



הרוגי מלכות בדור התקומה

*Martyrs of the Struggle
for Israel's Independence*



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Jewish history through the ages has a rich record of martyrs who willingly laid down their lives for the principles of right and justice. Many were those who made the ultimate sacrifice in the defence of the Jewish faith and of the Jewish homeland, while among the earliest are the martyrs of the second century BCE, like Hannah and her seven sons who, under Greek rule, refused to worship the pagan gods set up on the Temple site or to perform pagan rites.

In 135 CE Rabbi Akiba, one of the Ten Martyrs, was tortured and slain by the Romans for continuing to teach the Tora in defiance of a Roman edict, as well as for his national aspirations as a follower of Bar Kochba. Crusader chronicles, too, of the Middle Ages, list a horrific number of Jewish martyrs, while endless stories of the Spanish Inquisition tell of the tormenting fires which consumed those Jews who refused to recant.

However, the twenty people pictured here are martyrs of a rather different aspect — mainly that of laying the foundations of independence and the establishment of a Jewish State. Acceptance of such an aim brought with it the duties and responsibilities of a mature nation, in the case of the embryo State of Israel, of rescuing Jews from beleaguered Europe and of freeing the land from foreign domination.

Typical of those active during World War I were **Naaman Belkind** and **Yosef Lishanski**, both members of "Nili", the pro-British intelligence service aimed at ousting the Turks from Palestine. Belkind, born in Gedera in 1889, went to school in Rishon Leziyyon and later was employed in the local wine cellars. As a youth, he and his cousin, Avshalom Feinberg, joined "Nili", and in 1917 Belkind attempted to meet Aaron Aaronson, head of the organization, in Egypt but was intercepted and imprisoned by the Turks in Beer-Sheva.

Belkind was taken to the Damascus jail where, on 16 December 1917, he and his colleague, Yosef Lishansky, were hanged in Damascus' main square.

Lishansky was born in Russia in 1890, and, as a six-year-old child came with his family to Metulla in Galilee. For two years he worked with "Hashomer" — the Watchman Organization — guarding Jewish colonies in

the Sharon plain, but after being refused full membership in the group, he set up a second one called "Hamagen" — the Shield-protecting settlements in the south.

At this stage of his life he joined "Nili", becoming one of its key personalities. When the Turks surrounded Zikhron Ya'akov in October 1917, Lishansky escaped and hoped to find refuge with Hashomer, but, disapproving of his political outlook, the Hashomer committee decided to kill him and turn his body over to the authorities. Lishansky escaped once more and reached a wadi near Rishon Leziyyon, where he was found by Bedouin, handed over to the Governor of Jerusalem and transferred to Damascus, where he met the same fate as Belkind. Their remains were reburied in Rishon Leziyyon on 24 October 1919, while sixty years later, those of Lishansky were reinterred in Jerusalem.

Shlomo Ben-Yosef, born in Poland in 1913, was the first member of the Jewish underground to be executed by the British. Ben-Yosef joined "Betar" the Revisionist Zionist Youth — in its Rosh Pina nucleus, then became very active in "Etzel" — a resistance movement — although he opposed their "restraint" policy in force at that time.

Following the murder of a number of Jews Ben-Yosef and two friends — Avraham Shein and Shalom Zhurabin — planned to carry out a retaliatory action against the orders of their superiors. On 21 April 1938 the three set out for a high point from where they intended throwing a grenade at an Arab bus en route from Safed to Tiberias. The scheme failed, and all three were captured and tried. Shein was reprieved on account of his youth: Zhurabin was reprieved because the judges found him mentally sick and Ben-Yosef died on the gallows in Akko. He was buried at Rosh Pina, and after the establishment of the State, a monument was erected in his memory on the Rosh Pina — Safed highway.

Yosef Basri and **Shalom Salih** were both born in Iraq in 1923 and lived out their lives there despite their devotion to the Jewish homeland. Basri, a lawyer by profession, joined "Hehalutz" — the Pioneers — as well as the

"Hagana" - Self-defence Organization, on their inception in Iraq in 1942. In December 1949 he left under cover for Israel through Iran, but was persuaded to undertake a Zionist mission and returned to Iraq, where he was arrested and condemned to death in June 1951. Salih, also a member of "Hehalutz", who participated in hiding weapons and collecting information, was arrested at the same time, on the eve of his departure for Israel. The Iraqi police forced him to sign a false confession that he had laid explosive charges in the American Embassy in Baghdad, and he was sentenced to die.

Pleas for clemency addressed to the Iraqi High Court of Appeal from Jewish organizations the world over fell on deaf ears, while the request of Israel's representative at the United Nations for pardon met with no response. Basri and Salih were hanged in Baghdad on 22 January 1952. Basri was posthumously made an officer in the Israel Defence Forces.

Moshe Barazani, a Kurdish Jew born in 1928, came to live in Jerusalem as a child. Conditions were hard, and as a youth he was obliged to work to support his family. He was still very young when he joined "Lehi" — the Freedom Fighters — and took part in sabotage operations. Defying a curfew, he was arrested in a Jerusalem street with a hand grenade in his possession and tried before a British Military Court. Barazani refused to acknowledge the jurisdiction of the court, nevertheless he was sentenced to death. He shared the condemned cell in Jerusalem with a fellow underground fighter.

Meir Feinstein. Meir, born in Jerusalem in 1929, had studied at the Etz Hayim Yeshiva (Talmudic College) and joined the Hagana at an early age. After forging the date of his birth on his identification documents, Feinstein volunteered for the British Army, then joined "Etzel" and helped them obtain arms from various Army camps. Demobilized in 1946, he served in a propaganda unit, and in October 1946 took part in an attack on the Jerusalem railway station — a project aimed at destroying railway stations throughout the country.

Badly hurt, he was arrested and removed to hospital where his hand was amputated.

Feinstein, like Barazani, did not agree that the military court was empowered to pass judgement, and they persuaded friends to smuggle a hand grenade into the prison to blow themselves up together with their executioners. However, on hearing that Rabbi Goodman intended to be present, they detonated the grenade in their cell on 21 April 1947, a few hours before being led to the scaffold. They were buried in Jerusalem.

Two Egyptian Jews, **Moshe Marzouk**, born in Cairo in 1926, and **Samuel Azaar**, born in Alexandria in 1929, both joined Avraham Dar's intelligence network in 1951. Marzouk, who had studied medicine and practised in the Cairo Jewish hospital, participated in an intelligence training course in Israel, while Azaar was an engineer and a teacher.

They were part of a group of eleven put on trial in July 1954 for acts of sabotage and for belonging to an Israeli spy ring. Both Marzouk and Azaar were sentenced to death, and hanged in Cairo on 31 January 1955. Their bodies lie in the Cairo Jewish Cemetery.

Eli Cohen, also born in Alexandria in 1924, belonged to the local Zionist Youth movement and took an active part in organizing the immigration of Egyptian Jews to Eretz Israel. Three times arrested in 1952, in 1954 and in 1956 during the Sinai campaign — Cohen was then expelled from Egypt and in 1957 settled in Israel, where he served with the Israel Intelligence.

Recruited by the "Mossad" in 1960, Eli Cohen was sent to Argentina, where he played the role of a wealthy business man anxious to return to his home in Syria. Two years later he arrived in Damascus and quickly became close to people high up in military and political circles, regularly relaying messages through to Tel-Aviv. Caught by the Syrian security forces in the act of broadcasting in 1965, he was interrogated, tortured and sentenced to death. His execution took place on 18 May 1965 in the central square of Damascus, and to this day the Syrians refuse to transfer his remains to Israel.

Hannah Szenes, the only woman in this particular grouping, was born in 1921 in Budapest. Immigrating to Eretz Israel in 1939, she studied for two years at the Nahalal Agricultural School and joined the nucleus of "Hanoar Haoved" — Working Youth — which integrated into Kibbutz Sdot Yam near Caesarea.

When she was 23, she volunteered for the British Army, was sent to Cairo, then flown to Italy and parachuted into Yugoslavia where she spent three months, from March to June 1944. On 1 June, Hannah crossed the border into Hungary to help the Jews of Europe, but was arrested by the Nazis the very next day. Even when subjected to torture she defied her captors, and was not deterred when they brought her mother and threatened to torture her, too. Confessing to the "crime" of wanting to rescue fellow-Jews from death, Hannah was executed by a firing squad on 7 November 1944 and buried in the Budapest Martyrs' Cemetery. On 26 March 1950 her remains were reburied on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem.

Dov Gruner, also born in Hungary in 1921 when he joined "Betar". He immigrated illegally in 1940 and was sent to the Atlit detention camp. Upon his release, he joined "Betar" and "Etzel", volunteered for the British Army in 1941, then was sent to Africa and Europe. Following his demobilization, Gruner returned to the ranks of "Etzel" and on 23 April 1946 participated in an attack on the Ramat Gan police station with the intention of capturing arms. Seriously wounded, he was taken prisoner by the British and tried, and although Gruner claimed that the British had no jurisdiction over him, he was sentenced to die. "Etzel" then kidnapped a British major and a judge, holding them hostages. Later the hostages were released and Dov's execution postponed.

Three other youngsters — **Eliezer Kashani**, **Mordechai Alkachi** and **Yechiel Dresner** were in captivity with Gruner. Kashani, born in 1923 in Petah Tiqwa, was suspected by the British of being a member of "Etzel" and exiled to a detention camp in Kenya and was caught on the infamous "Night of the Floggings" on 29 December 1946. Incidentally, this was an operation mounted by Etzel in retaliation for the punishment

meted out to some of its members by the British.

Kashani was sentenced to death, as was his co-prisoner Alkachi, born in Petah Tiqwa in 1925. Alkachi, who also belonged to "Etzel", participated in a series of attacks on British troops and on army weapon stores, including that on the police fortress at Qalqilia. Captured on the "Night of the Floggings" Alkachi, too, received the death sentence.

The third of Dov Gruner's comrades was Yechiel Drezner, who immigrated to Eretz Israel as a child around 1926. A member of "Betar", he threw in his lot with "Etzel" after the arrest of his brother Zvi, who was exiled to Kenya. Drezner, too, was captured at the same time and sentenced to death.

All four — Dov Gruner, Eliezer Kashani, Mordechai Alkachi and Yechiel Drezner — refused to admit the competence of the British court. All four, despite "Etzel's" efforts to release them, were secretly transferred from Jerusalem to Akko jail; all four were hanged in Akko on 16 April 1947 and were buried in Safed.

Eliahu Hakim, born in 1925 in Beirut, immigrated to Eretz Israel with his family at the age of seven. He lived in Haifa, and early on volunteered for the British Army and was sent to Egypt, where he was active for the Jewish underground, distributing propaganda material and sending arms to Eretz Israel.

Deserting from the British Army, Hakim joined forces with **Eliahu Bet Tzuri**, born in 1922 son of one of Tel Aviv's veteran families. Bet Tzuri entered the ranks of Etzel in 1937, and in 1940, when the more extreme elements split from the parent organization to form "Lehi" — Freedom Fighters, moved to the new group. Hakim and Bet Tzuri met in Cairo where, on 6 November 1944, they took part in the assassination of Lord Moyne, British Minister of State for the Middle East, who resided in Cairo. Both were captured and sentenced to death. They were hanged in Cairo on 22 March 1945, and in 1975, on 26 June, were reburied on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem.

Ya'akov Weiss, Avshalom Haviv and Meir Nakar were the last three Jews to be executed by the British. Weiss, born in Czechoslovakia in 1924, joined "Betar" at the tender age of ten, was active in the underground during the Nazi occupation and helped smuggle Jews across the border with forged passports. Immigrating illegally to Eretz Israel in 1945, he was sent to the Atlit detention camp from which he and other detainees were freed during a "Palmach" operation. He then joined "Etzel". Haviv, who was born in Haifa in 1926, grew up and studied in Jerusalem, where he served in the "Palmach" — the assault company of the Hagana — and participated in the freeing of the Atlit camp detainees. Jerusalem-born Nakar, exactly the same age as Haviv, was also active in "Betar". In 1943 he joined the British Army and later worked in the recruitment and propaganda units of "Etzel".

All three, on 4 May 1947, while attacking Akko jail, were seized and sentenced to die. In an attempt to prevent the execution of the death penalty, "Etzel" kidnapped two sergeants of the British Intelligence Corps, but to no avail. Weiss, Haviv and Nakar were executed on 28 July 1947 and were buried in Safed. Next day the two British sergeants were found hanged, and after that, no more capital punishment was meted out to Jews by the Mandatory Government.

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