Inmate 1818

And Other Stories

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The Golem of Auschwitz

I first met Hayim when he was assigned to the small krankenbau, the infirmary at Auschwitz, where I was the only doctor. He had survived in the Auschwitz killing camp for nearly five months; the average inmate either died or was selected for gassing within three months of arrival. He was thin, but still looked healthy. His most distinguishing feature was his sparkling brown eyes which, in sharp contrast to everything around us, were full of life.

Hayim told us he had always looked mature for his age. Now, at eighteen, he appeared to be in his late twenties. When ordered by an SS guard or a *kapo* to work, he would energetically approach the chore and

do more than any other man in the detail, even if the labor was a meaningless chore like moving rocks from one pile to another. His behavior was not inspired by the cynical motto posted above the gates of Auschwitz: *Arbeit Macht Frei*, Work Makes You Free, but from his deep religious belief in the dignity of labor, even if performed for the enemy, provided it did not desecrate God's name.

Six weeks after his arrival, his faith was severely tested when his enthusiasm and brawn gained him assignment to one of the most hideous *kommandos*, or work units, in the camp—pulling gold-covered teeth from corpses before they were burned in the crematorium. Even this gruesome work did not destroy Hayim's faith. After his first day on the job, during which he threw up green bile from his empty stomach and fainted once, he decided, on religious grounds, that it was wrong to hand over all this gold to the Germans. By the end of the week, he was wearing a cloth pouch tied under his scrotum. After pulling the teeth, he would toss them roughly into the pail. Sometimes the impact would cause the gold filling or crown to separate from the tooth. When two or three golden nuggets had been dislodged in this way, he would retrieve them and hold them in his palm. At an opportune moment, he transferred the gold first to his shoes and later, in the outhouse, to the secret pouch. This method was effective until the pails were about half full. Thereafter, the golden nuggets would become lost among the teeth and

pieces of attached flesh. So he worked fast, and when the pails were more than half full, he ran to the hut that served as a collection point and exchanged them for empty ones.

The stolen gold presented Hayim with a moral dilemma: How much gold should he use for his own benefit, including bartering for extra food? After much consideration he concluded that religious law permitted the bartering of enough gold for food to maintain his current weight. He hid the rest of the gold for a purpose he hoped God would soon reveal. He used some of it to trade for a *Siddur*, a daily prayer book. He did not need the book to recite his prayers, which he knew by heart, but to him the Siddur was a precious link to the past, to his Hasidic home and dead parents. It symbolized a world the Nazis would never be able to destroy.

After ten weeks in this kommando, Hayim had accumulated almost a half kilo of gold, but he had also learned that his life was in danger. In order to preserve secrecy about the workings of the camp, the SS had a policy of dispatching his entire kommando to the gas chambers every few months, regardless of the fitness of each member. One afternoon, in an effort to save his life, he approached the German kapo in charge with a handful of shiny golden crowns, carefully selected for this purpose. Opening his palm, he flashed the gold and said in his best Yiddish-German, "I have half a kilo of this if you want it."

The kapo raised his club to strike him but stopped in midair. A sly smile appeared on his thin lips and he whispered, "Walk to the latrine." Once they reached the shack, Hayim went inside while the kapo stood at the entrance with his back toward the interior. "Talk," he ordered. Hayim offered to split his accumulated gold nuggets for a transfer to the infirmary. "I hate *swein-hund* stealing Jews," the German whispered. Then, after a moment of silence, he gave in. "But gold is gold." He opened the palm of his hand, which he held behind his back. Hayim dropped the crowns into it, and the kapo's fingers closed around them.

Further negotiations commenced over the next three days. At one point the kapo demanded two-thirds of the cache; Hayim refused but made sure that from each meeting, the kapo walked away with a few shiny crowns. On Saturday, a new SS guard was posted at the collection station. As Hayim dropped off his first bucket of teeth, the kapo nodded to him. Hayim returned to his station, but shortly thereafter, threw himself on the ground and started moaning. The kapo came over, cursed him, and clubbed him hard across his back. He then walked away and spoke to the SS guard. After a while he returned, ordered Hayim to his feet, and told him to start walking toward the infirmary. On the way they stopped at Hayim's barrack and divided the gold.

I remember my surprise when, after a week in the infirmary, Hayim handed me a canvas bag containing

gold nuggets. He said I should barter them for medicine, bandages, and food. I did, and we were rewarded by a significant improvement in the infirmary conditions. After a few days, I suggested that Hayim serve as our dentist. He objected that he had no formal training, but when I explained that the only service we could perform for a Jew with a bad toothache was extraction, he reluctantly agreed. After all, he had already pulled more than thirty-thousand teeth. Hayim's hands moved swiftly and skillfully and he developed a reputation in the camp as a good dentist. Although we had no medication available, the inmates claimed that they felt little or no pain during an extraction. Even for impacted wisdom teeth, I marveled at how small the incisions, how quick the procedures, how beautifully he sutured the gums.

It was this artistic ability to unite flesh with flesh that persuaded me to tell him about an unusual dream I had had. I dreamed that all the sick people in the bay left their bunks and gathered around the wooden table where I performed minor operations. "Make us a golem," they begged me, taking parts of their bodies and placing them on the table. One man placed his arm on the table, another yanked off his head. Someone offered his entire torso, the rest of him collapsing in a heap on the floor. Soon the entire table was covered with human parts. "We need a tailor to stitch him together," shouted a tall man with a paper bandage over his eyes.

Moses the tailor, who had sewn my Bar Mitzvah suit, stepped forward. With a fat needle and a thick thread, he quickly stitched together a human figure. "Doctor Safra, make him live," the inmates started yelling. Reluctantly, I walked over to the body, put my mouth over his mouth and forced my breath into him. Nothing happened, and after a few breaths I stopped. Once again, patients started shouting, "Make him live! Make him live; he will save us." Again I breathed into him and, with my hands, pushed and released rhythmically on both sides of his chest. On the seventh breath, his eyes opened and he started to breathe on his own. The inmates cheered as the golem slowly stood up, got off the table, and took his first awkward steps. He slowly walked toward the shelf where we kept the medicines, reached for a bottle of peroxide and drank it. Waving his arms wildly, he walked out of the infirmary. He wrecked a crematorium, ripped out the tracks on which the transports arrived, destroyed a section of electric fence, and opened the camp gates. But it was only I who ran through the gates to freedom.

I was puzzled and surprised by this dream. Myths, man-made living beings, supernatural creatures, none of these had held any interest for me—my concerns focused on the natural. However, as a young man, I had heard the legend of Rabbi Loew of Prague who, in the sixteenth century, used a Kabalistic formula to create a man from clay—a golem—to save the Jewish

community from a pogrom. This legend fascinated me. I had also heard of other instances of golem creation in Jewish lore, but I could not recall any specifics. I was certain that man could not fashion living creatures, but I did recount the dream to Hayim. After I finished, he said, "Creating a golem might force God out of hiding."

Puzzled, I asked, "What do you mean?"

"Joseph, when man creates life, even in the form of a golem, he is competing with God."

"And God doesn't like competition?"

Hayim ignored the sarcasm. "That's right."

"But when it comes to killing, he does not mind a lot of competition from the Germans."

Hayim thought for a long moment and said, "God is not here. He is hiding and does not see this."

I did not conceal my cynicism. "Is that so? I guess you still believe in God?"

"He exists," Hayim answered, his eyes gleaming.

"Do you think the golem of my dream could lead an escape?"

"No. That is why in your dream only you left the camp."

"Can we escape?"

"Only with the aid of a being created by God. But this being would have to be stronger and fiercer than Ezekiel's four-headed, four-winged creature."

Beginning to understand his logic, I replied, "But since God is hiding, such a thing can't happen."

"Yes and no. You see, God cannot hide from himself."

I grew impatient. "Stop speaking in riddles."

"It says, 'God created the world using letters of his divine name.' It is possible to create a golem by chanting specific letters and the mystical names of God."

"And God won't stop this?"

"He could. But since he is hiding, he will not."

The next few days were very hectic in the infirmary. More than the usual number of broken bones to set, dog bites to cleanse, and whip wounds to disinfect. Hayim and I had no time to talk about the golem, but I kept thinking about what he had said. In this kingdom of the dead, everything around me was miserable, brutal, and absurd. The Nazis had murdered my parents and brother. Although I never gave up hope, it would be irrational to doubt that they would succeed in killing me as well. But of one thing I was certain: They would never succeed of robbing me of my humanity. I would continue to heal and thereby to resist, in spite of the brutality and death they inflicted. I now asked myself, could man resist by creating life? More significantly, could life be created by the sound of holy words spoken by a human being? Reluctantly, I concluded it might be possible. After all, had not even the unholy words spoken by Hitler, Himmler, and others created Auschwitz?

More significantly, things were taking place every day in Auschwitz that no one had considered possible. Why not a golem?

To my surprise, it was not easy to convince Hayim to proceed. His concern was not whether we could make a golem, but whether we *should*. He worried whether, even in the present dire circumstances, it was appropriate for a Jew to practice creation. He also asked me if I wanted to further endanger my life. "What do you mean?" I asked.

In a low voice he said, "If the Germans find out, they will shoot us."

"Can a golem be killed?" I asked.

Hayim was annoyed. "I don't know."

I persisted, "Can he be gassed?"

Turning away from me, Hayim repeated, "I don't know."

I refused to drop the matter. "So, if we create a golem, we might create a life that the Germans can't gas."

"It's possible," he said, and walked away.

After several more such conversations, however, Hayim agreed to try, but only if I could provide him with *tefillin* (phylacteries), a *tallith* (prayer shawl) and the Kabalistic book entitled *Sefer Yetzirah*. This text was essential because it contains the recipe, sounds, and words for bringing a golem to life.

I told a few kapos that we would pay one level tablespoonful of gold nuggets for each of those objects. I

figured they could be found in the warehouses we called Canada. It was there that all the material goods stripped from the people arriving on the trains were sorted, stored, and then packaged for shipment to Germany.

Hayim and I discussed the materials out of which the golem should be made. As in my dream, I insisted that we assemble it from human parts, readily available from the cadavers in the infirmary. Hayim refused to proceed in that manner, insisting that a Jew was limited in his dealings with the dead to washing and clothing the body for burial; the Torah allowed nothing else. Also, according to the Midrash and Aggadah, only "pure earth" and water could be utilized to create a golem. Frustrated, I asked, "Where in Auschwitz can you find pure earth?" We seemed to have reached an impasse.

The following day Hayim suggested that in place of earth we could use ashes from the crematorium. "What could be purer than that?" he asked.

Now I was the one voicing misgivings, but he responded, "Joseph, you are a doctor. I understand you want to use flesh and bones. But I am the son and grandson of rabbis. Trust me."

Although in Auschwitz tons of flesh and bones were being turned to ash which rained down on us relentlessly, the ash was not available in the quantity we needed. Nor was it possible to carry bags or pails of

ashes from the crematoriums to the infirmary without being noticed and surely stopped.

Eventually, I devised the following plan. Every day an open cart stopped at the infirmary to pick up corpses. It was pulled by two men we called *schleppers*, or haulers in Yiddish, and followed by two men, *tregers*, or bearers. I made a deal with the tregers to bring us ash. They drove a hard bargain. Every bucket of ash was to cost us two tablespoons of gold nuggets—one for the schleppers and the other for the tregers. When one of the tregers asked what we did with the ash, I said, "We mix it with water to make a plaster and apply it on those with high fever."

"Does it help?" he wanted to know.

"Definitely. Ashes of the dead will help the living," I replied.

We had decided that the golem's weight should be about 130 pounds, ninety pounds of ash and the rest water. I should have realized how light the ash would be. We had to procure eighteen pails before Hayim agreed that we had as much as was needed. We also considered whether we should leave the mud in a lump or sculpt it into a human form. Hayim said that the rabbis were divided on this aspect of golem-making. Some held that, since God had created Adam from a lump of earth, we need not mold the mud. The mystics, however, felt that God had seven sacred manifestations, which included loving, kindness, and justice, and all of these had their counterparts within Adam's

body. They enumerated seven body parts: head, torso, phallus, right and left thighs, and right and left hands. According to the mystics, arms and hands corresponded to loving kindness and justice. The idea that I could produce these qualities in a golem appealed to me. I proposed that I sculpt the gray mud into a rough figure with these seven body parts, and Hayim agreed.

On the last Sunday in June of 1944, Hayim was ready to make the attempt. We chose that day of the week because only a few Germans entered the camp on Sundays. We got up at the usual time of 5 a.m. In the corner of the room, on the boards of a lower bunk, we mixed ash with water to make a light gray mud with the consistency of soft dough. With flat pieces of wood, we formed this mud into a rectangle about six feet long, two feet wide, and four inches thick then I sculpted the body parts. By seven o'clock I was finished, and I covered the form with a blanket. It looked like another dead emaciated Jew.

Hayim placed our only chair next to the bed and sat down with his back to the form. He put one phylactery on his left arm, the other on his forehead, wrapped himself in the tallith and started to pray. After a time, he stood, feet together, and swayed back and forth as he turned page after page of the Siddur.

Suddenly I was transported back to the past. Mother, Father, Grandpa, and Uncle Moishe were entering our synagogue, calling to a young boy I recognized as myself. “All of you stay dead,” I whispered to the ash-

es as I turned away from the bed and walked toward a sick inmate who was calling me.

At noon, Hayim closed the Siddur, kissed it, and placed it on the edge of the bed. He picked up Sefer Yetzira and paced back and forth seven times. Stopping at the feet of the form, he covered his head with the tallith and held the Sefer close to his face as his lips uttered words and sounds, consonants mixed with a string of vowels.

After one hour of chanting, Hayim fell silent. Exhausted, he slumped into the chair, his head almost touching his knees. I moved slowly toward him. The shape on the bed had assumed a human outline. With my heart pounding, I pulled off the blanket. I had seen and experienced much in Auschwitz, but nothing had prepared me for the terror and awe that I now felt. Before me lay an emaciated man, fully grown, whose skin had the color of human skin but whose age I could not tell. His eyes were closed and his chest moved slowly up and down, typical of very sick patients in the bay. His penis was erect. With shaking hands, I examined his toes and feet, which were warm and perfectly formed. With great effort I replaced the blanket, leaving only his head exposed. Haltingly, I recited "Shema Israel," trying to remember the words. By some sleight of mind, I saw the golem leading us out of this hell to freedom, with Hayim walking beside him, draped in the tallith and singing hymns of gratitude to God.

Heart pounding, I turned and shouted, “Hayim, it happened!” He was sitting on the chair, bent over, breathing heavily. I pulled the tallith off him. His left arm and hand had turned blue. He had wrapped the strap of the hand phylactery so tight that the circulation had been severely impeded. I unwound the leather strap from his hand and arm and the phylactery slid down. I also removed the head phylactery.

Hayim's breathing improved and normal color began to return to his arm. I put my hands on his shoulders and slowly pushed his torso into a sitting position. Kneeling, our eyes met and I saw the question in his eyes. I whispered in his ear, “It's a miracle. It worked.”

“Are you sure?”

“See for yourself.”

Haltingly, Hayim turned to look. I stepped over to the bed and slowly pulled the blanket off the golem. When I had exposed half his torso, Hayim motioned for me to stop. His face turned pale white; panic rose in his eyes. “Oh my God, what have I done!” he screamed, and ran out of the barracks.

Although created as a fully-grown man, the golem had the incapacities of a newborn. A yellowish-red peach fuzz covered the scalp. He could not talk, sit, or stand up, but the situation changed rapidly. After an hour he was able to lift his head, look around, and babble. I fed him sugar water with a spoon. Hayim had returned and we dressed him in pants, jacket, and shoes taken from a dead inmate. We resolved, for the

time being, not to allow contact between the golem and anyone else. This meant that either Hayim or I had to be with him at all times.

The following day the golem began to walk. Unlike a baby, he didn't start by crawling. He lurched forward like a foal, stumbling, regaining his footing, standing for a while on trembling feet, and then moving forward again.

By the end of the first week, he could feed himself and talk in Yiddish like a clever two-year-old. We decided not to tell him that he had recently been "born." Although he behaved as a child, he was surrounded only by adults, and thus would see only others who were like him.

Hayim demanded a circumcision. I opposed it because I didn't know if his blood would coagulate. "If he is to be a son of Israel, it must be done," Hayim insisted. We agreed to a compromise. The following Sunday, I pricked the golem's foreskin with a needle and allowed it to bleed. Hayim recited the appropriate blessings and we named him Tykva, which in Hebrew means hope.

Hayim devoted himself to caring for and teaching Tykva. One day after the circumcision, Hayim read and explained Genesis and Exodus to him. By the end of the second week, Tykva's speech, knowledge, and comprehension were those of a smart eight-year-old. Surprisingly, during the third week, Tykva developed measles, but the illness lasted only a day. Clearly,

Tykva's metabolism operated at a speed very different from ours. That Friday night, for the first time, we obtained a small candle, which we cut in two and lit. By then Tykva talked and behaved as an adolescent. On the Sabbath, Hayim started studying Talmud with him.

Tykva's amazing intellectual growth filled us with wonder and optimism that our suffering would soon end. Then, at the beginning of August, we saw Allied aircraft fly overhead. On the day of Tykva's circumcision, the nearby Trzebinia oil refineries were bombed. Black columns of smoke rose into the sky. Whenever we heard planes, Jews ran out of the barracks and shouted and waved, while the SS disappeared into their bunkers. Each time, we hoped that food and weapons would be parachuted to us, but this did not happen. I knew then that the rest of the world had abandoned us. Our only hope was Tykva. After all, his creation had been a miracle. Yet, while it seemed that he understood the concept of a creator and the commandments, he remained strangely unmoved by the suffering and death of the people around him. This did not surprise me, for he knew nothing of the furnaces where death raged day and night.

Hayim wanted to forge ahead with Talmud and Tanach. I proposed instead that Tykva help me with the sick as well as run errands in the camp. One day I dared to take him near the ramp when a transport had just arrived. We saw how the guards prodded people

with rifle butts, and rushed them toward the center of the ramp where a group of SS men stood. A handsome man of small stature stood at the head of this group, dressed in a gray leather coat with a riding crop in his hand. I told Tykva that this was Dr. Mengele, the angel of death. By moving his crop to the left or to the right, he sent people this way or that, with most of them going to the gas chambers. In a little more than thirty minutes, the SS guards had dispatched about a thousand people from the train to their deaths. A whistle sounded and the train pulled away. In the distance we saw another train approaching.

In a matter of days, Tykva developed into a capable medic. Each morning he washed the faces of the sick and injured, fed those who could not eat on their own, opened windows to air out the barrack. But, unlike Hayim, who was constantly running from one sick person to the next, he lingered at each bedside and conversed. As the days passed, I could tell that he was beginning to comprehend the horror of our situation. I recognized sadness, anger, and perhaps indignation in his eyes, although I did not know if he actually felt these emotions.

In the last week of August, a Mr. Rosenberg was brought to our infirmary. He had worked in the camp office that kept track of the total number of Jews arriving and of those who were gassed or sent to labor camps; Tykva insisted that Hayim and I go over and listen to what he had to say. He told us that the first

train from the Lodz ghetto had arrived in Auschwitz on August 15. It was clear that the Germans had now embarked on the destruction of the Lodz Jews, who had survived by working for the Germans as slave laborers. More than half of those brought into Auschwitz from Lodz were being gassed.

That evening, as the three of us ate our soup and bread, I insisted that we couldn't wait any longer. The gas chambers and crematoriums had to be destroyed, or at least damaged. I proposed that we smuggle Tykva into one of the *Sonderkommandos*, the teams of men who pulled bodies out of the gas chambers and burned them in the ovens. I was certain that Tykva would be able to convince them to revolt and destroy the gas chambers and crematoriums. I also hoped that these Jewish kommandos would break out of the camp and link up with the Russian troops, which, in June, had stopped advancing and had dug in about 120 kilometers east of Auschwitz. I felt strongly that Tykva had been created for this purpose.

Tykva felt confident he would be able to do what we asked. I believed that once he reached the Russians and informed them of the mass murder of Jews, the killing of their own prisoners of war, and the horrible medical experiments being done, they—and the outraged world community—would surely act quickly to liberate the camp. But Tykva surprised us with his own plans. He said that if he reached the Russians, he wouldn't return to Auschwitz but would continue

eastward toward Jerusalem. He said he had a feeling that he belonged there.

I arranged with the tregers to transport Tykva to the crematorium. I remember the surprised look on their faces when they tried to pick up Tykva, who was acting lifeless. They were used to corpses weighing eighty pounds or less. One growled, "How did he get so heavy?" The other replied, "Swollen, must be full of water." They finally decided to drag him toward the wagon, each treger holding Tykva under the shoulders while his legs dragged on the ground. The wagon was already full of corpses, and they couldn't lift Tykva's body to the top of the pile. Only when they unloaded most of the corpses on one side of the cart were they able to place him inside.

The days and weeks passed slowly without a word from or about Tykva. I, like Hayim, was sad and disappointed. It seemed that the Creator had given Tykva life, but not the mission to end our suffering. God had surely responded to one human being's deep prayer; I couldn't help but think that this was another instance of *Der mensch tracht und God lacht*, Humans make plans and God laughs. Despite that, I did not give up hope of leaving Auschwitz alive.

Hayim grew more distant. We barely exchanged a dozen words daily. Occasionally I saw his lips moving, and once I heard him say the word "Lord." Was he arguing with God? Another time I heard him chanting. The few words I understood seemed to be sentences

from the *Shema*. They referred to the commandment to love God with your whole heart and soul. Was he trying to woo God to return from his absence? When I asked, he refused to answer. He started walking with a stiffness that indicated that he was in pain then he started to give away most of his rations to the sick, and to lose weight. Five weeks after Tykva's departure, Hayim developed a high fever. His face became gray and gaunt. When I asked what hurt him, he pointed inside his mouth. I found yellow pustules on his tongue and in his throat; he was running a high fever. It was definitely strep. I swabbed his mouth with peroxide. I obtained four aspirins, which I crushed, mixed with water and made him drink. I placed cold compresses on his chest, but his temperature did not break and the swelling around the larynx increased.

On October 7, 1944, the Sonderkommando of Crematorium IV revolted, throwing the Gestapo overseers into the flames and killing four SS guards. They blew up their gas chamber and crematorium with black gun powder packed into metal cans, and about six hundred men of the Sonderkommando broke out and attempted to escape. When I told this good news to Hayim, I could see a shine returning to his eyes. I am sure he recognized Tykva's role in the rebellion. After rallying a bit, he died the next day by choking.

For the first time since arriving in Auschwitz, I broke down and cried. I stopped attending to the sick and lay helplessly in my bunk. Late that night I forced

myself to get up. I took the Siddur from the hiding place and, with great difficulty, I slowly recited the Kaddish for Hayim.

Over the next few days, we learned that the explosives used to blow up the crematorium had been smuggled in by four women from a nearby munitions factory. The SS guards took the women out of the camp and tortured them. They confessed that a red-headed man without a number had persuaded them to do it. The Germans did not believe them, and killed all four women in a public hanging inside the camp. The SS also boasted that they had killed or captured every one of the six hundred who tried to escape; but, according to our sources, Tykva had escaped.

Winter arrived, cold and hopeless. The killing continued in the remaining three gas chambers. I lost hope that Tykva's intercession would bring our rescue. Clearly, he had not been created for the purpose of stopping the slaughter. The final proof of this, to me, was when, on January 25, 1945, two days before the liberation of Auschwitz, the Gestapo entered the main hospital barracks and shot all 350 Jews. I don't know why they spared our small infirmary.

We who survived, 7,600 men and women, were not human beings but mere shadows, golems ourselves. Ill and feverish, I was placed in a Soviet hospital where I was assailed by doubts about the reality of the golem. Perhaps it had all been a dream.

After recovering, I traveled to Lodz, my hometown before the war. I learned that my uncles, aunts, and nephews had all died in Bergen-Belsen. I was the sole family member to survive.

There was nothing left for me or for hundreds of others like me in Poland. I decided to strike out for Palestine. I had known and felt death so deeply that I was no longer able to be a doctor and wanted only limited contact with human beings. Most of all, I needed clear air, open space, and a blue sky.

Upon my arrival in Palestine, I immediately joined an agricultural kibbutz in the Negev. I welcomed the blazing sun, the swirling sand, and the heat. The work that I liked most was riding a small tractor, preparing the land for planting. Before placing a rock onto a pile, I would give each a name. It would thus become the headstone for someone I had known in Auschwitz; those I had wanted to save but couldn't. There was a huge boulder on our land, too large to remove, where I chiseled Hayim's full name in Hebrew. I missed him terribly, both for what I remembered of him and how much he would have loved Israel—but probably not this kibbutz. I also wondered what had happened to Tykva. Had he reached the Russian troops? And how did they treat both him and the information he brought? Did they believe him? Probably not, for, even now, what took place in Auschwitz is incomprehensible to most people. And Tykva didn't have a number or any other proof that he had been in the camp. They

might have arrested him and put him on a train to Siberia. But even if they had, I was certain that he escaped once again. Perhaps he had made it to Jerusalem, as he said he wanted to.

Hayim's boulder came into view every day as I cleared the land. On a number of occasions I thought I saw someone sitting on it, but each time I approached, the figure would disappear. I concluded it was an illusion, that the rising hot air was playing tricks with my eyes.

One evening, as I walked the land on patrol, I again spotted a figure sitting on Hayim's rock. From where I was standing, it appeared to be a man who had his back to me. I dropped to the ground and began crawling, rifle cradled in my arms as I had been taught. As I neared the figure, I could make out his features and dress. He was tall, had red hair, and seemed vaguely familiar. When I was less than twenty yards away, he started sliding down the far side of the boulder. As he disappeared from view, I stood and started running. It was almost dark when I reached the boulder. I saw him slowly walking away. "Stop, or I will shoot!" I shouted.

He stopped, and for a moment, nothing happened. Then, without turning around, he said, "Shalom, Haver." I recognized the voice. It was Tykva's. As I walked toward him, a cool breeze suddenly skimmed the sand. In a powerful voice, he said, "Don't come closer. I am holy."

I froze. "What happened?"

There was no reply and he started to walk away. With a few steps he passed behind the boulder and out of my sight. I didn't follow him. His words kept repeating in my mind: “Don’t come closer. I am holy.” In Auschwitz he had been “human”; so human that it had not occurred to me to take his pulse or examine his two lungs, liver, or spleen. Who besides the Almighty could make a man or creature holy? Could that mean that God had come out of hiding, and had blessed or touched Tykva? If Tykva was holy, then something as miraculous as his creation in Auschwitz had happened to him in Israel. Not only to him, but also to thousands of others, and perhaps even to me. Had not our triumph in the War of Independence, full of improbable victories, been a miraculous event? Maybe Tykva had helped us to win that battle.

Suddenly and unmistakably, I felt my depression lifting. I looked at the night sky, its familiar constellations and planets, and, beyond them, I saw brilliant stars I had never seen. Stars that were blue, yellow, orange, and red.

The next morning, for the first time, I entered the kibbutz's chapel. The only prayer I could force myself to read was the Kaddish, which I recited once for my father, mother, and brother, and once especially for Hayim. Then I said a single Kaddish for all the inmates I could remember whose names I had pronounced when naming the stones. After I finished praying, it occurred to me that God might have de-

creed that Tykva should be in His service and active in our history. And was that so surprising? After all, something unprecedented in human experience had taken place in Auschwitz and, as far as I know, Tykva was the only golem in history to have been created from human ash; ash of innocent, righteous, and observant men, women, and children. Had the innocence of their holy souls shamed God out of hiding?

A few months later, I left the kibbutz and started working in a hospital. I married and had children. I was not religious. The only holiday we celebrated was Passover. After all, I too was a liberated slave. I referred to the fifth cup of wine at our Seder as Tykva's cup. I left open the door of our house each year, hoping that Tykva would enter and drink.

Years went by. In May of 1967, a few days after the liberation of the Western Wall, I watched as television showed pictures of soldiers and civilians praying there. Among the soldiers, close to the wall, stood Tykva. I am certain it was him.