

## **The Samaritans Walking Between The Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian Raindrops**

**By Efrat Tsedaka**

Translation by Shadi Sirhan and Stephen Kaufman

### Chapter A: From 1948 Until The Six-Day War

Al: Direct and Indirect Connection between the two Parts of the community

The establishment of Israel in 1948, with the War of Independence and its results, created a border between Israel and the Trans-Jordan [the former name of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan]. The western part of Jordan included the area, which is bordered in the south by Hebron and Bethlehem; Jenin in the north; Tulkarem and Qalqilya in the west; and the Jordan River in the east. Nablus was in the middle of this area. The Samaritans in Nablus had been disconnected from their brethren who were within the Israeli border. Their life was managed by the High Priests [Ahisha Ben-Pinchas who died in 1961, and his inheritor Amram Ben-Yitzhaq who died in 1980]. The connection with their brothers in Israel, most of who were in Tel Aviv, was renewed in 1951 when the Israeli Samaritans were allowed to go to Mt. Gerizim once a year during Passover. This procedure was valid until Passover 1965. In 1966 and 1967 the Jordanians started to reduce the number of Samaritan who came from Israel, forbidding dozens of them from crossing the border. Another connection between the two parts of the community was made in the beginning, with the family reunification agreement. In most cases, Samaritans moved from Nablus to Israel. However, in just one case that I will talk about in this paper, a Samaritan woman moved from Holon to Nablus. Another indirect means of communication was through the radio program which broadcast regards in Arabic from the Israeli and Jordanian radios. There were many instances of Samaritans from Holon hearing about the death of relatives in Nablus by radio long after the death occurred, and so they gathered and grieved over their dead relatives in the traditional manner.

The economical situation of the community was difficult since most of the community members were poor. In 1949 Yitzhaq Ben-Zvi came to help them. He was the second president of Israel and had become a Member of Knesset from the Mapai Party [Eretz Israel workers party]. Ben-Zvi became acquainted with the Samaritans when he was very young, at the beginning of the 20th century. He had known them during their hardest times, and deep in his heart a strong desire emerged to help them survive. Because of him, the Samaritan nation, which is the smallest nation in the world, started recovering. One of his many activities for them in 1949 was to raise help from the "Joint" for them, although the border separated the community. This committee supported the Samaritans in Nablus every month by giving them money and food through the Red Cross. The Samaritans in Nablus enjoyed this help until after the 1967 Six Day War when Israel started helping them.

The Jordanian government knew about this help and gave it a green light, though it knew that the Red Cross was just a "tunnel" to pass help to the Samaritans. The Hashemite Palace in Amman was kind to the Samaritans because of their small number, and also because they were an ancient nation

that attracted thousands of tourists who came to Jordan to share the Passover sacrifice on Mt. Gerizim.

#### A2: The Jordanian kingdom's kindness to the Nablus Samaritans

The relationship between the Nablus Samaritans and the Jordanians began during the reign of King Abdullah. A delegation consisting of the leaders of the Samaritan community in Nablus went to Shona next to the Dead Sea in 1949 to meet Abdullah, who spread his arms and gathered them under his responsibility, though he didn't have enough money to help them. This good relationship between the Samaritans and the Hashemites continued during Hussein's reign. The Samaritan leaders in Nablus received invitations to go to the palace in Amman, and they were friendly with some of his ministers. There are two incidents that show King Hussein's kind treatment to them, which the Samaritans will never forget.

The first incident occurred in the middle of the 1950's which concerns the summit of Mt. Gerizim to which the Samaritans make pilgrimages three times a year: during Passover, Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles. But on every occasion, they had to pay some kind of tax to the Arabs in Nablus who were the owners of the lands on the summit of the mountain. This issue was brought to King Hussein, who invited the landowners to come to him. After a very short dialogue, the owners agreed to sell him their lands. Hussein immediately gave the land to the Samaritans, and since then they have belonged to the waqf of the Samaritan community.

The second incident occurred in the beginning of the 1960's, when heavy rain damaged the house of the High Priest's brothers Asher [High Priest 1980-1982] and Pinchas [High Priest 1982-1984]. The brothers, who both had large families, did not have the money to rebuild their homes. Their lack of resources caused them to go to King Hussein. In a very short time, a messenger arrived from Amman to Nablus. In his hand was an envelope containing 1000 dinars, an enormous amount of money at that time that was given by King Hussein to the priests in order to fix their homes.

#### A3: Different livelihoods of the Nablus Samaritans

In 1965 the foreign correspondent Dr. S. H. Schkul, who lived in Israel, interviewed the High Priest Amram Ben Vitzhaq. The interview was translated into Hebrew and Dr. Schkul writes:

"The High Priest, who speaks Hebrew clearly, accepted us with extraordinary excitement. With great respect, I was taken to the reception room very close to the synagogue. It is a white room made of bricks on the summit of Mt Gerizim. The place was nice, tidy and extremely clean. I sat in the corner on a bench covered with a light green cushion, the place set aside for respected visitors. Some of the old Samaritans joined me. In front of us, in a very simple chair, the High Priest sat wearing a long, white and green colored robe. The High Priest told me that the number of the Samaritans today was no more than 386 people. 155 of them live in Israel, and they met their fellow community members once a year during the week of Passover, which they celebrate on Mt. Gerizim next to Nablus, the Biblical Shechem - in Jordanian territory."

"Tourism is one of the main sources of living for this closed tribe. The Samaritans are not involved in agriculture. A lot of them work in

teaching [even in Amman and others work as tourist aides. Their priests [the Levites do not work in any of these jobs, but only in Bible teaching and instructing their tribal people."

"From my experience, it is not hard to know the priests: all of them are accustomed to gathering their hair and rolling it into the shape of a sphere above their back I like our old ancestors. The reason is to fulfill the commandment which is not to cut their hair all their life."

One incident, which occurred one year later, in the beginning of 1966, to the 77-year-old High Priest Amram Ben Yitzhaq, displays very well the relationship between the Jordanian authority and the Nablus Samaritans. There was an argument between him and the post office manager in Nablus after the High Priest Amram accused him of opening the letters that were sent to their boxes. In the middle of this argument, the High Priest asked God to put an end to the arrogant ruling of this person. The manager of the office complained about this to the police center, and the High Priest was arrested. The Samaritans were very angry about that, and the brother of the High Priest went to Amman to King Hussein's palace. When King Hussein learned what had happened, he ordered the High Priest to be sent on his way immediately and to cancel all charges against him, and he even ordered the manager of the post office to apologize to the High Priest Amram.

Another living for the priestly family in Nablus, which opened up gates for them in the Jordanian monarchy, was mentioned by the priest Yakov Ben Ezzi (High Priest 1984-1987]. After the Six Day War he spoke to Ma'ariv reporter Menachem Talmi. Here are some quotations from Talmi's article.

"At a small shop in the Samaritan neighborhood in Nablus, a sign hangs on the display window: "Palm Wisdom. Destiny. The Rabbi Yakov Ben Ezzi reads the palms," written in both Hebrew and English. The price? - It is not fixed. Everybody pays what his bean tells him to pay. Inside this shop, with its window spotted and sticky and its floor sleeping under layers of dust, a blue seat taken from an old bus is standing in the middle. On the driver's seat sits a well-dressed man with a gray beard wearing a robe and a turban. He is a fortune-teller - a thin man with glasses on his face through which you can see alert eyes beyond them.

After the establishment of Israel, there was no more connection with Nablus and this Samaritan man lost his job. He started reading palms to tell his clients what their future would be like ... Yakov ben Ezzi continued telling us`... I started reading about psychology and palm reading. Over many years I read many books on this subject. A lot of the books were in Hebrew and a few in English. When I had enough knowledge about it, I started working with it. My clients were basically the rich Arabs from the West Bank and from Jordan. I was telling them their character, their past and their future. I became very famous and many important people started coming to me, even from the government, and even from the royal family. They always asked me to advise them. I used to go to them at Shona, to Irbil [a town in E. Jordan] and to Amman. They also came to me, and sometimes we would meet in secret places so that nobody would know about it.'

\*\*\* They were a lot - a lot and important. The police commanders, minister's wives and also ministers themselves ... Once, Samir Rasha Refri asked me to come to his place. I looked on his hand and I told him: "Mr. Minister, next year you will be the Prime Minister. Don't be very happy, because you will

just be for a short period, maybe a few days only." And that is what happened. He was the Prime Minister just for three weeks.'

'... Once I visited Sherif Hussein in Amman, and I even told him that he would be Prime Minister not long from now. He told me: "I am writing down here what you are telling me, word by word, and you will sign on the paper, because these words are yours. If your prediction will be false, we will cut off your head. Do you agree?" I said "yes" and I signed. A few years after, he became the Prime Minister.'

There were a lot of ministers' wives. I met them secretly, of course. They were more excited than their men. Once for example, King Hussein's ex-wife was among them. I saw something not good in her hand. I didn't want to tell her, but she insisted. I had no choice. So I told her: "Your majesty, I am very sorry. I hope that I am wrong, although I am usually not wrong in these things, but it is written here, on your palm, something harsh - very terrible. His majesty the king is going to divorce you." A few months after, that is exactly what happened."

#### A4: Environmental Pressure & Low Morale

However, in the poor economical situation for most of the community people in Nablus there was no change. The pressures from their surroundings continued. Because they were defined in the eyes of the Arabs as "real or authentic Jews," it did not help them to be liked by their neighbors. High the atmosphere before the Six Day War, most of the Nablus residents supported, and were on the side of Jamal Abd El-Nasser. Often they organized rallies of support, which were dispersed by the Jordanian Legion. The Samaritans in Nablus, who liked King Hussein because of his support, faced a lot of criticism in the streets since most of the Nablus residents did not support King Hussein. Another development was added to this hard atmosphere when the Jordanian authorities prevented their Israeli brothers from coming to Mt. Gerizim to celebrate the Passover. In Passover 1966, the Jordanians prevented 22 young people from Holon from crossing the border, claiming that it was on account of their service in the JDF, and in Passover 1967, the Jordanians kept many Samaritans from Holon from crossing the border through the Mandelbaum Gate in Jerusalem. The Samaritans were frightened that the Jordanians intended to not respect the clause which was made in the cease-fire agreement that allowed the Samaritans from Israel to cross the border to Jordan. The morale for the community people was very low, and the people had not felt this badly for many years.

In 1965, a young Samaritan woman from Holon, Pnina Tsedaka, a teacher who graduated from Seminar ha Kibbutzim in Tel Aviv, crossed the border in East Jerusalem in order to live with her chosen, Hillel Tsedaka who was a Samaritan from Nablus. She was accepted with open arms by the community in Nablus. It was hard to accept her in Nablus eyes because of the social differences between the new society to which she came, and the Israeli society that she used to live in. She hoped that her husband, also a teacher, would fulfill his promise to join her and go back to live in Holon. But the promise took a long time to be fulfilled. When they had their eldest child in Nablus, Pnina and her husband were bothered by living problems. When the IDF came into Nablus on June 7, 1967, Pnina's life changed. She asked her husband to move immediately to Holon and to start living their new life, and she was lived in Holon and another two children were born to them. Today she is the headmaster of a school in Holon, and her husband works in purchasing.

A5: The Nablus Samaritans just before the entrance  
of the IDE during the Six Day War

Pnina is telling of the incidents on the night of June 7, 1967, as well as what occurred before, with a lot of excitement which is evident from her words:

"I traveled to Nablus. I lived there two years. Here I can tell you what the difference is because I experienced it. I was disconnected from the outer world for two years. No more Hebrew - nobody to speak with in Hebrew, which is my mother tongue. Even now I am still excited. My only connection was the radio. I had a Bible. That's all that it was.

My husband tried to help me. He tried to get me out to visit his friends, the Arabs, to get to know their wives. I needed space. It didn't go well for me. We got a child. I felt that it was all that I had. The rest of the world that I had made for myself during the past years, I just lost it, and I had no replacement for that.

I was surrounded with suspicions. I couldn't feel secure with myself and with the things that I wanted to say. I told him: "Look, enough is enough! I don't want these friends. They sit and they say whatever they want, and me, no. What kind of fun is this?"

I didn't have a lot of things to do inside the community. Even those people who worked as teachers didn't work in the same atmosphere that I was used to, not like my methods. I hardly found things to talk about with them. Those were the two years, in which I had just one thing, which lightened my life - my son. We lived with my husband's family. We got along very well. But I felt that I gave up myself. Everything, which was characterizing me just, disappeared, even my laugh. I just felt that I was shrinking and shrinking. I got very scared.

The only connection between my family and me was during the Passover. Even in 1966 and 1967 when they came over, they were only a few of them because in those two years they didn't let them all come over. Briefly, those were my two years. I couldn't accept this situation. I just couldn't take it. But I surrendered.

I got just one good result - I got a son. But thinking that I needed to raise him up here, that he would speak just Arabic and would go to school and suffer there because of all the things they will tell him, I which are against the country there, like spying - that was a nightmare, and in the nights I couldn't sleep because of that.

Suddenly the Six Day War started and the refugees from Tulare and Qalqilya started to come to Nablus. My brother in law came from town and said: "Pnina, the war started!" We turned on a radio - 'Forty-seven airplanes were shot down by us.' They conquered Tel Aviv! Me, my world was destroyed. All my hope was just to hear the news from Kol Israel, but on Kol Israel nothing had been said - not good and not bad. I had a sense of peace inside me. Somewhere in my mind I knew that something should happen here.

A few gangsters from the street came over and told me that if I tried to hear Kol Israel this night, I would be dead. The radio was on, and it was on the Kol Israel station but they just didn't hear. Suddenly they started

broadcasting about a cease-fire, and the Jews hadn't come to Nablus! What a nightmare.

All the Samaritans in Nablus wanted the Jews to come over. London was broadcasting at 10 PM that there was a cease-fire between Israel and Jordan. But the Jews were not in Nablus. I took my son with me to the bed and started to cry.

Suddenly my husband came to me and said 'Pnina, get up get up. There is a special thing I want you to see.' He and I ran to the window and I saw Nablus fully enlightened. It was 11 PM. Projectors were lighting the city. That was the IDF.

I could feel my muscles shrinking that night, I just couldn't move. But I could believe what had happened. In the morning I woke up and I waited to see the soldiers in the streets. I didn't see anybody. Suddenly up on the mountain I saw an Israeli jeep and on it was an Israeli flag. You know what that meant for me? - That was the messiah! I got such an ecstasy. I just ran on the roof of our neighborhood, and I waved with my hand to every Israeli passing by. That was redemption.

Now you understand what is the difference between here and there? It is like going from an open place to a closed one. It is like living in a huge house and they close you in a small room without windows, without doors, without light. That's the way I felt.

At that day, at 10 AM, they sent somebody to ask me to go to the High Priest's house. Who wants me? The commander of the army unit who freed Nablus asked me, "Tell me, are you the teacher who in 1965 moved to live in Nablus" I told him: 'Yes I confess. He said: 'I've got a special order to take care of you.'"