**Theodor (Binyamin Ze’ev) Herzl**

May 2, 1860- July 3, 1904

“Im tirzu, ein zo agadah” “If you will it, it is no dream”

Often called the **father of modern of Zionism**, Herzl was born in Budapest in 1860. In 1878 the family moved to Vienna, and in 1884 Herzl was awarded a doctorate of law from the University of Vienna. He became a writer, a playwright and a journalist.

In 1894, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish officer in the French army, was unjustly accused of treason, mainly because of the prevailing anti-Semitic atmosphere. Herzl witnessed mobs shouting “Death to the Jews” in France, the home of the French Revolution, and resolved that there was only one solution: the mass immigration of Jews to a land that they could call their own.

In 1896 **Herzl published Der Judenstaat (The Jewish State).** In it, he argued that the essence of the Jewish problem was not individual but national. The Jews are one people, he said, and their plight could be transformed into a positive force by the establishment of a Jewish state with the consent of the great powers.

In his **Zionist novel, Altneuland (Old New Land**, 1902), Herzl pictured the future Jewish state as a socialist utopia. He envisioned a new society that was to rise in the Land of Israel on a cooperative basis utilizing science and technology in the development of the Land. In Altneuland, the Jewish state was foreseen as a pluralist, advanced society, a “light unto the nations.” *This book had a great impact on the Jews of the time and became a symbol of the Zionist vision in the Land of Israel.*

Herzl's ideas were met with enthusiasm by the Jewish masses in Eastern Europe, and he appealed to wealthy Jews such as Baron Hirsch and Baron Rothschild, to join the national Zionist movement, but in vain. He then appealed to the people, and the result was the convening of the **First Zionist Congress** in Basle, Switzerland, on August 29­31, 1897.

At the First Zionist Congress, the World Zionist Organization was established as the political arm of the Jewish people and Herzl was elected its first president.

Herzl convened six Zionist Congresses between 1897 and 1902. It was here that the tools for Zionist activism were forged: *Otzar Hityashvut Hayehudim*, the Jewish National Fund, and the movement’s newspaper Die Welt.

After the First Zionist Congress, the movement met yearly at an international Zionist Congress. In 1936, the center of the Zionist movement was transferred to Jerusalem.

At the Sixth Zionist Congress (1903), Herzl proposed the British Uganda Program as a temporary refuge for Jews in Russia in immediate danger. While Herzl made it clear that this program would not affect the ultimate aim of Zionism, a Jewish entity in the Land of Israel, the proposal aroused a storm at the Congress and nearly led to a split in the Zionist movement. The Uganda Program was finally rejected by the Zionist movement at the Seventh Zionist Congress in 1905.

Herzl died in Vienna in 1904 of pneumonia at the age 44. By then the movement had found its place on the world political map. In 1949, Herzl’s remains were brought to Israel and reinterred on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem.

\*\*\*

**Golda Meir (Myerson)**

May 3, 1898- December 8, 1978

Golda Meir (born Golda Mabovich) was born in Kiev in 1898. Economic hardship forced her family to emigrate to the United States in 1906, where they settled in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

In high school she joined the Zionist group, “Poalei Zion” (Workers of Zion). She immigrated to British Mandate Palestine in 1921 with her husband, Morris Myerson, and settled in Kibbutz Merhavya.

Moving to Jerusalem in 1924, she became an official of the Histadrut Trade Union and served in a managerial post with the union’s construction corporation, Solel Boneh. Between 1932 and 1934 she worked as an emissary in the United States, serving as secretary of the Hechalutz women’s organization; she also became secretary of the Histadrut’s Action Committee, and later of its policy section.

In 1946, she replaced Moshe Sharett as head of the Jewish Agency’s Political Department, the chief Jewish liaison with the British.

In January of 1948, Meir traveled to the United States and managed to raise $50 million to help cover the costs of the Israeli War of Independence.

In 1948, David Ben Gurion appointed Golda Meir to be a member of the Provisional Government. A few days before the Declaration of Independence, Ben Gurion sent her disguised as an Arab on a hazardous mission to persuade King Abdullah of Jordan not to attack Israel. But the King had already decided his army would invade the Jewish state following the British departure.

In June 1948, Meir was appointed Israel’s Ambassador to the Soviet Union. Elected to the Knesset as a Mapai member in 1949, she served as Minister of Labor and National Insurance until 1956. In June 1956, she became Foreign Minister, a post she held until January 1966. As Foreign Minister, Meir was the architect of Israel’s attempt to create bridges to the emerging independent countries of Africa via an assistance program based on practical Israeli experience in nation building. She also endeavored to cement relations with the United States and was successful in creating extensive bilateral relations with Latin American countries.

Between 1966 and 1968, she served as Secretary General of Mapai, and then as the first Secretary General of the newly formed Labor Party.

**In 1969, the 71­year­old Meir assumed the post of Prime Minister, becoming the world’s third female Prime Minister** (after Sirimavo Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka and Indira Gandhi of India).

In the wake of the Munich massacre at the 1972 Summer Olympics, Meir appealed to the world to, “save our citizens and condemn the unspeakable criminal acts committed.” Outraged at the perceived lack of global action, she ordered the Mossad to hunt down and assassinate suspected leaders and operatives of Black September and PFLP.

The major event of her administration was the Yom Kippur War, which broke out with massive coordinated Egyptian and Syrian assaults against Israel on October 6, 1973. As the postwar Agranant Inquiry Commission established, the IDF and the government had erred seriously in their assessment of Arab intentions.

Although she and the Labor Party won the elections (postponed due to the war until December 31, 1973), she resigned in 1974 in favor of Yitzhak Rabin.

Golda Meir passed away in December 1978 and was buried on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem.

\*\*\*

**David Ben Gurion**

October 16, 1886-December 1, 1973

Born in 1886 as David Green (Gruen) in Plonsk, Poland, **Ben Gurion is considered one of the three founding figures of Zionism** beside Chaim Weizmann and Herzl. He was educated in a Hebrew school established by his father, an ardent Zionist. By his mid-teens, Ben-Gurion led a Zionist youth group, "Ezra," whose members spoke only Hebrew among themselves.

Ben Gurion was the major factor behind Yishuv’s (a term that refers to the Jews in Palestine prior to 1948) military power and is **considered as the** **founder of the State of Israel.**

At the age of 18 he became a teacher in a Warsaw Jewish school and joined the Socialist-Zionist group "Poalei Zion" (Workers of Zion).

Arriving in the Land of Israel in 1906, he became involved in the creation of the first agricultural workers’ commune (which evolved into the Kvutzah and finally the Kibbutz), and helped establish the Jewish self-defense group, “Hashomer” (The Watchman).

Following the outbreak of World War I, Ben-Gurion traveled on behalf of the Socialist-Zionist cause to New York, where he met and married Paula Monbesz, a fellow Poalei Zion activist. He returned to Israel in the uniform of the Jewish Legion, created as a unit in the British Army by Zionist leader Vladimir Jabotinsky.

From 1921-1935, he served as the secretary general of the Histadrut, the General Federation of Labor in Palestine, and in 1935, he served as the Histadrut’s representative in the World Zionist Organization and the Jewish Agency, and was elected chairman of both organizations. From 1948 until his retirement in 1963, except for a brief interval in the early 1950s, Ben-Gurion served as Israel’s Prime Minister and its Minister of Defense.

As Premier, he oversaw the establishment of the state’s institutions. He presided over various national projects aimed at the rapid development of the country and its population. In particular, he called for pioneering settlement in outlying areas, especially in the Negev.

In late 1953, Ben-Gurion left the government and **retired to Kibbutz Sde Boker in the Negev**, but remained politically active, returning to the political scene in 1955. He stepped down from office in 1963, and retired from political life in 1970. He then moved back to Sde Boker, a kibbutz in the Negev desert, where he lived until his death in 1973.

**Fun Facts About David Ben Gurion:**

 • He displayed a great aptitude for learning languages. In addition to his native Yiddish-Hebrew, he also learned Turkish, English, Russian, French, German, and later in life Spanish and ancient Greek.

• He was an avid yogi, and was often photographed standing on his head. Some say he believed in the overall benefits of yoga; others say he was just looking for a way to alleviate his back pain.

**David Ben Gurion and Israeli History:**

1947 Served as chairman of the Executive of the Jewish Agency Directed the general policy of the Haganah, the underground military organization Accepted the UN Partition plan on behalf of the Yishuv

1948 Declared the establishment of a Jewish State to be known as Israel

1973 Passed away on December 1st in his home in Sde Boker

**Famous Quotes by David Ben Gurion:**

 “Ours is a country built more on people than on territory. The Jews will come from everywhere: from France, from Russia, from America, from Yemen... Their faith is their passport.”

“Thought is a strenuous art - few practice it, and then only at rare times.”

“Israel has created a new image of the Jew in the world - the image of a working and an intellectual people, of a people that can fight with heroism.”

\*\*\*

**Menachem Begin**

August 16, 1913- March 9, 1992

Israel’s **sixth Prime Minister**, Menachem Begin, was born in Brisk (now Brest-Litovsk), then part of the Russian Empire, on August 16, 1913.

Following the completion of his education at a local public high school, Menachem Begin enrolled in Warsaw University in 1931 and was granted a law degree in 1935.

A popular orator among Jewish students in Warsaw, Begin worked full-time on behalf of the Betar Zionist youth movement in Poland following his graduation. He became head of Polish Betar in 1939, one of the most influential positions of leadership in pre-Holocaust Jewish Europe. At the onset of World War II, Begin encouraged the emigration of thousands of Polish Jews to the Land of Israel just as the British mandatory government was shutting the country’s gates.

Begin continued his Zionist organizational work until Soviet occupation authorities arrested him in 1940. He remained in Gulag prison camps, mostly in Siberia, until 1941, when he was freed with other Polish prisoners. Upon release, Mr. Begin joined the Polish army-in-exile, and was assigned to a unit that was dispatched to the Middle East. His parents and older brother remained trapped in Poland and perished in the Holocaust.

**Menachem Begin and Israeli History:**

1942 Begin makes Aliyah to Israel. Begin is asked to assume command of Irgun Zva’i Leumi (known as ETZEL, the Hebrew acronym for “National Military Organization”) In this capacity, he directed ETZEL’s operations against British rule

1948 Begin founded the Herut party, which later was formed in the Likud party

1967 On the eve of the Six-Day War, Mr. Begin was instrumental in initiating the formation of Israel’s first government of national unity. He served as minister without portfolio for the national unity government’s duration, from June 1, 1967 to August 1, 1970.

1977 Begin was elected Prime Minister on May 17, 1977 As Prime Minister, he begins peace negotiations with Egypt’s President Anwar Sadat

1978 Begin and Anwar Sadat jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize

1979 Peace treaty with Egypt signed on March 26, 1979 on the White House lawn in Washington

1980 Begin served concurrently as Prime Minister and Defense Minister from May 28, 1980 until August 6, 1981. In this capacity, he ordered the Israel Air Force’s successful raid on Iraq’s nuclear reactor, shortly before it was to go into operation, in June 1981

1981 Begin reelected Prime Minister of Israel

1982 First Lebanon war

1983 Treaty ending the state of war between Lebanon and Israel was signed on May 17th, but was abrogated by the Lebanese, under Syrian pressure, less than a year later. Initiated the movement to save Ethiopian Jewry (Operation Moses in 1984 and Operation Solomon in 1991) On September 15, 1983, Begin submitted his resignation as Prime Minister

1992 Suffered a heart attack at his home in Tel Aviv and passed away 6 days later

2005 Begin was voted the 4th-greatest Israeli of all time in a poll by the Israeli news website Ynet to determine whom the general public considered the 200 Greatest Israelis

\*\*\*

**Moshe Dayan**

May 20, 1915- October 16, 1981

Moshe Dayan was an Israeli military warrior who became a crusader for peace. He was skilled in both battle and diplomacy. He played a key role in four wars, but also helped negotiate the historic Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty.

Dayan was born on May 20, 1915, on kibbutz Deganya Alef, near Lake Kinneret (Sea of Galilee) to parents Shemuel and Devorah. The kibbutz was founded in 1910 and called *em hakvutzot* - the mother of collective settlements.

Ambassador Gideon Rafael wrote about Dayan, “Rocking the boat is his favorite tactic, not to overturn it, but to sway it sufficiently for the helmsman to lose his grip or for some of its unwanted passengers to fall overboard.”

**Moshe Dayan and Israeli History:**

1929 Dayan joined the Haganah, an underground organization that defended Jewish settlements from Arab attacks

1939 British outlawed the Haganah and Dayan was arrested and imprisoned for two years

1941 Dayan was release from prison and joined the British army, where he served with the forces that liberated Lebanon and Syria from Vichy France during World War II. Dayan was wounded in battle in Lebanon and lost his left eye, and began to wear the black eyepatch that later became his trademark

1949 Participated in armistice talks with Jordanian officials

1952 Became chief of operations at General Headquarters

1953 Elected Chief of Staff of the armed forces

 1956 On October 29, Dayan led Israel’s Suez campaign, an invasion of the Sinai Peninsula after Egypt, Syria and Jordan signed a pact stating as their goal the destruction of Israel

1958 Dayan left the military and entered his second career – politics

1959 Elected to the Knesset as a member of the Labor Party. Served as Minister of Agriculture until 1964

1967 Dayan was appointed Minister of Defense just in time for the Six-Day War

1973 Yom Kippur War. Israel was unprepared for the surprise attack. The nation’s lack of preparation was blamed on Defense Minister Dayan

1974 Dayan submitted his resignation to Prime Minister Golda Meir

1977 Dayan accepted appointment as Minister of Foreign Affairs because he believed, “I could significantly influence Israel’s moves towards achieving a peace arrangement with our neighboring Arab States and with the Palestinian inhabitants of Judea and Samaria and the Gaza Strip.”

1978 Dayan was involved in peace negotiations with Egypt

1979 Dayan resigned as Foreign Minister

1981 Dayan passed away on October 16th in Tel Aviv and was buried in Nahalal, the moshav where he was raised

\*\*\*

**Yitzhak Rabin**

March 1, 1922- November 4, 1995

Yitzhak Rabin was born in Jerusalem during the British Mandate over Palestine in 1922. His father immigrated from the United States and in World War I served as a volunteer in the Jewish Legion. His mother was one of the first members of the Haganah, the mainstream Jewish defense organization. After completing his schooling, Rabin volunteered for the Palmach, the elite fighting force of the Hanagah.

During the War of Independence in 1948, Rabin directed Israeli operations in Jerusalem and fought the Egyptian army in the Negev. During the War of Independence, Rabin married Leah Schlossberger who was working at the time as a reporter for a Palmach newspaper. They had two children, Dalia and Yuval.

In 1964, Rabin was appointed Chief of Staff of the IDF. Under his command, the IDF achieved victory over Egypt, Syria, and Jordan in the Six-Day War in 1967. After the Old City of Jerusalem was captured by the IDF, Rabin was among the first to visit the Old City and described the moment that Israeli soldiers reached the Kotel: “There was one moment in the Six-Day War which symbolized the great victory: that was the moment in which the first paratroopers reached the stones of the Western Wall, feeling the emotion of the place; there never was, and never will be, another moment like it.”

In 1968, after 27 years of service in the Palmach and the IDF, Rabin retired and was appointed Israeli Ambassador to the United States. He became active in the Israel Labor Party and in 1973, he was appointed Minister of Labor under Golda Meir.

After Golda Meir resigned in 1974, the Knesset voted confidence in a new government headed by Rabin.

During his first term as Prime Minister, Rabin emphasized improving the economy, solving social problems, and strengthening the IDF. In 1975, Rabin signed the Sinai Interim Agreement between Israel and Egypt where both countries declared that the conflict between them should be resolved by peaceful means rather than military force.

In 1976, Rabin ordered Operation Entebbe. On his orders, the IDF performed a long-ranged undercover raid at Entebbe Airport in Uganda to rescue passengers of an airliner hijacked by Palestinian militants. The operation rescued 102 hostages. Five Israeli commandos were wounded, and the commander, Yonatan Netanyahu, was killed. All of the hijackers, three hostages, and 45 Ugandan soldiers were killed.

In 1977, the Labor Party was defeated, and Rabin served as a member of the Knesset in the opposition. Between 1984-1990, Rabin served as the Minister of Defense.

In June 1992, Rabin was again elected as Prime Minister. During his second term in office, Rabin focused on creating peace between the Palestinians and Israelis. He played a leading role in the signing of the **Oslo Accords**, which granted the Palestinian National Authority partial control over parts of the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

For his role in the creation of the Oslo Accords, Rabin was awarded the **1994 Nobel Peace Prize**. The accords, however, greatly divided Israeli society with some seeing Rabin as a hero for advancing the cause of peace and some seeing him as giving away land they viewed as belonging to Israel.

On the evening of November 4, 1995, Rabin was assassinated by a radical Jewish man who opposed the signing of the Oslo Accords. Rabin had been attending a mass peace rally in what is now known as Rabin Square, located in the middle of Tel Aviv. When the rally ended, Rabin walked down the city hall steps toward his car, at which point he was assassinated. Rabin’s assassination came as a great shock to the Israel public and much of the rest of the world. Hundreds of thousands of Israelis came to the square where Rabin was assassinated to mourn his death by lighting memorial candles and singing peace songs. Rabin was laid to rest at Mt. Herzl in Jerusalem. Many world leaders attended his funeral. Below are some of the words spoken by these leaders at his funeral:

“Yitzhak Rabin lived the history of Israel. Throughout every trial and triumph, the struggle for independence, the wars for survival, the pursuit of peace and all he served on the front lines, this son of David and Solomon took up arms to defend Israel’s freedom and lay down his life to secure Israel’s future.” – President Bill Clinton

“I’ve never been used to standing except with you next to me, speaking of peace, speaking about dreams and hopes for generations to come that must live in peace, enjoy human dignity, come together, work together, to build a better future which is their right.” – Hussein of Jordan

“To be a captain is not a light task. And you were not a lighthearted person. Earnestness became second nature to you and responsibility your first. These two traits made you a rare leader, capable of uprooting mountains and blazing trail; of designating a goal and achieving it.” – Shimon Peres

\*\*\*

**Ze’ev (Vladimir) Jabotinsky**

October 18, 1880- August 4, 1940

Ze’ev (Vladimir) Jabotinsky was born on October 18, 1880, in the city of Odessa, Russia. At the age of 18, he left for Italy and Switzerland to study law, and served as a correspondent for several well-known Russian newspapers. His reports and articles were widely read and soon became recognized as one of the brilliant exponents of Russian journalism. All his reports and articles were signed with his literary pseudonym “Altalena.”

The pogrom against the Jews of Kishinev in 1903 spurred Jabotinsky to undertake Zionist activity. He organized self-defense units and fought for Jewish minority rights in Russia.

Jabotinsky was elected as a delegate to the 6th Zionist Congress, the last in which Theodor Herzl participated. During this period, Jabotinsky was active in spreading the Hebrew language and culture throughout Russia, and the establishment of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

**Ze’ev Jabotinsky and Israeli History:**

1914 Outbreak of World War I Jabotinsky became a newspaper correspondent.While there, he met Joseph Trumpeldor and worked for the establishment of the Jewish Legion

1917 Jabotinsky was successful in his efforts to create the first Jewish Legion.

1920 Jabotinsky stood at the head of the Haganah in Jerusalem against Arab riots and was condemned by the British Mandatory Government to 15 years hard labor

1921 Jabotinsky became a member of Zionist Executive and one of the founders of “Keren Hayesod”

1923 Youth movement Betar was created aimed at educating its members with a military and nationalistic spirit- Jabotinsky stood at its head. Jabotinsky wrote and published “The Iron Wall” essay after British Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill prohibited Zionist settlement on the east bank of the Jordan River. He formed the Zionist Revisionist party after writing it

1925 Jabotinsky left Keren Hayesod after a disagreement on the direction of the Zionist Movement and established the Union of Zionists­Revisionists (Hatzohar) which called for the immediate establishment of a Jewish State

1929 Jabotinsky left the country on a lecture tour after which the British administration denied him re­entry into the country. From then onwards he lived in the Diaspora until his death.

1935 Jabotinsky founded the New Zionist Organization (N.Z.O) to conduct independent political activity for free immigration and the establishment of a Jewish State

1937  Irgun Tzvai Leumi (I.Z.L) became the military arm of the Jabotinsky movement and he became its commander. The three bodies headed by Jabotinsky, The New Zionist Organization (N.Z.O), the Betar youth movement and the Irgun Tzvai Leumi (I.Z.L) were three extensions of the same movement. The New Zionist Organization was the political arm that maintained contacts with governments and other political factors Betar educated the youth of the Diaspora for the liberation and building of Eretz Israel The Irgun Tzvai Leumi (I.Z.L) was the military arm that fought against the enemies of the Zionist enterprise. These bodies cooperated in the organization of Af Al Pi illegal immigration. Within this framework, more than 40 ships sailed from European ports bringing to Eretz Israel tens of thousands of illegal immigrants.

1939 Jabotinsky was active in Britain and the United States in the hope of establishing a Jewish army to fight side by side with the Allies against Nazi Germany

1940 Jabotinsky suffered a massive heart attack on August 4th while visiting the Betar camp in New York

1964 Jabotinsky’s remains and those of his wife Jeanne were reinterred on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem

\*\*\*

**Naomi Shemer**

July 13, 1930- June 26, 2004

Known as the “First Lady of Israeli Song,” Naomi Shemer was a prolific songwriter and composer. She wrote numerous songs, many of which have become popular hits, she composed many well-known children’s songs, and she also set poems to music, including works by Rahel and Natan Alterman.

Shemer was born on Kvuzat Kinneret and grew up overlooking the shores of the Jordan River. Many of her songs recreate the landscape that was such a part of her youth and reflect her love of the topography and scenery of Eretz Yisrael.

In 1967, Shemer was asked to compose a song for the Israel Song Festival. Though not itself part of the competition, the three stanzas of “Yerushalayim shel Zahav” (“Jerusalem of Gold”) became instantly popular. Particularly because the Festival occurred just before the Six Day War and the reunification of Jerusalem, the song acquired a national significance that spoke to the Jewish people’s eternal love for Jerusalem and its surrounding areas.

Following the Six Day War, Shemer composed a fourth stanza to the song, celebrating the liberation of the Old City of Jerusalem and the road to Jericho. “Yerushalayim shel Zahav” was translated into many languages and became an international statement on the reunification of Jerusalem.

Of the songs Shemer wrote about the Yom Kippur War, the most popular became “Lu Yehi” (“Let it Be”) which began as a translation of the Beatles’ song by that name and evolved into an independent hit. This and other songs, many of which have been published in books of her music, have made Shemer’s songs arguably the most-sung in the 1960’s to the 1980’s.

For her immense contribution to Israeli music, Shemer was awarded the Israel prize in 1983.

Shemer was laid to rest at Kibbutz Kinneret on June 26, 2004, where she was born.

\*\*\*

**Josef Trumpeldor**

December 1, 1880-Match 1, 1920

“Tov Lamut Be’ad Artzeinu” “ ארצנו בעד למות טוב ”

Joseph Trumpeldor was born in Piatygorsk, Russia.

**Josef Trumpeldor and Israeli History:**

1902 Trumpeldor enlisted in the Russian army and fought in the Russian-Japanese war. Trumpeldor lost his left arm during the siege of Port Arthur and was taken prisoner. He was awarded a medal for his gallantry and zeal, and was the most decorated Jewish soldier in Russia

1912 Made Aliyah to Palestine and lived for a while at Kibbutz Deganyah. With the outbreak of the First World War, Trumpeldor, a Russian citizen, was considered an enemy alien, and as he refused to take Ottoman citizenship, he was was expelled from the country and joined the Allied war effort

1915 Saw action in Gallipoli where he was shot through the shoulder

1918  Trumpeldor established He-Halutz, the pioneering youth organization that prepared youngsters for settlement in Eretz-Israel

1920 Following his return to Palestine, Trumpeldor was involved in the defense of Tel Hai, against Arab attacks. Trumpeldor was fatally wounded at Tel Hai and was killed together with seven other defenders on March 1, 1920. Supposedly, as he lay on his deathbed, he said, “Never mind, it is good to die for one’s country.” Tel Hai became a cause celebre of the Zionist movement, and Trumpeldor became a Zionist hero

\*\*\*

**Lt. Col Jonathan (Yoni) Netanyahu**

March 13, 1946- July 4, 1976

Yoni was born on March 13, 1946 in New York City. His parents, Benzion and Cela, were working for the creation of a Jewish State on behalf of the New Zionist Organization. Shortly after Yoni turned two, his parents returned to their homeland, now the newly created state of Israel. Yoni’s father assumed the editorship of the first general Hebrew Encyclopedia while pursuing, from time to time, his researches on the history of the Jews in the Middle Ages. At first the family lived in Talpiot, a southern neighborhood of Jerusalem, where Yoni’s brothers Benjamin (Bibi) and Iddo were born. In 1955 the family moved to their permanent home in the Katamon district of Jerusalem.

In 1957, the family left for more than a year and a half to the U.S., where Yoni’s father could do further historical research. They returned to Israel in 1959 when Yoni was in high school, only to leave again and settle in a suburb of Philadelphia when Yoni was in 11th grade.

During the summer of 1963, he joined some of his friends from Israel, who came to New Hampshire to work as counselors at a Camp Young Judaea.

In June 1964, following his graduation, Yoni returned to Israel. Upon being drafted into the Israeli Defense Forces for his obligatory military service, Yoni volunteered for the paratroopers. Yoni excelled as a soldier, and was later sent to Officers’ Training School, from which he graduated first in his class. Yoni then became a platoon commander in the paratroopers.

On January 31, 1967 Yoni was discharged from the army. He had already been accepted to Harvard University for the fall of 1967, and with time on his hands now, he was brushing up on his studies and reading works of literature and philosophy.

In May of 1967 dramatic events were unfolding in the Middle East. Egypt closed the Straits of Tiran to Israeli ships and moved its army into the Sinai Desert. The Arab world openly declared its intention to destroy the state of Israel. War was imminent, and Yoni, along with numerous other reservists, was mobilized. When war finally broke out on June 5, Yoni took part in the fierce and pivotal battle of Um Katef at the Sinai. A few days later he participated in battles on the Golan Heights.

On the last day of the war he was wounded in his arm while reaching out to help a wounded comrade. He managed to crawl back to the Israeli lines, and upon reaching them, fainted. Yoni was evacuated, first to the rear, and then to Safed Hospital, where he was operated on. His left elbow remained permanently disabled.

Towards the end of the summer of 1967, and before leaving for Harvard, Yoni married his long-time girlfriend Tuti. The ceremony was held at the newly liberated Amphitheatre of the Hebrew University at Mount Scopus, which overlooks the Judean Desert. The newly wed couple left shortly afterwards for Boston.

While Yoni enjoyed his studies at Harvard, in which he excelled, he felt increasingly that his place was not there, and so in the summer of 1968, he and Tuti returned to Israel. They enrolled at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where Yoni studied mathematics and philosophy.

Although he was now in Israel, Yoni felt that he had to do more than just live in Israel, especially when the army was desperately looking for experienced officers. By the middle of the school year, he made up his mind to enlist once more in the army. Both his brothers had by then returned to Israel, and Benjamin (Bibi) had become a veteran soldier in Israel’s elite commando unit, Sayeret Matkal (known briefly as “the Unit”). Yoni applied for membership in the same unit. He was immediately accepted and assumed the command of a squad.

Yoni was soon sent to another elite unit, Sayeret Haruv, to gain further experience as company commander. After half a year with Sayeret Haruv in the Jordan Valley, where Yoni saw action, he returned to Sayeret Matkal in late 1970, to serve as company commander. By that time his youngest brother, Iddo, had joined the Unit as well, and thus for nearly two years all three brothers served in the same unit. In the summer of 1972 Yoni was promoted to deputy commander of Sayeret Matkal.

In the summer of 1972, Yoni commanded the hijacking from Lebanon of a group of high-ranking Syrian Officers. These officers were subsequently exchanged for Israeli pilots languishing in the Syrian jail. In the spring of 1973, Yoni commanded a raid on the PLO leaders in Beirut.

With the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War on October 6, 1973, Yoni immediately returned to his old unit, Sayeret Matkal, and was put in charge of a force that fought on the Golan Heights. The most noted of the battles Yoni commanded during the war was the one against a Syrian commando force. The Syrians landed by helicopter near the main command post of the Israeli army on the Golan Heights, intent apparently on capturing it. Upon learning of the landing, Yoni moved swiftly with his available troops and engaged the Syrians. Despite the advantage the Syrians had at the outset of the battle, having taken cover on the rocky terrain of the Golan Heights, Yoni’s exposed force of some 30 or so men managed to defeat and rout the Syrians, who numbered at least 40. During the battle Yoni’s force lost two of its men.

A second operation of Yoni during that war was the rescue of Lt. Col. Yossi Ben Hanan, a brigade commander of the armored corps, who was lying wounded behind enemy lines. For these and his other achievements during the war, Yoni was awarded a distinguished service medal.

In June 1975, Yoni left his armored brigade to become commander of Sayeret Matkal. During his year of command there he was in charge of many operations. Of these, all but one remain secret –the raid on Entebbe – where he met his death.

On June 27, an Air France airliner, whose flight originated in Israel, was hijacked Europe by Arab and German gunmen. The plane eventually landed in Entebbe, Uganda, where President Idi Amin was waiting for the terrorists and received them with open arms. The hostages were kept captive at the Old Terminal of the Entebbe International Airport, held under guard by the terrorists and by a contingent of Ugandan soldiers. The terrorists warned, that if their demands to release from jail more than fifty terrorists were not met, the hostages would be killed.

On July 1, Yoni received orders to plan and prepare his unit for the mission to Entebbe. His unit’s part in the raid was to take over the Old Terminal complex – namely to kill the terrorists, free the hostages, fight the Ugandan soldiers stationed there, and prevent any Ugandan reinforcements from reaching the area while the hostages and other troops were being flown out. Yoni quickly sat down with a few of his officers and drew up a preliminary plan.

At noon on Saturday July 3, the Israeli government under Yitzhak Rabin met in special session. After hearing the Chief of Staff’s presentation, the ministers engaged in a long debate and finally, by unanimous vote, approved the mission.

The Israeli force of four Hercules transport planes took off heading for Africa. The Unit’s force was flown in three of these planes, with the lead plane carrying Yoni and his initial assault party of 29 men. At the stroke of midnight, Ugandan time, on July 4, 1976, the first plane landed at Entebbe airport. Yoni and his men, driving in a Mercedes and two Landrovers, which were meant to simulate a Ugandan force, got off the plane and proceeded to the Old Terminal, where the hostages were held. Contact was soon made with Ugandan soldiers. A brief battle developed with the Ugandans and the terrorists, following which the terrorists in the building were killed and the hostages freed. During the battle, Yoni was hit in the chest, as he ran forward, and lay critically wounded outside the main hall where the hostages were held.

Yoni died at the entrance to the evacuation plane, as the hostages were being herded inside. Yoni was the only man of the rescue force to die. Yoni’s body was placed inside the plane, which then took off to safety in Kenya. From there it proceeded to Israel. Only a few of the hostages may have realized that the fallen soldier lying at the front of their plane was the commander of the force responsible for saving them.

Yoni was buried on Mt. Herzl, alongside the grave of David Elazar, Chief of Staff during the Yom Kippur War. Thousands attended Yoni’s funeral. Yoni’s name, until then virtually unknown beyond the army, became famous throughout Israel overnight. His deeds, and his thoughts and reflections – brought to light in his posthumous and bestselling book of letters – remain a source of inspiration for many in his country and around the globe.

\*\*\*

**Tal Brody**

August 30, 1943-

Tal Brody is an American-Israeli former basketball player, and current Goodwill Ambassador of Israel, who lives in Israel. Brody was drafted # 12 in the National Basketball Association (NBA) draft, but chose to pass up an NBA career to instead play basketball in Israel. He played on national basketball teams of both the United States and Israel, and served in the armies of both countries.

Facts about Tal Brody:

• Born in 1943 in Trenton, New Jersey

• New Jersey All Star basketball player in high school

• In college, he was a high-scoring All American and All-Big Ten guard in 1965, while playing for the University of Illinois

• In 1965, he was drafted 12th in the NBA draft. Before the NBA season started, he traveled to Israel where he led the U.S. basketball team to a gold medal in the 1965 Maccabiah Games

• Convinced by Moshe Dayan and others to return to Israel to help elevate the country’s basketball team and morale, he passed up his NBA career to instead play basketball in Israel, as the shooting guard and captain of the Israeli Maccabi Tel Aviv basketball team

• He was voted Israeli Sportsman of the Year in 1967, and was a member of the European All Star Team

• In 1977, he led tiny Israel’s basketball team to the European Cup Basketball Championship. Along the way, his team defeated the heavily favored Soviet Red Army team

• Brody’s famous remark upon beating the Soviets – “We are on the map! And we are staying on the map – not only in sports, but in everything.” – became a part of Israeli culture. It has been used for decades in various contexts, from political speeches to National Lottery commercials

• In 1979 he was awarded the country’s highest civilian honor, the Israel Prize

• In Israel, he is a revered national hero, icon, and legend – a superstar akin to Michael Jordan in the U.S. He is thought by some to be the greatest and most famous athlete who has ever represented the country. As Israel’s first modern-day sports hero, he is a symbol of all the young country’s achievements.

  \*\*\*

**Gilad Shalit**

August 28, 1986-

Gilad Shalit (19 at the time of his abduction, 25 at the time of his release) was born on August 28, 1986. He is the son of Aviva and Noam Shalit, brother to Yoel and Hadas. He is both an Israeli and French citizen.

Gilad was kidnapped when Hamas terrorists attacked his army unit. After more than five years being a captive to Hamas, Shalit was set free and returned to Israel on October 18, 2011.

Shalit was born in Nahariya but was raised from the age of two in Mitzpe Hila in the western Galilee. He graduated with distinction from the science class of Manor Kabri High School. Shalit began his military service about a year before his abduction – at the end of July 2005. Despite a low medical profile, he preferred to serve in a combat unit, and followed his elder brother Yoel into the armored corps.

On June 25, 2006, Shalit, a corporal, was captured in a cross border raid near the Kerem Shalom crossing to the Gaza Strip. During the attack, in which the terrorists dug underneath the border before emerging and subsequently spraying automatic fire and grenades, two IDF soldiers (Pavel Slutsker and Chanan Barak, z’l) were killed and three other soldiers were also wounded.

The IDF immediately launched Operation Summer Rains in which infantry units advanced into Gaza in an attempt to secure the immediate release of Shalit. The operation, though, was unsuccessful and within a matter of weeks the Hezbollah abduction of soldiers Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev into Lebanon turned Israel’s attention to their northern flank. Israel initially stated that it would not negotiate for the release of Shalit, but international intervention from Egypt, Germany and the European Union helped in efforts to work out an exchange deal.

  \*\*\*

**Omri Casspi**

June 22, 1988-

Omri Casspi (born June 22, 1988) is a Jewish Israeli professional basketball player currently on the Cleveland Cavaliers in the National Basketball Association. He is the first Israeli-born player to have been selected in the first round of the NBA amateur player draft.

Born in 1988, Casspi began playing basketball with Hapoel Holon and made his professional debut in 2005-6 with Maccabi Tel Aviv. After playing with Hapoel Galil Elyon during the 2006-7 season, he returned to Maccabi Tel Aviv and became an integral player, helping the team regain the league title in the 2008-9 season. As a Maccabi, he averaged 12.6 points per game and was named to the all-league team. He also started for the Israel national basketball team and has competed successfully in the European league.

On June 25, 2009, Casspi became the first Israeli-born player to be selected in the NBA draft’s first round when the Sacramento Kings chose him with the 23rd overall pick. When he suited up for his NBA debut on October 28, 2009, he became the first Israeli to play in the NBA. Only Israeli Oded Kattash, who had signed a contract to play for the New York Knicks in 1999 but never appeared in a game, had come as close to playing the world’s best league. In his debut, Casspi scored 15 points and in his first start on December 16, 2009, he scored 22 points, tying the record for most points scored by any Kings player in his first start since the team moved to Sacramento in 1985. In 2011, Casspi played in all of Sacramento’s 71 games, starting 27 of them. On June 30, 2011, Sacramento traded Casspi and a future draft pick to the Cleveland Cavaliers.