March 20, 1985
At Home - Los Angeles

Dear Jay:

We received and read your remarkable journal. It is remarkable on at least two counts: Your experiences during your month on miluim range from the depressing and frightening to the tender and compassionate; and your report of these experiences reads like a war correspondent's or novelist's. And throughout there is a humane concern about people, whether they are friends or enemies. There is much to be sad and to cry about in your journal, but there are also some things to smile and even to laugh about. There are global politics and intimate vignettes. Some experiences are reported so as to constitute a short story in themselves.

Your journal starts with a discussion about saving one's skin by refusing to serve in the Israeli army. This may be done by some kind of manipulation, by malingering, or by making a political statement. Whereas a political statement might be seen as a higher form of malingering, malingering would never be seen as a political statement. In view of your squad members' experiences with you, they would certainly know that your refusal was a political statement and not a higher form of malingering. Apparently graffiti on the outhouse wall revealed that others who might have refused for political reasons are serving because of the same pressures you felt. This pressure is indicated by your continuing inner discussion with Zionist, political and idealist reasons about whether or not to return to duty. At the same time you recognize and acknowledge that social pressure is involved-- you would be letting down your squad mates and that is unfair and different from the way you want the others to regard you. There is an issue here that comes up again later in your journal. That is, your concern about how your refusal to serve might affect your continuing political career in Israel. You decide that in the long run your ability to influence what happens in Israel is greater if you do serve than if you do not serve. Is this a hint that you have political aspirations?

So you served even though you believed the entire operation stank. And when the entire operation stinks, then every detail of the operation has a bad smell. But as odoriferous as checking Lebanese cars for contraband may be, it has become necessary. I take you to mean that when you say that Sharon is always on the soldiers' minds it is because he is always up their noses as the main cause of the stinking operation-- and that they speak of expletive Sharon.

Another issue that runs throughout the journal is the problem of fighting against guerrillas. You observe that one can never trust the people of an occupied country. Thus your statement that politics is how people lead their lives and can be helped to live them as best they can means that an occupied people may demonstrate their assumed indifference toward the occupier. But in the dark of night they may place remote control bombs or they may drive a car full of explosives into a truck carrying soldiers. Adults may encourage a youngster to throw a rock and then make a big scene scolding him. There is a pretense of accepting and being subservient to the occupier while at the same time they harrass him and attempt to draw him into a foolish over-response.

There is both sadness and humor in your picture of the disintegration of the Lebanese countryside. The homes, roads and automobiles are deteriorating. The occupied people are willing to live with these conditions because repairing their homes, roads or automobiles may mean that they may make things easier for the occupier or that they will be taken from them and used against them.

Even as you describe the deterioration of Lebanon, you recall the beauty of the land and the pleasure of the beach as it was when you were there before. There is nostalgia for the period "two and a half years ago" made real on the beach in the midst of war, and the extreme pleasure of being able to swim nude in the Mediterranean Sea in the middle of January.

As much as the members of your plugah developed into a fighting unit, and the plugah members got to know ea ch other in the cumulative year you have all been together, I don't know whether you got to know each other as well as you did until you became comrades in a

combat situation. The experience of being in mortal danger together may not be a source of pride. However, I think there is a certain pride in having survived a shelling or a fire fight. It fosters exhilaration and comradeship. Maybe this is manipulated-- a kind of folklore of fellowship under fire-- separating the men from the boys-- and similar homilies that have been told to soldiers since ancient times to get them to believe and feel that because they survived their cause is just. It includes the silly notion that combat separates the men from the boys when all it does is separate the living from the dead. As for the pride in serving under fire, I know that my combat infantry badge is one of my prized possessions.

You correctly call yourself the main character in your journal, and I have wondered how the others in your squad see you. For you must be a different person from those the other squad members know. I have you down as an American Jew (who can't drive an automobile) and who came to Israel because he is a Zionist-- something that may not make sense to your peers who regard themselves to be Israelis and not Zionists. You are a college graduate who could get a job that makes a lot of money(?) but you choose to live on a kibbutz. You are a "peacenik," but are on miluim under fire. You are politically aware and your prognostications about what would happen in Lebanon have come to pass. You are willing to do any kind of hard work. You are recognized as someone who has special knowledge and skills and you demonstrate this by identifying the classical record for Miki and by reading the map to show Sefi where you were and from which direction the fire came.

You are a humanist. Your humanism is demonstrated by your concern for the enemy as people when you try not to stamp on the farmers' plants and when you assist the prisoners to urinate comfortably. However, this does not mean that you are going to work for the enemy. You are an atheist. But you helped build the sukkah and you'll participate in a minyan if a 10th is needed, especially if someone has to "say kaddish." You do silly things-- like putting candy wrappers in your pocket for proper disposal instead of throwing them away. You are single and something of a prude. You are a vegetarian. You are a good guy to have on a patrol.

You are critical of your fellow soldiers who are so ready to shoot, and you question why this is so. There are a number of reasons why we tend to do this. First, the use of force is considered a male value. The army is the institution that organizes force. Being forceful-- being tough-- is appropriate to the Army. Second, the philosopher, Abraham Kaplan, described the law of the instrument (?): give a man a hammer and he'll hammer with it; give a man a drum and he'll beat it, so if you give a man a gun he'll shoot with it. This is reinforced by the models who are the good guys who kill the bad guys and who appear nightly on television. Your squad members demonstrated they're the good guys by refusing to kill the cute new-born rats. Then there may be a fearful sense of power that is expressed in the bravado talk. That is, they may talk of killing civilians but would not pull the trigger. I think they, as you tried to explain to them, know that the strategy or tactic of retribution may be the least effective. It's always anticipated by the enemy who prepares for it. It may lead those who want revenge into a trap. It can be pointed out that when others complain "We shouldn't have gotten into this mess" that it all started with an effort to gain revenge.

They may not be as good killers as they talk themselves up to be. A considerable percentage of American soldiers did not fire their rifles in combat in W.W.-II-- like me. You must know my story about the fire fight in Germany when I first fired my rifle. I was crouched behind a wall holding my rifle while the others (perhaps some, perhaps all, I don't know) shot at the enemy. I heard someone calling to me-- not by name, but like "Hey, you." Several others may have turned around but were waved back. When I turned to see who was calling I saw it was a big American Indian, a Master Sergeant. (The 45th Division was basically composed of the Oklahoma National Guard-- and had more than 100 percent casualties. This conversation is not recalled but recreated.) He waved me to come to him. I ran back to him. He asked me, "What's your name?" "Hurvitz." "You're Jewish, ain't you?" "Yes." "Then why ain't you killing those bastards. Get back there and kill some of them." "Yes Sir." And I did. But I was, in a sense, shamed into it by special attention given to me.

So I can appreciate the joke about shooting and killing. Most often we were aroused when some one was shot. Someone would become the cheer leader. "See what those bastards did to your buddy! Let's kill them all." And much more of the same. Some of our soldiers were so enamored of their opportunity to shoot that they shot more than Germans. As we rode on trucks or tanks they shot and killed cattle in the field; and they also shot at liberated concentration camp survivors who wandered in the distance. (We discovered who they were later when we learned that their blue and grey striped "pajamas" was the concentration camp uniform.) After the fighting they shot each other and themselves.

You reveal how different you are from the others in your squad by several incidents you describe. There is the incident of being crowded together in a house with Lebanese civilians during a rain storm. Here again humane relationships prevailed. Some of your squad mates were pleased that the houses which were suspected of being used by the enemy were destroyed. You seem to resist such overkill measures. Two women are mentioned in your journal. One is the woman who was eating the guava in her back yard. You searched for one and felt awkward about picking fruit from her tree without requesting permission. A somewhat similar and yet different incident occurred when you requested assistance to find the mint you smelled and the old lady over-responded to your request. I presume you thanked her for her assistance.

Although soldiering in a combat area cannot be pleasant, there is a kind of freedom that permits you to be as dirty as you can get, to eat like a slob, to talk ugly and so on. You can sleep with your dirty clothes on and wear your shoes day and night. Then when the fighting stops and some discipline is established, the loss of freedom brings out complaints about the "chickenshit" army. Some of the men want combat because there are certain elements they enjoy in combat such as the excitement of taking chances. There is an electrifying comradeship of danger. In most instances a fire fight continues for several minutes and then things get quiet again. You associate combat with the game of capture the flag combined with Russian Roulette because you felt you played a game. It's a kind of male game soldiers can enjoy, especially when they have sufficient fire power to overwhelm the enemy, whether they are trained soldiers or guerrillas. However, you don't make life any easier for us here when you tell us you enjoy your patrols.

The comforts of home are brought to the front lines to keep up the soldiers' morale. I was amused by the availability of the telephone truck. There is unreality and humor in the absurdity of the telephone set-up business on January 26th. Cakes and other goodies are brought from home and eaten together. The various leaves for enlisted men for a weekend or whenever seems to foster much coming and going. Soldiers hitch rides home and back, and seek other means of transportation. Because the soldiers can't count on transportation in the combat zone they can't get back to the combat area. A malingerer may complain he couldn't get back to duty because he couldn't hitch a ride. How do the officdrs know whether they have the men they need for the jobs that have to be done?

Then, on January 14th, you experience the reality of War; you write: yesterday our plugah commander, Sefi, and a unit member, Miki, were killed by a remote control device. When you report this incident you use the figure of speech of our being bit players in others' dramas. When such a tragedy occurs there may be a desire to replay the film in our heads, to try to make the incident end differently by changing a simple action someplace earlier in the scenari However it can't be done. The shock of having squad-mates killed and the thought of how close one was to the end of his own story or film is strong motivation to reevaluate one's thoughts about serving in Lebanon. There always will be stories, and in the remembering and in the telling of the stories this incident will always be part of your life.

In my experience I recall that whenever one of our men was shot his body was removed immediately so there wouldn't be any physical evidence of what could so easily happen to the rest of us. Another element in anticipation of the combat was the advice given to the new men

when we came up to the firing line. We were advised to defecate and urinate before we engaged the enemy in a fire-fight. The concern was that the fear of imminent death would cause involuntary soiling and wetting of our pants. Although this didn't happen to me, I understood that the old timers intended to be helpful.

The place where Sefi and Miki were killed was the site of a previous explosion two weeks before. Who is responsible for the incident that killed Sefi and Miki? The other infantry soldiers, the officers, the military tacticians, the politicians? Each one can exonerate himself and implicate the others. With the most recent news of the car-bomb explosion that killed 12 Israeli soldiers in Lebanon, we've entered a more dangerous situation. Then an officer was killed at the terrace wall. Another statistic. How many statistics become a cause for action? In Marxist dialectics there is the concept of the transformation of quantity into quality. How many soldiers have to be killed before the total situation is re-evaluated?

Following their deaths/Sefi's and Miki's funerals are and then visiting with their families. This kind of identification with the family is possible only in an army as small as Israel's. It is a loving expression to the family, but also an excruciating experience. What does one talk about with parents whose son has just been killed? How nice a person and a good soldier he was? The hopes and expectations were otherwise, and now they will never be realized. What they will have is photographs, diplomas, newspaper clippings, letters, memories, and there will be tears and tears and tears.

Every dead soldier is a hero to his side. Soldiers are given qualities associated with heros even though they were not. Who is going to stand up and say "He really wasn't that kind of guy"? Can you tell the story of things as they really were? Can you do it and still maintain your friendship with the other squad members? Everyone joins in a conspiracy of elevation to greater perfection-- for that is what they want to have done for them. You helped make up the list of Sefi's and Miki's things. This job must have been very difficult and was given to you because of your maturity. Your more comprehensive evaluation of Miki shows that he lacked something and you're uncomfortable about saying anything critical about him. You were also somewhat critical of Sefi, and point out how you were helpful to him at different times. And, with others, you plan for the shloshim services.

The visit from the general in charge of Israeli forces in Lebanon, to talk to fifteen soldiers is interesting. You didn't accept him passively, but also complained about your situation. That may be unusual in an army at war, but his mollifying compliments were to be expected. Had you raised any kind of political issue he would have replied that others make the political and military decisions and he carries them out. Everyone learns to cover his ass. Had you become more aggressive he would have put you down. By the time he became a general he had considerable experience with complainers.

The army cannot permit too much mourning because it so readily turns from thoughts about the dead soldiers to concern about oneself. Such thoughts may lead to faking illness, to complaining about everything becoming too difficult, and perhaps even to desertion. The incident with the officer who asked whether anyone was fearful may have been his way of permitting the soldiers to express their fears. He knew that all were more or less fearful, and he acknowledged his own fear to enable the enlisted men to do so too. But it's interesting that such a small group would be given attention by a general and by a mental health officer. Later there was a third visitor-- an impersonal (?) khativa commander, and then a more humane khativa commander. All had a job to do to test the soldiers' morale and help them get over the shock of the deaths of their squad-mates under fire.

There are several items in your journal that have personal significance for me. One of them is the identification of mothers, wives and sweethearts with their soldiers. We know about mothers who did not raise their sons to be soldiers, and mothers who have some kind of psychic communication with their sons. It's as though fathers do not experience anxiety and depression. They are presumed to be tough and stoical, and do not demonstrate their sentiment and attachment. When I was in service it didn't occur to me that my father

worried about me. I knew that my mother and my wife were worried. They could express themselves, and they did. My father was more taciturn and passive and deferred to them. But I have come to know that he worried about me as I worried about you even though he could not put his worrying into words. The mothers of Sefi and Miki are like animal mothers whose own offspring have been taken from them. They are given another animal's offspring and they nurture them-- the way Sefi's and Miki's mothers took to nurturing the young men with whom their sons lived and fought on miluim until they became statistics.

It was disturbing to read how the rabbinate in Israel use their position to politic and to foster the idea that their rabbis actually know God's preferences. Israel will never become the home of a significant number of Jews until there is separation of church and state. I read that only 15 percent of Israelis are Orthodox believers; how come they are so powerful? Also I read recently that the Reform movement is demanding more money for its services and institutions in Israel or it will change the priorities in its fund raising activities for Israel. And do you believe that your Chabadnik squad mate really believes that the earth and our solar system and all the galaxies are 5745 years old?

You may have other thoughts that you will record. Thoughts about people, incidents, scenes, and actions not taken. In time these thoughts will consolidate into particular memories that will remain with you for the rest of your life, and you may share them with your children as I have shared my experiences with you. May more pleasant experiences push the memory of the disturbing experiences out of your life. May the disturbing experiences be transmuted into political activity. How can Peace Now and the movement for withdrawal fro Lebanon develop momentum. How can this movement take advantage of the soldiers' and their families' anxiety and depression about events in Lebanon and build the peace movement?

Your calendar birthdate, January 8th, wasn't acknowledged. You noted that you were 34 years old when you reported that one of your squad-mates was 37 but you didn't report any observance.

You returned to the kibbutz and reported your experiences. I wondered what kinds of questions the kibbutz members asked you, and what kinds of stories they told you in return. I felt that you would have preferred to be a combat soldier during the pre-state period when the Jewish Underground was fighting the British, because you would have known for certain that you were on the right side and there wouldn't have been any question about your motives.

The final miluim incident you report was stopping the Lebanese's car by shooting at it. Earlier during your miluim you were on a patrol during which there was a shot through an auto windshield. Apparently this incident helped to prepare you for your later experience. This incident became a popular topic of conversation, and your squad-mates marveled that you would shoot as you did because of your lack of "killer instinct." But the shooting was justified, and necessary in view of the suicide car bombs that were introduced about the time you shot at the car.

I see your miluim experiences as parts of a play, and I wonder whether the kibbutz would give you time to try to write one. There are protagonists and antagonists in the different viewpoints of the soldiers which develop out of the different situations you describe. There are enough persons from outside the squad who come to it who offer an opportunity to develop assorted thoughts on the issues of the day. If it is fair to say that each war has its own "personality," then the personality of the present war in Lebanon is defeat. It is represented by the withdrawal from Lebanon in the rain and mud; and by the loss of more Israelis in the war than were lost in the actions which were used as an excuse to fight the war. This is the first defeat of an Israeli conflict with a neighbor state.

In connection with a remark made someplace about having something to talk about, my response is, how fortunate those soldiers are who don't have anything to talk about-- because they didn't have to experience action. You have completed your tour of duty. Now two friends from the kibbutz are going for their miluim. Hopefully they will return safe and sound with nothing to talk about.

A couple of questions: What is an RPG rocket? And why does the enemy shoot only one at a time? What is the Itzik Manger book you loaned to your chabadnik squad-mate? On January 16th you made a short trip to a nearby stronghold to pick up some men from your unit who returned from leave. Did you pick them up in a vehicle or did you lead them back by foot? What I want to know is whether you drove. Have our LAT clippings helped to place your experiences in a larger picture?

You state the purpose of your journal in the first paragraph on Sunday, January 13th, at 8:00 o'clock. I think you fulfilled the purpose you set for yourself exceptionally well. However, I have a question about your writing. What did your fellow miluimnikkim say about your writing at all hours, day and night, in rain and shine, on solid ground and in the mud? And what did it mean to your visitors-- the general, the mental hygiene officer, the others, who may have come upon you when you were scribbling your notes? Did you write your notes in English or in Hebrew?

Your addendum to your journal came on Saturday, March 9th, before we went out for the afternoon, partly to have the journal and then also the newly arrived addendum photocopied. We made five copies. We'll keep one at home (in addition to the original) and send one each to Mark and Libbe. With your permission we'll tell Bill and Mandy about the journal and ask whether they would like to read it. If so we'll send one to each of them. We'll have our duplicate to loan/show to others-- Ray Prinz, Ralph Kramer, friends of yours who may come to the house or may ask about your present activities, or whoever. Let us know if this is OK. Your first two letters after you returned from miluim continue to report on your war experiences. The third letter after you returned home to the kibbutz is concerned with other thoughts and activities. Nevertheless the thoughts about that month in Lebanon in 1965 will always be with you.

The map that accompanied the journal is helpful but it is too difficult to duplicate it and send it to the others. A Hebrew glossary-- of military terms used-- would be helpful.

Peace, love, write on.