups of kids decided to throw rocks (or more exactly, to sling them with slingshots) and their accuracy made us have to take cover. But we got back to our outpost without having to use any anti-riot accessories and the rest of the day went by quietly. It's worth reporting just what stationing ourselves on a roof means. If we knock or kick on a door loudly, the residents of that house know that they should quickly obey the knock and open the door. When the door is opened we point to the ceiling (or in a short sentence in Arabic or Hebrew explain that we're going up to the roof) and the occupants know to obediently stand aside and to let us do as we wish. This is Standard Operating Procedure and doesn't seem to be considered by anyone to be a form of humiliation — only a little inconvenience which we logically have to impose on the people here.

And now back to yesterday's political discussion. One religious member of the plugah joined in and said that though politically he didn't agree with me, morally he could understand me. If he were called on while in miluim to help evacuate west bank settlers he might refuse to do so — and definitely would if those settlers actively resisted evacuation. As I always do, when he said "if" the settlers are evacuated (and added that he was sure such a day would never come) I added "with God's help, soon". One of our officers joined in with me, emphasizing his position (a position I've held in the past) that one can't refuse to serve now because that only legitimizes refusal from the other side later. Our second in command, a gentle and soft-spoken guy, emphasized that the nature of an army is that it carry out orders — even in a democracy the army doesn't have to be, and can't be a democracy. I found myself defending our religious plugah member (who's on the whole a very intelligent guy, but far from a pleasant person), explaining that freedom of conscience is a basic right in all societies, all the moreso in a democracy. My not refusing in the end, while still making a very strong statement of conscience, won me numerous points. But that doesn't help me overcome the basic question of my complicity in Israel's suicide. As I explained to our Hashomer Hatzair kibbutznik officer, I'd have no problem refusing to serve in Vietnam because I'd feel no responsibility toward a hypocritical "defense" of the United States, whereas here, I think that the government is undermining Israel's defense and that I have to take responsibility where the government doesn't, by not undermining the army. But that's good only so far — the catch starts when the army itself is used in Israel's destruction rather than in its defense.

And now, with one more hour left in tonight's guard duty (actually, I'm sitting and personing the field radio) I can perhaps catch up on some notes. I hadn't intended to arrange myself to have this job from 00:00 until 03:00, but when the opportunity presented itself (because the officer who ordinarily works these hours wanted to work earlier in order for once to have some consecutive night hours to sleep) I was happy to take the job. It's very quiet and I can write comfortably, and I don't have to think that perhaps it would be worthwhile to instead get some sleep. Since I can't sleep now anyway, it's a wonderful time to sit and write.

I have to admit that one of the thoughts that makes refusal to serve a hard decision for me is the question of just who it is that I'm trying to "impress". It's clear that the average Israeli, beyond perhaps

being impressed by a show of guts (though sitting for a month in a military prison doesn't really seem to be much in the way of guts to my mind) thinks that refusal is wrong. But I've already admitted that my refusal wasn't a political act, but a personal act that grew out of a feeling of despair. I feel uncomfortable with the thought that my refusal would be understood by Americans who have a similar background to mine. They can understand and support refusal — but they don't understand the reality of Israeli politics. But as I was overseeing the erasing of slogans from the walls of the refugee camp I started wondering what the people in the camp might feel about my refusal. They don't know me, and undoubtedly for them the occupation is on the whole faceless. Though these aren't the people I feel I have to make a political statement toward, I still harbor some amount of hope that refusing to serve could somehow keep a bridge toward future good relations between us open. Even though they don't know who the hell I am, and probably couldn't care.

And now my replacement is on his way, and I'll continue writing tomorrow (barring surprises).

Shabbat, October 20, 09:00

This is the way things are supposed to be during miluim. I went to sleep at 21:00 last night, was up from midnight until 03:00 for some comfortable guarding, and then slept again until 08:30. It's wonderful that things are so boring — if only they would stay that way I could read a couple of books.

Most of us here, both with political leanings such as mine as well as outright annexationists, think that the basic policy should be one of leaving well enough alone. This is no doubt for personal reasons — if things are quiet then we can relax more and will have less rocks thrown at us. But most people probably also think something along the lines that we're not going to solve the Palestinian problem through shoot-'em-ups every other day, so it's not even worth trying. Instead the best thing to do is keep things at the basic stand-off that they're presently at. (Which is, by the way, another good reason for refusal — in some small way it disturbs the balance of a destructively stable situation.)

Our g'dud commander, however, sometimes gives the impression that he doesn't share this particular outlook. This in itself is strange since through my experience with Khanan as an officer (which included serving with him in Lebanon) and through personal discussions with him, I'm sure that his personal views are like those I described in the previous paragraph. It's when he has to function as a commanding officer under the particular circumstances that we're faced with here that he seems to adopt a different approach. It seems that he feels himself compelled to take more initiative — to show more clearly that we're supposed to be in charge here and that we call the shots. Since I know that he's a good officer, perhaps he's justified in some professional way when he initiates actions where most of us would rather leave well enough alone. On the other hand it seems to me that he's caught in a couple of binds — higher ranking officers than he expect him to be more activist oriented, and he has to show them that he's not afraid to take action. At the same time he knows that some of his soldiers need to let off steam, and he probably initiates some actions in order to give them more of a feeling that they're actually doing something here. In the long run this seems to be another example of how good people become caught in the bind of an impossible situation — not an example of how they positively influence it.

Shabbat, 11:10

At the moment a heated argument is raging in our dining tent. About an hour ago our plugah commander (Yossi P.) sat down with me over a cup of tea and we talked about my decision to stay with the plugah instead of going to prison. We've been working together comfortably for over two weeks now and he said that he still wanted to understand my decision. Another member of the plugah (Yossi R.), our best sergeant (who frequently functions as an officer) who's also an avowed leftist, sat with us. I quietly explained to him that my decision to sit in prison wasn't a political one, but rather a personal one, influenced more by feelings of powerlessness and desperation than by the feeling that I could influence anything. Our sergeant joined in and explained that the politicians are cynically using the army for their political purposes, knowing full well that those of us on the left won't dare to undermine the army which we see as central to Israel's defense. He added that he wonders whether massive refusal to serve in the territories is the answer, because only in that way will we show how serious we are about our beliefs. Yossi P. was shocked — that's the worst thing that you could possibly

do! I explained to him that Yossi R. didn't want to take such action, but that he was expressing how desperate he felt the situation was. I took the opportunity to add that a large part of my dilemma was based on the feeling that my serving was a way of taking part in Israel's destruction, even as I knew that refusing to serve endangered the important consensus around the non-political nature of the army. It was a good talk in which I was able to explain why once I was here it didn't make a difference whether I was making someone wipe slogans from the walls or someone else was fulfilling that job — occupation remains occupation.

I didn't intend to convince Yossi P., but I think that I did bring him to an understanding of my position. As we were talking more people joined in, and things got out of hand, and soon the arguing was hot and heavy. Though I can easily hold my own in a political argument, I see little point in it, and I left, as did the two Yossis, and we let others do the arguing. In general, though I can be drawn into an argument, I'm only willing to take part in quiet discussions. I have no illusions that I'll convince anyone, so at least the atmosphere can be a positive and friendly one.

Shabbat, 13:00

About a week ago we received a piece of intelligence — a group inside the refugee camp plans to murder a woman in the camp suspected of helping Israel. We have no contact with intelligence work and don't even know where in the camp this particular woman lives, so there was nothing we could do to defend her if our information was correct. It seems that on the whole violence in the camp is directed toward us, though we really don't have any means of knowing what everyday life is like for the people here. It seems clear, however, that street fighting with us is considered a legitimate means of expressing one's manliness (I have yet to see woman throwing rocks at us, though I have no doubt that they do). This connects up with the old Franz Fanon vs. Albert Memmi argument about the nature of violence.

Fanon saw the use of violence as a liberating factor in the lives of oppressed people. Through violence they supposedly regained more control over their lives. Memmi, on the other hand, argued that violence was no more than an additional expression of how an oppressed people didn't succeed in assuming power over itself. A people involved in liberating itself, he argued, had to develop a self-discipline that made it refrain from using violence. There's undoubtedly something romantic about a violent struggle for liberation, but once you get beyond that romantic cover, it's hard not to agree with Memmi. Though in the Tulkarem refugee camp we don't see much internal violence beyond the warning we received about the planned murder, our papers are filled almost every day with reports of such violence. I personally see this sadly as a sign of how far the Palestinians still have to go before they'll really take responsibility for their own lives.

In the framework of a discussion of violence in the refugee camp it's worth reporting a small incident. One of our outposts reported that they saw a kid inside the camp with something that looked very much like a rifle. This kid was later caught, and in his possession was a surprisingly accurate wooden replica of our Galil rifles. It's interesting to reflect on the thought that this "toy" could only be problematic for the kid carrying it. It didn't make him more powerful to take action against us, and instead only made him more vulnerable toward us, since we certainly had to find him, at least to learn if his rifle was real or not. Perhaps among his friends he gained a certain status by being brave enough to carry such a toy, though why the toy should be a replica of an Israeli weapon (if that was the real intent) is unclear to me. But a different thought also presents itself. Sadly, just about everywhere kids play war games with war toys. Inside the refugee camp these are no longer games, but instead very real activities. Yet somehow, these kids are still in need of some sort of make-believe war game.

Shabbat, 21:30

I was almost caught up with my notes, but as always happens — something happened. It was a quiet and peaceful Shabbat. At around 17:00 two groups of six of us entered the refugee camp, basically in order to show the residents that we're still around. We went up to the roofs of a number of houses and stayed there until a bit after dark. That's nothing special or exciting after a couple of weeks of this. One group on one of the roofs was the rather successful target of a large group of stones, but that wasn't particularly special either. On our way back to our outpost a car came toward us with its lights out and we stopped it. A group of youth had congregated down the street from where the car had come and

we stopped it. A group of youth had congregated down the street from where the car had come and were throwing stones. We stopped the car for questioning —who told you to turn your lights off, what are the names of the people throwing stones. Out of six of us, four were leftists, and the questioning could hardly be considered much of an interrogation. Our officer warned the main questioner (the only one of us who knew much Arabic, though most of the youth in the camp speak a rather good Hebrew) not to lay a hand on the main kid being questioned. In the end, it was about 45 minutes of questioning, during which time the youth down the street occasionally threw stones and taunted us, and the owner of the car would yell to the stone throwers not to hurt his car. I'm not sure who he was more afraid of, us or the kids down the street. And then we finally got back to our outpost — on the whole an uneventful and not particularly interesting addition to the banalities of occupation.

Sunday, October 21, 10:00

A quiet night passed, and that gives me time now to try and catch up on the last of my notes that I haven't succeeded in writing about.

About a week ago, after the curfew was lifted, the same day we carried out Operation Slogan Erase, a group of paratroopers from the standing army received orders to enter the refugee camp at night and to remain there for about 24 hours, stationing themselves on a rooftop. They stationed themselves quietly, as planned, but in the morning they reported to us that rocks were being thrown at them. Shortly thereafter we heard them using an exorbitant amount of anti-riot equipment, so we prepared a couple of units of our soldiers to go and help them. I stayed here. When our leftist officer returned from "helping" he excitedly told me that I had to hear a story. He said that the paratroopers had not only stationed themselves on a roof, but that they'd also unfurled a large Israeli flag on the roof and that the soldiers, all eight of them, instead of having one or two guarding or on the lookout and the rest relaxing, were standing on the roof in a very provocative manner. He was amazed and said that he told the officer of the paratroopers that it was obvious that they should expect a barrage of rocks — they clearly represented a provocation. Their officer reported that wherever he goes he represents Israel, so of course he should unfurl a flag. With logic such as that, the only conclusion is that he's going to have to expect stones thrown at him wherever he goes — but of course that's what he wants, since then he can respond with his weapons. (Later that evening, when a group of us went into the camp in order to be on alert when these paratroopers left their "temporary" outpost, I had a chance to see their flag, and I admit that I probably would have thrown stones at it as well.)

Later that night I heard an additional story, even more mind boggling than that about the flag. The U.N. representatives in the camp had complained to the military authority in Tulkarem that these paratroopers had taken clothes from the house whose roof they were on. They were even seen beating Palestinians on the street in front of the house. Though we found this hard to believe, an investigation revealed that some of the troops had dressed up in Palestinian clothing and on the street others of them acted out punishing them — "demonstrating" to the "natives" what would happen to them if they didn't behave. We were amazed to learn of this behavior, and even moreso to learn that the officer with these troops didn't see what was wrong with it. And I suppose that it goes without saying that all of these soldiers are undoubtedly nice kids who love their mothers and who help old ladies cross the street. And it should also go without saying that they were all born since 1967, and that all of their military service has been since the start of the Intifada.

Sunday, October 21, 20:15, and
Monday, October 22, 06:00

This short interlude should perhaps be entitled "The Ninja Wars", though that title sounds a bit too serious. After all, even though there's no question that there's a war going on, what I'm about to describe is really little more than a skirmish. Still, this particular story deserves a title, because although on the whole it's more of the same, in a way it's also different. After being here three weeks we've pretty much developed a basic pattern of behavior, the essence of which is that we initiate our actions instead of reacting to provocation. This time, we responded to what seemed like a problem that had sprung up.

At around 14:00 a roadblock of ours stationed at the end of the main street of the refugee camp,

with a good view of much of that street, suddenly reported on the field radio that they sighted about twenty "ninjas" in all shades of colorful dress, and with masked faces, marching, perhaps dancing, back and forth across the street. We have orders to try and catch masked people, and such a colorful pageant was not only an opportunity to try and catch some, but also sounded like the start of a large demonstration. But though in a way these ninjas sounded rather ominous, they certainly didn't represent a threat to us. The person who reported them even pleasantly described them as reminding him of Purim. We were willing to let well enough alone. Which wasn't the case with a higher ranking officer (outside of our g'dud, but with authority over us). He demanded that we immediately jump to action, sending a few groups of soldiers to try and catch the trouble makers.

We had little choice other than to spring to action, though as soon as we were inside the camp, aside from the inevitable and unavoidable occasional rock (which can still be frightening and dangerous) it was clear to us that all was quiet. But we continued to wander through the alleys of the camp, getting a rather surrealistic tour.

In some ways it was like the mandatory local color scenes in countless Asian thrillers, in which the western hero faces a new reality that he hasn't known before — a bleakness exemplified by women and children sitting on their doorsteps, passively, perhaps apathetically, staring at you as you pass by. At one point a group of six of us held a main intersection, standing quietly underneath whatever cover we could find so that a sudden barrage of rocks wouldn't hurt us, waiting for a group of amorphous, perhaps apocryphal, ninjas to appear. A woman limped into the intersection and started passing us, on her way home, when she saw a friend of hers about 100 meters behind her. They called to each other, and the woman near us waited for her friend to slowly catch up. There she was, waiting patiently, perhaps even demonstrably nonchalantly, in the middle of six well trained and armed infantry soldiers who were purposefully trying to not be particularly visible.

But if in some ways this was an Asian thriller, a switch of channels brought you a Felliniesque pageant of unconnected, almost surreal images. On a wall of one alley we walked through we found the carefully painted slogan "I Like Isreal", with the misspelling making it almost believable after the mandatory double-take. The only other almost English slogan was "ninjas Demagracy" (I think I've got the spelling right), the meaning of which is beyond me, though I suppose that I more or less catch the intent. Still, more than a political slogan, it sounds like the name of a punk-rock band. In general the dress in the refugee camp is a rich mix of tradition and modern garb, but I was still surprised when in one alley a young girl with a Rolling Stones "Sticky Fingers" T-shirt passed us. Maybe a T-shirt with Michael Jackson, but with an album over ten years old of a middle-aged rock band? On kibbutz we can often find kids in dated T-shirts of this sort — left by volunteers and then passed down through a few kvutzot until the shirt falls apart. But who was the volunteer in the Tulkarem refugee camp who left his T-shirt before he left?

From one alley, in which a stone was thrown at us, we entered another and there heard the pleasant, bouncy music of one of Israel Television's more popular children's programs coming from one of the homes we passed. Another double-take, but after all, why shouldn't the kids here watch Israeli children's programming. Yet another alley. We stood quietly in the alley for about five minutes while waiting for another group of us to report to us that they'd stationed themselves at a new spot. We stood quietly in the alley and suddenly from a hole in the wall facing us, at floor level, a splash of water flowed out toward us into the alley, and then another. Inside the house on the other side of the wall someone (undoubtedly a woman) was washing the floor, and we were the recipients, whether or not by design was rather unclear since the person washing the floor probably couldn't see us, of the dirty water. Whatever symbolism there was in this act should be solely attributed to the wild imagination of the beholder.

As a sort of whipped topping to this tale of adventure, or perhaps a recurring pasacaglia, though not at consistent rhythmic intervals, we have to remember to add the stones. Every so often, from someplace that looked to be more than anyplace else "out of nowhere" a stone or group of stones would fly threw the air and suddenly land near us — and then there was quiet again. After my next shower (presently delayed — it's now 09:30 and I finished personing the field radio half an hour ago with the intent of going straight to the shower, when we got an announcement to be on alert for entering the refugee camp) I intend to put on my "Never A Dull Moment" T-shirt.

Rel'd
11-10-90

Monday, October 22, 11:15

And now I've showered and changed to clean clothes, our being on alert has been called off, and I can now hopefully write the epilogue to our story — "The child with the slingshot meets the most humane occupying army in the world". (To be continued when the latest rumors are either proven wrong, or when I return from what sounds like a long visit to the refugee camp.) [Happily, luckily, and admittedly to my surprise, nothing developed from those rumors, and throughout the day I was able to write, with my shoes on more often than off, but still rather comfortably. The rumor, which we'd heard had spread through the closest refugee camp to "ours" was that five Palestinian day laborers had been murdered in Kfar Saba, retaliation for the murder of three Jews in Jerusalem on Sunday. Actually, it didn't really matter whether the rumor was true or not, only whether it would spread to the Tulkarem refugee camp and lead to rioting. But it's a sign of the times that just about everybody here found the rumor perfectly believable. As I think the Liberation News Service used to say — it's the truth, whether it happened or not.]

The group that I wasn't with succeeded in catching a kid of about ten years old in the act of throwing stones at them with the aid of a very accurate slingshot. That he was the enemy went without saying — and our first prisoner of war in our three weeks of street fighting. He was a prisoner that we apparently could be proud that we'd captured.

But our capturers, eight soldiers in all, couldn't decide what to do with him. Especially since almost immediately after he was caught a number of women, probably his mother, aunts and sisters, started following them wherever they went, pleading to let him go. Nobody was exactly sure what to do, and apparently an argument started between the troops, though the officer in charge quickly organized things, and via back alleys (actually, almost the entire refugee camp is back alleys) they brought their prisoner to our outpost. The kid was undoubtedly very frightened, but he apparently quickly understood that trying to run away wasn't a very good idea and he cooperated. It even seemed that he started to enjoy his adventure and his place in the sun. My guess is that he was captivated by our weapons and uniforms (though they're dirty and messy and don't make much of an impression on me) and was pleased and excited by his opportunity to be so close to us. (I've suggested as a very real way of solving the Intifada that we offer all the Palestinian youth who want to, and are fit, to enlist in the Golani Brigade which is made up of Jewish kids not so different from them, and which has a name as a crack and elite unit not only in Jewish but also in Palestinian circles. I'm sure that many kids would jump at the opportunity.)

So our stone thrower was brought back to our outpost, and once again an argument started — what should we do with him! The question was both tactical and strategic. Tactically, when the kid was brought to our outpost he was brought right into the middle and was able to see everything (as though there's so much to spy on). After a few moments it was decided to keep him at a distance from us, with a guard with instructions not to touch him beyond leading him by the hand. But it was on the strategic level that things were heated. One person vehemently demanded that we stop with our kid glove attitude. Beat the kid and teach him a lesson. And in order not to give the impression that he's a racist he added that that's the right way to deal with all children — beat them so they'll remember well what not to do. I added that he shouldn't stop with kids — that he should beat his wife as well, but I realized that chances were too good that he'd agree with the idea, so I remembered that I have to be careful.

Interestingly, even, or perhaps especially, those who most openly speak of wanting permission to shoot live ammunition related kindly, maybe even affectionately, to this kid. After all, they're good people at heart, aren't they? (This is a good place to tell a popular Kahana joke. In order to be accepted in Kahana's organization you have to pass two tests — to kill an Arab and to kill a cat. The person being told the joke is supposed to ask in shock — "but why a cat?") I'm probably overdoing it with this assumption, but I had the feeling that one of our troops even felt a bit of respect and through that, affection, for this kid.

Wednesday, October 24, 08:30

It's a relaxing sort of change to be sitting in an auditorium listening to the Kibbutz Chamber Orchestra rehearsing a Cimarosa opera. This morning a friend from the plugah loaned me his car for the day and I drove the no more than twenty minutes to the kibbutz where the orchestra rehearses.

Tzippi is busy playing at the moment, but we'll have some time together before I have to return. I'd planned to make this visit yesterday but various things came up (none of them in this particular case connected to problems in the refugee camp) that kept me at our outpost. This morning I'd intended to person the field radio from 06:00 until 09:00 and then catch a ride to our g'dud where the car I took is kept (five minutes from the plugah by jeep) but at 07:00 the jeep was going to the g'dud, and at about that time our leftist sergeant friend of mine (Yossi R.) woke up, wondering why he hadn't been wakened during the night. I explained to him that after he'd gone to sleep we'd had a change of orders from our g'dud, cancelling the action he was going to take part in, so I simply left him out of night guard duty, since he hadn't been included originally anyway. That being the case, he said he had no reason not to replace me so that I could get off earlier. So by 07:00 I was here, found Tzippi, then went to her room where I showered, and now I'm able to sit and write as I listen to the rehearsal.

This is perhaps a very proper place to start writing some thoughts that for a couple of days already I've known that I was going to have to write. For the past three weeks I've been keeping a journal from what is one of the fronts of an ongoing war that's called the Intifada. But more and more it's been becoming evident that the difference between the "front" of the Tulkarem refugee camp and the rear guard of Israel to the west of the green line is little more than semantic. Just about every day we enter the camp for around an hour, either to patrol or to disperse a demonstration. We ordinarily get only a moderate barrage of rocks, though occasionally it's totally quiet, and occasionally hot and heavy. Disturbances such as those that we on the whole have to deal with are considered minor, and the papers don't print anything that indicates that things are other than quiet (and normal) in "our" refugee camp or in numerous other camps, villages or towns similar to it.

And so for us, all is relatively quiet and predictable, while back in Israel all hell seems to be breaking loose. When we read the papers or hear the news on the radio we can even forget that we're supposed to be on the front lines. Today, as has happened more and more frequently of late, the green line, which was supposedly erased long ago by Israel, was brought back into existence as roadblocks throughout the country kept Palestinians from entering Israel to go to work — a security measure taken after the numerous attack on Israeli Jews of the past few days.

But it's clear that we're entering a stage of "bringing the war home". A stage in the ongoing struggle where civilians (which means, of course, Jewish civilians — the vast majority of the Palestinians are non-combatant, but they're assumed to be the enemy anyway) are fair game. Now, instead of our families worrying about our safety when we're on miluim, the people with me tell me that they're worried for their wives and families "back home" (which for most of us is only a short drive from where we're stationed).

People react indignantly to the reports of the attacks by Arabs of this past week. Without in any way trying to defend these attacks I try and remind people that the attackers have lived most, or even all, of their lives under an occupation which for them is very real. We're constantly stationed in their midst, we can command them at will and whim, we go into their homes in order to go up to their roofs without them being able to complain — and these are only run of the mill, daily examples, not counting the all too numerous cases in which soldiers deviate from the rules. To a large extent thanks to us violence is an integral part of their daily lives — how could we possibly assume that sooner or later it wouldn't be directed back toward us.

So this is a week of Palestinian violence toward Jews, and it seems that it's only a matter of time before Jews decide to righteously "retaliate" in vigilante actions of their own (and it's important not to forget that a major difference between "us" and "them" is that "they" don't have an army or police force responsible for their defense, or a court system to mete out punishment). We used to joke "what do you get when you mix Northern Ireland with South Africa? — the West Bank", and soon it seems that the correct answer will simply be all of Israel.

A short while ago the orchestra had a break and Tzippi and I sat out on the lawn before the auditorium where the rehearsals take place. I've continued writing from the lawn. This kibbutz has about 2,000 residents and is perhaps five times the size of the Tulkarem refugee camp, with 12,000. As I was sitting on the lawn, writing and relaxing, I realized that though it's only been a week and a half since I was last home, I'd forgotten what it was like to see a lawn and to hear birds chirping around me. In all of the refugee camp there's not one park. That in itself seems to me to be sort of an act of violence.

Tzippi and I had talked on the phone about the possibility that I'd get a morning to visit while she was here, so she brought along Mom's letter #552 of October 10. I have to admit that Mark's

method of trying to calm Mom's anxiety is rather inventive. It's true that I'm usually stationed on the Syrian or Lebanese borders. That's because I belong to a highly trained infantry unit which is supposed to be able to defend those borders in the case of war. It's strange to think that it's safer to spend miluim on those borders, though on the whole it's been true for the past three years that miluim there are more comfortable than in the territories. Friends who used to think that I had it rough in miluim when we were sent to the Syrian border became jealous of me after they'd had to serve in the territories a number of times and I hadn't.

Not being at all rushed at the moment (and with no fear of suddenly being put on alert, or worse, having to make good on that alert) I've got time for a thought that keeps coming up in my head. There are those among us who are known to feel that these are great miluim. We're not far from the center of the country, we hardly have to exert ourselves physically, we almost never wear our heavy field belts, the phone is readily available. I of course find it close to impossible to understand how someone can think such a thing. On the other hand, every so often someone will sit and talk with me and exclaim that these are really terrible miluim. I will no doubt agree with him — my opinion toward having to perform the acts of occupation we're called on to perform is common knowledge. But then my companion will explain something like — we never get canteen at our outpost, or that we have to live in tents instead of in bungalows, or that the leaves aren't good (actually they're quite good, but there's always somebody who'll complain about them). Someone else, with a bit more depth to his thought, will remark that there isn't enough variety to our assignments and that we're always in the same place instead of on vehicular patrols which give us a chance to see some scenery. Yet another will note that the atmosphere between the members of the plugah is tense which makes these miluim harder on him. Though I understand and agree with the last two points, for me, my attitude toward these miluim doesn't really have anything to do with the physical conditions. As I've noted to numerous friends, even if I'd worked in our kitchen for the entire month, the basic fact of being part of an occupying army would influence my mood. So even though I'm often able to crack a joke or to take part in relaxed and enjoyable bullshitting around, I couldn't imagine describing these miluim as anything less than rather torturous.

Yesterday evening, for various reasons, I had a hard time arranging the guard duty list for the night and the next day. I'd had my shoes on since the morning and had done more than my share of guarding, as well as performing jobs which are mine alone. I was pretty exhausted and after supper I sat by myself at the dining tent table to relax a bit and be by myself. (A sharp sense that I've developed told me that if I took my shoes off I'd have to put them on again within a few minutes, and I was right, though I took them off just the same. All told, throughout the day, from 06:00 until midnight, I had them off for about twenty minutes altogether.) While sitting at the table one of the most religious members of the plugah decided that this was a good time for what we jokingly refer to as "know the enemy" (the army has an acronym for that name and under that title we sometimes have lessons on Syrian weapons or military tactics). So he politely (though undoubtedly also provocatively) asked me if I thought that Jews should be permitted onto the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. I was surprised at how calmly and quietly (and I don't mind saying, also clearly) I explained to him my general political and cultural outlook — and how attentively he listened, realizing that though we're really in different worlds, I was definitely making sense.

And if I'm on the subject of different worlds, we have a new soldier in our plugah who brings religious piety to new heights. He seems to be an intelligent guy, but he's hardly in the army, but instead in a world of his own in which every event is a special opportunity to say a bracha or to remember a particular verse from the Bible or Talmud or something similar. When I finished the standing army I wasn't much of a soldier, and most of what I know about being a good infantry soldier I learned in miluim, and there's no reason not to expect that something similar can't happen to this character as well. Except for the fact that he often hardly seems aware of the fact that he's supposed to function as a soldier. But I write of our being worlds apart because his favorite saying seems to be "there's no joy like the deliverance from doubt". He'll say this when he finally knows when he'll be guarding throughout the day, or when it's clear when his next leave is going to be, and in numerous similar circumstances. But of course his main joy is in not having any doubts about the way that the universe functions: everything is in God's hands. And on this account he finds me as unbelievable as I find him when I tell him that life is interesting because we don't have answers, and know we won't find ultimate answers, but keep searching for them just the same.

Thursday, October 25, 02:00

At 15:00 I was back at our outpost. Neither Tzippi nor I complained when the orchestra rehearsal finished earlier than expected. We drove to Netanya and wandered a bit around there, eating lunch, sitting and talking. It was an excellent way to spend the day, and though I returned quite tired, I was most definitely refreshed. Even though I'll be home for this Shabbat, this short break was sorely needed. My tour at the field radio was from 15:00 until 18:00, but the person I was to replace told me that I could sleep for an hour before replacing him, which I happily and readily did. I "made up" for that hour from 18:00 until 20:00 when there was a hole in the new guarding lists I'd made up.

During my tour at the field radio one of the more left oriented religious members of the plugah sat with me. He often reminds me that though he considers himself a humanist, he isn't particularly interested in having to give up territories. He asked me my opinion of how the plugah is behaving toward the "native" population, but it was clear that more than wanting to hear my opinion, he wanted to tell me his, and I was happy to listen. He's worried. He hears everybody say how politely we deal with the local population, but he thinks that the facts are different. He thinks we use more force than is necessary and that as our month has progressed we find it easier and easier to use our anti-riot equipment without giving it a second thought. And more than these examples, he's very attuned to the level of verbal violence that we direct toward the "natives" — when we speak at (never, of course, with) them, and especially when we speak about them among ourselves. It's most definitely true that we don't go around beating or shooting the residents of the refugee camp, and I'm happy to distribute medals on humane conduct if that's called for. I'm not really sure what the right attitude to take on this issue is — to join in with the vast majority that gives itself a pat on the back for restrained and humane behavior in the face of verbal taunting and stone throwing, or to feel the underlying signs of hatred and dehumanization that are the inevitable side effects of the occupation.

Thursday, October 25, 12:00

To continue the same issue of last night's writing, a few members of our plugah returned to our outpost yesterday evening after picking up supplies at the military administration right by us. They reported that there they saw a group of suspects being made to sing 'Am Yisrael Khai (The People of Israel Lives). Let's try that sentence again: With broad grins on their faces and with a generally jovial atmosphere of satisfaction they again and again told everyone, who then also happily repeated the story, about the pleasant experience they'd just had of seeing suspects being forced to sing 'Am Yisrael Khai over and over. Both descriptions are accurate, and of course one's view of our behavior here depends on which description you choose. Our soldiers aren't the ones who initiated this punishment (and those using it certainly didn't invent it — it's been around a very long time). All they did was enjoy the fact that it was happening — certainly a banal sort of pleasure. Most of them can't understand why I think it's not only something not to be proud of, but actually something to be ashamed of.

Thursday, 18:00

Perhaps it's because I intend to be on my way home tomorrow morning. That, along with being tired and fed up with this stuff, mixed with the expectation of getting home, makes me count the minutes. Whatever, I'm down. An hour ago I phoned Tzippi and she immediately sensed something in my voice. It's not really anything in particular, just a normal case of end of miluim blues, mixed with a much too large dose of occupationitis. After a month on the Golan Heights I become tired with scenes that I normally greatly enjoy seeing, and returning to, each year, so it's logical that the same should be true about being here, and all the moreso when the same scene that I have, day after day, is of a refugee camp. It's been a few days since I was last inside the camp, and though I have no particular interest in going in, somehow being there breaks up a very monotonous day, and at least in the short run monotony can be more destructive (personally) than occupation. Units of ours went into the refugee camp twice today. Each time I was set to enter, and each time someone replaced me at the last minute. So that was one less time I had to sweat profusely, and having stones thrown at me, and wonder about what my reaction to those stones should be. But it was also one less time that I could see

different sights from up close and to have the feel of adventure and excitement that undeniably exists in our activities here. I'm more than willing to forego the experience, but the feeling is still very real.

It so happened that this last entrance into the camp was pretty "productive". One of our units caught a person on the wanted list, though we don't know what he was wanted for — it may even be that he didn't pay his car tax, though it might be something more serious. I haven't yet had a full report of what went on, but from the sound of things a good deal of anti-riot equipment was used. I don't know how many stones and bricks were thrown — they make much less noise.

Since 18:00 (about an hour and a half now) I've been at a watch tower that I've guarded at only once before. I needed somebody for two hours, and I was available, so I volunteered myself. It's boring but quiet. I have a view of the refugee camp from above, though that mostly shows me only rooftops. I'm next to a strong projector. It and another at an outpost of ours about 100 meters from here give all the street light the refugee camp has. I have a view of the villages to the north, east and south, and though from here there isn't much to see in them, it's a slightly different view than what I've been used to.

Yesterday our Chabadnik member of the plugah (Moti) arrived. We thought he wouldn't be with us at all for this month and it's nice to have this surprise and to have a chance to talk with him. We've been together many years and are good friends, finding many similarities despite our differences. He's an excellent talker, though not much of a listener. Last night I arranged for him to be on guard duty with Yossi R. at a post just above our field radio. At the same time I was personing the radio. This morning Moti told me that he had a good conversation with Yossi R. I corrected him — I heard him talking for two hours, and Yossi listening.

But though Moti isn't much of a listener, this morning we had a very good talk. He hadn't known all the history of my refusal to serve, nor my finally deciding to change my mind, and I told him the entire story, quite at length. He's one of the only people in the plugah who reacted that he was surprised that I didn't ultimately decide to end up in jail. He said that he'd expect me to be consistent until the end — and didn't mean this derogatorily. Though our opinions are very different, one of the reasons we're close is the fact that I cling very strongly to my beliefs. So in a way I guess that I disappointed Moti by not going to jail, and in a way I guess that I'm sorry about that, though my commitment is to myself and not to him.

Shabbat, October 27, 1990, 09:30, at home

I'd expected to have much of today to sit down and transcribe much of what I've written since I was last at home. I go back to Tulkarem tomorrow morning, for altogether another two days before we're released, and though I don't think that I'll succeed in transcribing all of what I've written, I do want to get some of it into the mail. When I finished writing at around 20:00 on Thursday I'd expected a quiet night to pass and then to be on my way home relatively early the next morning. I'd thus figured that I wouldn't have anything else to add from my last writing, and could thus devote my time to transcribing. But things didn't work out that way.

I'd arranged myself to be on guard duty from 01:00 until 03:00, along with someone with whom I enjoy talking. I could have assigned myself to be at the field radio for about that same time, and in that way be able to write, but I didn't have anything else I wanted to write about, and Yossi R. asked that I give him those hours, so I had no reason not to agree. I went to sleep at around 21:00, perhaps even earlier, and was awakened at 23:00 by about three gun shots, about the only shots of real bullets we've heard since we've been here. One of the two people guarding at the spot I was going to be at in another two hours had seen a few molotov cocktails being thrown at our outpost. He hadn't seen who had thrown them, nor exactly from where they'd been thrown, so he fired a few shots into the air to at least show that we were on guard. Of course it wasn't only the gun shots that woke all of us up. If a molotov cocktail is thrown at you, that means that you have to react in some way, and all of us were awakened, a patrol was organized, and in general for about an hour we were on our feet before returning to rest and then guarding. Things didn't exactly return to normal, but they'd at least calmed down. The molotov cocktail had a long way to go before reaching our encampment and we were never really endangered, but then since we've been stationed in Tulkarem this is far and away the closest that anyone has come to seriously threatening us, and a central and important aspect of our job here is to protect ourselves.

Though this is certainly an unpleasant sort of experience, it was much less frightening than

others I've had in the past. Somehow it didn't really phase me. What's more frightening is the fact that there's good reason to assume that this isn't really an isolated event. Since the "disturbances" of this past week parts of the Palestinian leadership in the territories have called for outright attacks on Israeli soldiers. This seems to suggest that for the remainder of the time we'll be in Tulkarem we'll be a logical target for more molotov cocktails, or perhaps kamikaze attacks when we're patrolling. This isn't the sort of thing to look forward to. Israel has closed off the territories from pre-'67 Israel in order to try and prevent more attacks of the sort that occurred last week. And with the borders closed chances are good that soldiers are the only target available for whoever decides that vengeance is the correct policy. Even with the understanding that I'm able to feel for the desperation of someone who thinks that he has no other way of achieving his goal, for obvious reasons I prefer not to be the target.

My plans for going home early yesterday were grounded when it was decided to establish curfew throughout the territories (or at least in the areas where we're stationed — I don't know what the exact policy is). Curfew demands more troops and more troops on alert for immediate action, and our plans to leave for home before others returned simply weren't plausible anymore. But by 11:00 people had returned, and the atmosphere was calm, and I was able to set out on the way home. Before getting to the green line from where I could comfortably try and hitch a ride I passed through the town of Tulkarem and also got to the roadblock that we person each day. From the roadblock we have a good view of much of the main street of the refugee camp. It was interesting to see that on the street a group of about twenty kids were playing a game of soccer. Yes, there was curfew, and yes, they're supposed to stay in their homes, but the army isn't quite that stupid that it would deny these kids a rather innocent way of letting off steam. Were we to try and enforce the curfew more than was already in effect we'd undoubtedly lead to rioting, and my guess is that neither side wanted this. The kids playing soccer probably understood this as well, and playing outside was thus not only a form of recreation for them (and from what I've seen, usually the street is rather crowded and not a regular spot for a game) but also a sort of protest, showing us that they knew that we wouldn't try and make a show of force as long as their play was more or less "innocent". So though we're in charge, it's also a standoff, the limits of which are determined by how much each side is willing to pay for changing this impossible, but somehow workable, *status quo*.

This was the first time I've passed through Tulkarem when it's been under curfew. It had a ghost town like atmosphere, made all the eerier by the fact that only a day earlier I'd passed through it and it was lively and bustling. Now there were groups of soldiers stationed on various rooftops, enforcing the quiet. But this didn't change the fact that as we drove through the town numerous stones and bricks were thrown at us, some hitting our enclosed command car. And this from a town that as opposed to the refugee camp just to the east is normally considered peaceful and quiet. Talk about bringing the war home!

On yesterday morning's news we heard a report that our Defense Minister had decided to permit soldiers to open fire with live bullets on stone throwers. This didn't lead to much of an argument, mostly because even those who were happy to hear of such a decision understood that there were undoubtedly strings attached. For them it was too good to be true, and for the rest of us, frightened as we were of its implications, it was clearly not an "order" which could be carried out in any plausible manner, and we thus knew that we could expect later clarifications to water things down immensely. Still, there's something frightening in the escalation of our ongoing war. It's clear that the present status quo isn't going to last too much longer.

One additional item from Friday morning deserves to be reported. After we'd awakened and were attending to various jobs, the basic objective of which on my part was to make the time pass so that I wouldn't think only about when I'd be able to leave for home, a friend from the outpost a couple hundred meters away, inside the refugee camp, came down and started talking with me, both as a friend and as a medic. The previous day, as happens just about every day between 16:00 and 17:30, numerous rocks had been thrown at their outpost. One other friend had been hit by a rock in the forehead and I'd been called to take a look at him. He had a bump on his head, but nothing more serious than that. But Oren, who had now come to visit, had a different problem. He was visibly shaken and asked me if I had anything in the way of tranquilizers that I could give him. I told him that I didn't, and instead we sat and talked for around fifteen minutes. Oren identifies himself as a leftist though I've never really enjoyed having him on my side in an argument because even though I agree with his gut feelings he somehow doesn't argue well (he by the way is also a vegetarian). Where he is

stationed the rather regular response to the daily rock throwing is a tear gas grenade here, a rubber bullet there, with nothing really having any effect. He reported to me that he'd thrown one too many grenade, all too often seeing the tear gas take effect on innocent women and children in the streets but not changing anything. What's more, he reported that even when kids threw stones at him, he found himself identifying more with them than with himself. During our talk he started crying a number of times. It was a classic case of Catch 22 where if you claim that you can't take any more you in that way prove that you're normal, and thus you can. I spoke with our plugah commander and arranged for Oren to no longer be stationed where he's been. Perhaps in that way he can get through the last few days without too much strain.

But this incident illuminated for me a central aspect of my behavior here which has made me capable of getting through this month. I'm very personally involved in both the political and the personal aspects of our occupation. I often find myself identifying with rock throwers and sensing the humiliation involved in our barging into people's homes, or walking with a rifle through their streets. (I should add that I also feel what the occupation is doing to us and our behavior toward the Palestinians and among ourselves. Though I don't identify with soldiers who feel humiliated that they're unable to use live bullets and to use the training they've been given, I can understand them as well.) But somehow I've succeeded, for good or for bad, in separating myself from what's happening and have instead become a voyeur. I'm able to say "this isn't me doing these things" but instead make myself into a camera, seeing and taking pictures of what's happening, without really getting involved. And of course a camera isn't called on to make moral judgments about itself. Oren felt that my talking to him had helped him, and I hope it did. I don't think he realizes how much our conversation only sharpened and intensified my own personal moral dilemma.

Shabbat 18:00

At lunch today a friend gave me a fitting description of what I generally call the cat and mouse game, or cops and robbers, that we and the youth of the refugee camp play. He said that from his limited Intifada experience these activities most reminded him of an old Warner Brothers cartoon series in which a bulldog, who has the job of protecting some geese from a fox, is always chasing after the fox. Of course chases are common in cartoons, but in this particular series it was the dog's job to chase the fox and the fox's job to be chased. They'd both check in for work in the morning on a time clock attached to a tree and then start the chase. When the lunch time bell would ring they'd politely halt the chase until the bell signifying the end of the meal at which time things would pick up again where they'd left off until the sound of the bell that ended the day's work, at which time they'd punch out on the clock. Earlier I'd referred to a very specific "time to throw stones", but I admit that this new metaphor, taken from a very different realm of associations, has a distressing accuracy to it.

Wednesday, October 31, 1990, 9:30 at home

There really wasn't any reason to write during my last two days of miluim. When I returned on Sunday morning I returned to more of the same, though on the whole things were calmer and quieter. We had the clear feeling that things were winding down, and though our job was to perform whatever tasks we were called upon to perform, we were also actively trying to carry out that other order we'd had since the beginning of our service — to protect ourselves.

So we sat around a good deal, counting the hours until our release. At one point a higher ranking officer heard something like a demonstration taking place inside the refugee camp and on the field radio asked our plugah commander whether we were organizing a patrol to deal with the problem. Our plugah commander calmly responded that a month's experience had taught him that there was no point in doing anything and that the "disturbance" would calm down by itself. We were proud of him.

(This reminds me of another incident that took place about a week before our release. The second in command of our g'dud was passing through our area of responsibility and called us on the field radio. He reported to us that the refugee camp sounded bustling and lively. Thinking that we were being put to task for not quieting things down our plugah commander responded that everything was under control and that since there was no curfew there was no reason why things in the camp

shouldn't be that way. The second in command of the g'dud quickly apologized. He hadn't meant to berate us but rather to remark that life seemed to be going on normally and to note that that was something positive.)

One of the activities we were involved with during the last couple of days was preparing for our end of miluim plugah party. I don't know when this tradition started but it's become mandatory that at the end of each miluim we gather for a festive meal. Usually this means that we meet at a restaurant in the vicinity of our service, and then many of us complain that because of this meal we get home a couple of hours later than we would have otherwise, and all because of a meal that we weren't really interested in from the beginning. Others respond that our celebrating together is an important means of solidifying our fighting spirit which is a central aspect of our effectiveness as a unit (and I can personally add that it functions effectively in preventing someone who might refuse to serve from doing so as well).

Perhaps this is a proper place to report a short incident. When I first reported to the g'dud, after meeting with our khativa commander, one of the first people I saw was our g'dud commander's driver who for many years was a sergeant in our plugah. He told me how upset Khanan had been by my refusing to serve — that he'd taken my refusal as his personal failing — and that he'd been in a bad mood since then. Two other people whom I'm close with in the g'dud reported something similar to me, and later on, after I'd rejoined my plugah Khanan's driver reported to me how pleased and relieved Khanan had been when I'd changed my decision. Though I originally responded to these reports with little more than a shrug of the shoulders I later realized that somehow, even though I saw myself as very detached from the proverbial fraternity of fighting men, in some small way it was still important to me that I hadn't made Khanan feel bad.

And if on the subject of the fraternity of fighting men, it was an ongoing joke in our plugah that I was taking notes on our behavior to make a report to a human rights group active in Israel. In some ways it was a question of loyalties — what were you more loyal to, your values or to the guys you're committed to fighting and dying with. For most of the people in the plugah the decision was obvious, but who was concerned with values anyway. Still, between the jokes on the subject, some of them made by me, I let it be known that I wouldn't hesitate to report on abnormal or deviant behavior, just as I'd be happy to report that our plugah had acted in a proper and respectable manner. I doubt that this had much influence on the overall behavior of the unit, but I certainly won't complain if it did.

Back to the subject of our party, this time it was decided that we'd celebrate at our central outpost the night before being released. Steaks were bought, along with various other delicacies, and everything was prepared at our outpost. This meant that some of us couldn't participate since we still had to have a number of people on guard at various places. I was quite amenable to the suggestion of a religious friend that I arrange for the two of us to be on guard duty together during the party. He in general doesn't enjoy these parties and he knew quite well that although as among the oldest people in the plugah I'm usually called upon to be elder statesperson and to make some sort of speech, this time I'd be more than happy to avoid that honor. I wouldn't have known what to say at the end of these miluim beyond being thankful that they're over, and I found it very strange to celebrate at all only a short distance from the Tulkarem refugee camp, on alert at any time to enter the camp to suppress any celebration that might take place there.

I'd originally thought that I'd do my night duty by the field radio, taking the time to do some writing. But I didn't really have anything to write about. I'd even succeeded in doing some reading during the last two days because there was nothing to write. A nice situation to be in, for a change. But instead I guarded with Avi'ad and we had no problem talking the whole three hours of our shift, discussing the various people in our plugah and how they behaved during the month, as well as how we ourselves had performed. Avi'ad identifies himself as a humanist religious Jew and is very critical of most of the other religious members of the plugah whom he sees as using their religion to justify whatever they want to do. He often reminds me that he doesn't share all my views and that he doesn't look forward to having to return territories, but it's clear to me that if he, rather than the fanatical religious right, were the person with whom I'd have to reach some sort of compromise around the future of the territories it would be very easy to find a solution. As I've perhaps written previously he's actually more critical of the behavior of a number of members of the plugah than I am, perhaps because I have less expectations, or perhaps because I've seen the behavior of members of the standing army such as the paratroopers we had contact with, whereas he's only seen how we've behaved.

Three hours of guard duty is a very long time. Even if you occasionally repeat things that have been said already, in three hours you can cover an awful lot of territory, and that's what we did, reviewing our month from various perspectives. In some ways our talking made it unnecessary for me to write. There are others in the plugah with whom I have more in common, especially politically, but somehow we compliment each other well when we talk and therefore it becomes to some extent sort of a process of thinking things through which is what I do on paper as well.

One of the things we talked about was the subject of shoes. It seems that many too many soldiers' shoes are wearing out. When I would arrange the work schedule for the next day, or even moreso when I'd organize a list of people to be on alert to enter the refugee camp, I'd often have to take into consideration three or four people who didn't have shoes they could wear inside the camp. This even happened to two of our officers, one of whom we stationed at an outpost which he didn't have to leave until he got a new pair, while the other took the shoes of someone else whose job didn't entail entering the camp. This other officer also arranged to have a temporary pair of shoes issued to him, but they were small on him and he thus couldn't wear them. They were passed on to someone else who didn't have a pair. For the first week, until he received the shoes, this person had complained that he couldn't enter the camp. He wanted to get his hands dirty (though he described things much less gently). But the solution of the shoes lasted only a short period of time — he soon decided that the dirty work really wasn't for him. He wanted to kill the bastards, but he certainly didn't like having rocks thrown at him. So he was more than happy to pass these spare shoes on to me when my pair fell apart completely. And there I was, the person who almost ended up in jail for refusal to serve in the territories, taking another pair of shoes which was a bit small on me in order to do the work we were assigned while numerous gung ho annexationists and in general Arab haters were happy to leave the dirty work to me.

Oren, whom I'd helped move from an outpost which had become psychologically very trying for him, had adjusted well during Shabbat. When I returned he reported to me that the change of venue had done him well. Avi'ad was upset with my involvement with Oren. He claimed that considering the amount of tear gas Oren had shot at demonstrators over the previous week he had every reason to feel terrible and that I had no reason to either feel sorry for him nor to try and placate his guilt. I'm not sure to what extent Avi'ad really understood how much he'd hit on a sensitive issue for me. It can rather logically be argued that in the long run I helped prolong the occupation since my intervention on a personal level for one soldier did nothing more than to make him more capable of dealing with his own difficulties in serving which had almost come to a head. And Oren, instead of reaching the conclusion that he was in an impossible situation from which the only sane thing to do was get out, coped.

Avi'ad brought up one other member of the plugah whom I'd forgotten to write about. Throughout almost the entire month two members of our plugah were on loan to another plugah. One of these soldiers was someone whom we were all happy to be rid of. Though sometimes we dislike him because he's a religious fanatic, most of the time we're simply fearful of what he'll do because he doesn't seem to be in full control of himself and is capable of causing accidents through what might politely be called absent-mindedness. While on guard duty at the plugah he was on loan to he apparently decided to check whether his rifle worked properly and shot a couple of bullets at the solar water tanks on the roofs of the houses of the village near the outpost where he was stationed. There are those of us who find it surprising that he actually hit the target, but that's an easy way of avoiding the seriousness of the issue. Even taking into consideration the fact that one can say that it's hard to hold him responsible for what he does, he's still guilty of a serious crime of willful destruction of property. To the surprise of a number of us, including Avi'ad, his sentence was altogether a week of not having leave (the event occurred a week before the end of our miluim). This in effect means that if he was supposed to have two days of leave before our release, he didn't get them. This is hardly punishment, and hardly suggests that the army looks harshly on what he did. Unlike Avi'ad I found it hard to get upset over this sentence because I had little expectation that the army would respond in any other way, though I admit that I'm disappointed. After all, I could have gotten four or five weeks in a military prison for refusal to serve, whereas this character basically gets no punishment at all for either willfully or absent-mindedly destroying property, for no reason other than that he was bored. I always knew what the army's priorities were, but I still prefer that it not show them to me so blatantly.

So our last two days were passing by calmly, without much else to get excited over besides our end of service party. We did catch one more person on the wanted list, and then had a report that what

was possibly an explosive device was found on the road, but on the whole these were uneventful and perhaps even boring days. Throughout Sunday and Monday we were on alert. Some sort of security unit was preparing to try and catch some people on its wanted list via a stake-out and we were supposed to be on alert to seal off the area in question if and when they decided to take action. On the one hand this meant that from the morning until the evening we were in our shoes, ready at any time to be called. But on the other hand this meant that no other special activities were planned (during the day at least) because we had to be available when necessary. So we didn't patrol the refugee camp and didn't respond to various problems that might otherwise have caused us to take action. Instead we simply sat around bored and counted the hours.

Sunday night a group of us took part in a round-up of the males of a nearby village. Avi'ad took part and afterwards emphasized to me more than once that this was the worst sort of work he'd been called on to do during the entire month. Of course it wasn't only distasteful, but also stupid. Once the men were rounded up in the town school the people from our plugah guarded while someone lectured to those rounded-up on why they should behave nicely toward Israel. At least they didn't have to take part later on in overseeing the erasing of slogans which is normally the topping to this sort of activity.

Tuesday at around 11:00, about the expected time, our replacements arrived. Their officers had arrived Monday evening and we'd briefed them on what the work was like here, and now all that was left was for the officers to brief their soldiers and then to take charge of the area, in that way freeing us to return our equipment and get released. And so we waited, and waited, and waited, while the commander of the new plugah gave an exceedingly long briefing to his soldiers. We really couldn't understand what it was that was taking him so long because on the whole there really isn't much to tell about the refugee camp and the "work" there. And then, while we were still waiting for him to finish, as I suppose at least half of us expected (and the other half wasn't really that surprised) the unit from the stake-out decided to go into action and the call for us to take action and seal off the main streets of the refugee camp came. We'd already packed up almost all of our equipment but we had to quickly spring into action for one last "farewell tour" visit to the Tulkarem refugee camp.

The stake-out team was trying to catch the group that had planned the murder of a woman in the camp that I reported on in my notes of Shabbat, October 20. They decided that they had a number of them cornered and that meant that it was the right time to take action, even though the only thing which interested us at that same time was being released. We quickly entered the camp and blocked off various escape routes, but our sudden entrance into the camp created a sudden reaction as well and a large barrage of rocks greeted us. It was sort of like old times, though we were neither interested in making jokes about it, or about being there at all. Curfew was imposed and after things had calmed down a bit we patrolled the alleys, making sure that things were quiet. While patrolling the alleys I had a chance to talk with another of our officers with whom I didn't have much contact during these miluim. Though he's less of a leftist than some of our other outrightly left oriented plugah members he's certainly far to the left of most of the people in the plugah. When we organized into small units to enter the camp on almost no notice we had enough troops for two patrols, one with our plugah commander and the other with our second in command, and this officer took up the rear in the patrol I was in with our second in command. Thus we had a chance to talk as we walked through the alleys whereas otherwise he'd have been in front while I was taking up the rear. I told him that he got extra points from me for being very slow on the trigger, and he was pleased with the compliment. He noted that the soldiers he's usually responsible for are normally very hot headed and he had to work hard to keep them calm. He told me that he even taught them to say "thank you" after receiving an identity card from someone they'd told to present one. A small victory for humaneness. He told me that he was impressed with and respected the fact that I did whatever it was we were called on to do, even though he knew that these things were highly distasteful to me. Always one to feel the time is right for cynicism, even while on patrol inside the Tulkarem refugee camp, I told him that this was small comfort.

I should add that while we were in the camp a unit from the paratroopers of the standing army was there as well and we had a chance to see how they functioned as opposed to us. Once again we saw how these kids were enamored of their own strength and sought any opportunity to show it. Since we'd enforced curfew people weren't supposed to be on the streets. Men stayed off the streets almost totally, but occasionally we'd see a number of women who were probably trying to go from where they

were when curfew was imposed to their homes. We didn't interfere with them and even aided a grandfather who was trying to round up his grandchildren from different houses and get them all home. But the paratroopers seemed to see women walking on the streets as an offense to them. They'd yell at them to get back to where they'd come from, and a few even picked up stones to throw at them (or at least in their direction) until our yelling at them to stop interfered with their regular behavior and restored a bit of respectability and civility. We entered the camp at around 12:30 and came out at 15:00. It had been a bustling town when we suddenly entered, and now it was almost like a ghost town with almost nobody on the streets or even in the back alleys. One long last scene from the Battle of Algiers.

This particular scene actually had a lot that was similar to the Battle of Algiers. For one thing, though the group being staked-out can undoubtedly be considered a "terrorist" group, depending on the side you're looking from, it can also be considered a brave group of heroes. One of them was killed and apparently two more were caught, as we learned from the news, both on the television last night and in today's papers. Before we left the camp an Israeli television film team arrived and did a bit of filming — on last night's news I saw two friends from my unit. Since I'd been standing in the same place that was filmed I'm glad that the small unit I was with left the spot a few minutes before filming started. The general of the central command even arrived to view the success of the operation, though I'm not really sure that the army considers it that great a success — after all, not everybody whom they'd wanted to catch was caught. Today's papers carry slightly conflicting reports on the incident. In general it's second page news, though it's been a long time since the IDF has succeeded in catching people of this sort. The news reports inaccurately report that an army patrol "met" the group by chance. There may be some intelligence reason involved in not making it known that this was a stake-out. And I'm still not sure just on who's side I'm on. I doubt that the members of the terrorist group would be the sort of people whom I'd have much in common with, neither in the way of background or in the way of character. But somehow history has thrown them onto center stage in a role which is usually identified as freedom fighting hero, while I'm in the boots of the bad guy with the black hat who suppresses the youth whose every breath is devoted to freeing his people. Of course we're dealing with cliches. The news rarely goes beyond cliches anyway, so perhaps there's no reason not to simply see him as my enemy and make that the end of it.

Wednesday, 17:30

So instead of leaving our outpost at around noon and returning to a base just inside the green line where we could return our equipment and once again become civilians, this process started at around 16:00. But although the delay was a long and not particularly enjoyable one, in the end we were released, and with a ride all the way home I was home by 19:15. Not long after that I was in the shower, trying to wash off a month of being an occupying power.

And now I'm more or less caught up with my notes and can't really remember anything else that I wanted to report on. There are numerous other incidents, though most of them are only more of the same. I purposefully chose not to emphasize aspects of these miluim that make them similar to other stints of duty. Most of the people I was with didn't see anything different between these miluim and what we normally do anyway, or as I've already noted, they often found that these compared quite favorably. For me they were qualitatively different, and I know that that's the case for a number of other people with whom I served, as well as for many other people in Israel who perhaps go through the same hesitation about refusing to serve before they ultimately show up for their month of service. The very vast majority of us choose not to rock the boat, or come to the conclusion that the rocking we could do would hardly be felt even in a shallow wave. So I had the experience of serving in the territories. I lived through it, and the occupied Palestinians lived through it, and we don't seem to be any closer to reaching a solution than we were a month ago.

Perhaps we're farther away. I can't blame my service or the service of my g'dud for doing much one way or the other — for bringing a solution closer or pushing it farther away. But at the end of this month I'm definitely not optimistic. Part of my lack of optimism isn't connected to our service. This month had more than its share of incidents in which the continuing spiral of violence spun higher and higher. It was a month during which for a few days the green line was reestablished — at least until the government was shocked by its own action and quickly opened the borders again. And it was

a month during which the violence which is usually concentrated in the territories broke out from those borders and overflowed into Israel proper. It was a month, like so many more before it, of daily, almost forgettable violence, the type that doesn't even merit being mentioned in the newspapers, the type that most Israelis are happy to blind themselves to and to claim doesn't exist. But it was also a month in which new heights of violence were reached.

It was a month during which in many ways the war was brought home, in which the home front suddenly became the front lines. I find it hard to believe that this situation can be changed. When people within Israel are arming themselves with weapons, when people begin to be afraid to walk the streets, when every Arab day laborer is regarded with suspicion, it's hard to imagine that people are going to be open to talk of a political solution. And of course on the other side the rage continues to mount and kids become heroes when they decide to perform kamikaze raids on any Israeli target they can find, acting out a sort of Hollywood action film, not realizing that it's only in the movies that nothing happens to the ninja hero.

I learned from up close a lesson in Palestinian rage. This time the rocks that I saw being thrown were being thrown at me, and I know that they can be harmful if they hit me. (I learned as well that there's no point in trying to show my well earned credentials — "hey guys, don't throw rocks at me, don't you know that I'm really on your side?" — when simply my presence in the Tulkarem refugee camp makes me the occupier and the enemy.) I also know that many of the people throwing those rocks are young kids who know little other than rage, and it looks as though Israel wants to continue to teach them that, and that alone.

And I learned a lesson as well in the moral wasteland of the average Israeli soldier. I saw soldiers who in no way felt that this stint of service was in any way different from any other, who were oblivious to the fact that we were actively occupying another people. I saw soldiers who took pleasure in that occupying. And I saw young soldiers, hardly twenty years old, who have learned that they have the power to boss around a subservient population, and that the proper response to resistance is more strength. If these people are the main actors in our drama, one can hardly expect a happy ending.

I saw many Israeli soldiers who were disturbed with the job they were called on to perform. There were even some who though their political outlooks justified the occupation still tried to perform their jobs in as humane a manner as possible, and to even be watch dogs over others who didn't try and behave in such a manner. I saw others who for various reasons decided that they had no other choice than to perform tasks which were distasteful to them and which they saw as ultimately destructive for Israel.

I don't know how many of those others whom I most identify with went through the same process I went through before ultimately serving in the territories. My guess is that most of them felt their options limited from the beginning and didn't see refusal as one of those options and in that way saved themselves the headache of considering refusal. I know that most of them feel themselves caught in a bind and have no idea how to get out. Like them, I don't feel that there's much I can do to change the situation, and I admit that a good part of my ultimate decision to serve stemmed from the fact that I knew that even taking that step wouldn't be effective in any way either.

What's perhaps most disturbing to me is the ease with which I found myself adjusting to the job I was called on to fulfill. I think that I did the right thing in deciding to perform all the tasks I was called on to perform once I'd decided that I'd serve. I still can't see myself keeping my hands clean while others do the dirty work, and I know that I earned the respect of numerous people for making that decision. But I don't know if these people actually know just how easy it was for me to carry out all the tasks I had to perform. That's my own secret. While others are praising me for finally deciding to serve, or for carrying out our orders in a proper (and of course humane) manner, thinking that I've made an ultimate sacrifice and respecting me for that, I'm wondering what the fuss is all about. During these miluim I discovered that it's really not that hard to be an occupying power. Sometimes you can even learn to enjoy some of the situations you're faced with. Sometimes it's easy to forget your political views and simply do what you're told. Sometimes you find it comfortable to let yourself become hardened and indifferent to what's happening around you, to detach yourself from the ultimate consequences of your actions. And perhaps that's what frightens me most.