In Building the Temple of Solomon - 4
Before, During and Afterwards…
(Fourth Episode)



Abiram

Hiram, King of Tyre, had come to Jerusalem again with a few others for discussions. During the talks in the Reception Hall, King Solomon had some of his senior officials with him also. I was on my seat to take notes of what was being said.

They talked for several hours on various topics.

In this meeting, which was running mostly in a friendly and harmonious atmosphere, a number of problems that were difficult to resolve were encountered. The most outstanding among these were financial matters. This was partly because King Solomon's chief treasurer had died some time before. Solomon had appointed Stolkin, who was no longer involved in the building of the Temple, to replace him because he was trustworthy indeed.

However, Stolkin was very new to the task; he was still a novice in that respect. He was cautious, preferring not to interfere too much, but it seemed that he had to work on putting the accounts in order. For that purpose he needed some time. The King of Tyre, surprisingly, was acting thoughtful this time.

I interpreted this different behaviour of the King of Tyre in my own way: *"Of course... Stolkin did a good job with his cedar trees, consequently he made him earn a lot of money. That's the reason!"*

Then, I was angry with myself. What did I have against the King of Tyre?... What harm had he given me?... Why did I have such an adverse opinion concerning him?... Was I right in this judgment; could I not be wrong?

Their discussions continued almost up to evening. Hiram, King of Tyre, and his followers retired to rest. Stolkin, Adoniram, Zadok and Achizar remained in the Reception Hall. Solomon told me that my job was complete for the day and I could go, so I left and went to my room in the palace.

Just as I was almost undressed, I heard some voices coming from outside the palace.

Some people were shouting aloud. There was an argument going on. I couldn't understand what was happening. The time was almost 9 o'clock, which was the beginning of the night. It was unusual to hear such shouts near the palace at this hour,

As usual, I wondered what was happening.

The voices were coming from the side where the main entrance door of the palace was, from the front courtyard. I went out of my room towards that way. On the upper floor, the windows were quite high off the base. Even if I managed to climb up, I couldn't really see much because it was already getting dark. The best solution was to go downstairs. However, in order to do that, I had to return, and go to the other side of the building, then climb down to the bottom floor, go around the side corridor and head towards the main entrance door. It would have been inappropriate for me to go straight down the main staircase in the centre when there were guests in the palace.

By the time I whirled down and got there, the voices had stopped. However, just as I was about to look out of the front door, someone grabbed me by the arm.

I turned; Zerbal.

«Where are you?... We are looking for you. We can't find you anywhere. Solomon is calling.»

I tried to tell him that there was a commotion outside and that I wanted to see what was going on, but he refused to let me, saying that the King wanted me right away.

When I tried to go back through the way I came by saying, *«All right!... I'll get dressed quickly.»*, he dragged me along by saying *«Forget about getting dressed now! Let's go immediately.»*

As we walked with rapid steps towards the Reception Hall, he quickly summarized the subject as much as he knew.

Amazing!... Zerbal never talked so much. I think he was very excited.

The Shepherd

Just a while before, a shepherd who grazes his herd at the foot of Mount of Joppa had just arrived in the gate of the palace. He immediately asked to see King Solomon. They wouldn't let him in. He said that he had very important information. They did not care; they told him it was late, and to come the next day. He insisted, saying that it was too urgent and that he could not wait until the next day. They were gentle and asked him what this “important” information was; he would not tell them. When he said he could only tell King Solomon, they dismissed him as crazy and thought he might have bad intentions.

He did not leave. Moreover, he started shouting and calling out to King Solomon as if he could hear him. They warned him, «Hush! Don't shout!» but he raised his voice even louder. That was the kind of shouting I heard. They were about to give him a good beating and chase him away, when he pronounced something about those who killed the architect of the Temple.

At that instant, the situation had changed.

They realized that he was not crazy at all. He is a vulgar shepherd, but he doesn't seem to have bad intentions. They searched him. He had nothing but the felt cloak he was wearing, the staff in his hand and the empty pouch in his bosom. Afraid that what he said might be true, they made him wait there and reported the situation to the guards inside. When the news went all the way to King Solomon, he ordered them to bring him in. Moreover, he had him brought into the Reception Hall, and have sent the other guards were out. Then he told them to convey me immediately.

I thought, *"Look at this! King Solomon is letting a shepherd into the reception hall where he meets other kings, where ceremonies are performed."*

I also realized that this was a ridiculous thought. I thought it was, because I underestimated the shepherd. Solomon was already in the Reception Hall. Of course, He wouldn't go just to talk to a shepherd....

His reason for sending the guards away was also evident. Whatever it was, he did not want everyone to hear the information to be given by the shepherd. But no matter how much he tried to keep it secret, the news would now spread quickly in the palace.



When we reached the hall, Zerbal knocked on the door casually.

Achizar, the Master of Ceremonies, opened it. Apparently even Ben Dekar, the Inner Guard, had also gone.

Achizar hurried me in and closed the door. Zerbal stayed outside.

At first, I noticed the posture of the shepherd.

He was standing in the centre of the hall, as facing Solomon sitting on his throne. He wore a worn-out felt cloak. As he entered, they wanted to take the staff from his hand, but he resisted, so they did not insist.

When Solomon saw me, he gestured for me to take my seat to carry out my job. He waited for me to get ready.

Then he addressed the shepherd and asked, *«What is your name, shepherd?»*

The shepherd replied, *«Everyone calls me Pharos.»*

If what he said was true, the man's name meant "lantern".

When Solomon asked, *«From whom are you?»*, he did not answer.

He couldn't have not heard. I think he ignored it. Because when Solomon repeated his question, it became clear that he did not want to give any information in this matter. Finally he said: *«Solomon, my great King Solomon, what will you do by learning who we are from? We are peasants, farmers, labourers, shepherds. We can't be regarded as from anyone.»*

What did he try to mean?

Or was he being sarcastic in his own way?

I couldn't understand whether his remark made Solomon angry or more curious. He repeated his question as *«Shepherd Pharos, don't get on my nerves. Tell us clearly from whom you are, so that we can know you.»*

The shepherd bowed his head. He stopped for a while. Then he mumbled something like *"Be... Je..."* or so.

Solomon couldn't hear. Even I couldn't hear, though I was closer to the shepherd.

When he looked up and saw that Solomon was staring at him, he was as if a bit startled. I realized later that he wasn't startled at all, that there was something else going on, but that's how it seemed to me at the time.

«My Sublime King Solomon, forgive me. It doesn't suit us, but...» and then, after a pause, he promptly said aloud, ***«Benjamin.»***

King Solomon seemed to freeze. Suddenly he stood up. We all got up at once. What was he going to do?... Why did the word of the shepherd influenced him so much?

He didn't say anything. He sat down again. «Tell us once more what you know about those who killed the master architect of the temple» he said softly, and pointing at me, *«so that he also can hear and write down.»*

The shepherd resisted: *«I have told you, my sublime king.»*

«I know. Tell us one more time. It's going to be on the record.»

I wonder if Pharos understood this reference of being recorded.

That is not clear, but he bowed his head and told us once more what he had told previously.

By this means, I had the chance of learning what had happened from the beginning.

«The other day, I lost one of the goats in my herd. I searched everywhere, but I couldn't find it. A goat doesn't leave the herd. You think it has wandered off, but then it comes back by itself. This was a young goat; it did not return. I thought, "I wonder if it went to the rocks and something happened to him there." Goats do not spread out on the plain like sheep; they like the grass that grow between the rocks.»

When Faros went on and on, Solomon warned him, *«Get to the point, Pharos. Say what you really have to say.»*

The shepherd muttered, *"Because you said it would be recorded"* in a voice that only I could hear, but he continued as follows:

«I climbed towards the upper slopes of the mountain, and then I heard the sounds of some people. We don't get many visitors in our neighbourhood. Occasionally thieves fall in. Since my mind was always on the goat, I was worried, "They must have caught the animal unattended and slaughtered it!" I thought it might be dangerous to show myself. I approached without making a sound. When I looked up, I saw that there was a narrow plain on top of the slope and a ***cave*** *between the rock layers. Moreover, it seemed to be large. I had never noticed it before. I went around and sidled up to it. The entrance was covered with bushes. How could the brushwood of the mountain fill the entrance of the cave in such a place? It was obviously made by human hands.»*

He took a breath and then continued:

«I crawled closer and peeked inside. There was very little light. I couldn't see anything, but I could hear people talking. Obviously there were three of them. I have nothing to do with thieves and ill-willed ones. My mind was on the goat, but if it was three people who stole the goat, obviously I wouldn't be able to handle it. I even regretted getting so close. Just as I was about to go back, I heard them mentioning the temple here, so I kept waiting quietly and listened to what they were talking about.»

Faros had explained all this in one fell swoop. He stood and breathed for a while longer. When Solomon became impatient and said, *«What were they saying? Tell us»*, he continued:

«One of them said, "We shouldn't have done it. We shouldn't have killed him."... "Did we do it on purpose? He should have spoken up" said the other sharply... "It's all because of you. You will see, they will catch us anyway. Then you will enjoy death from death."... The other got angry and said, "Look at me! We all did this together. Don't try to put the blame on me alone." The previous one said, "I wish we had pressed someone else instead of the architect. We would have been just as guilty if we had killed the king." The third man said, "Stop arguing. How many days have passed and they have searched for us, but they have not found. They will never find us again. They will forget about it. Let's drop the matter and take care of ourselves." He also told me the name of the architect, but I couldn't hear it very well; it was something like Iran or Uran...»

Solomon did not correct the assumption of the shepherd. When he asked, *«Is that exactly what they said?"* Faros became puzzled. Maybe he had told it a little differently before I came in. *«I don't know»* he replied, *«That's how I remember it. Maybe they spoke somewhat differently, but that's more or less what they said.»*

When Faros stopped again, Solomon asked what happened next.

The Shepherd then added: *«When I couldn't find the goat, I went down to the village to ask in the neighbourhood. From the conversation of a few people, I learned that the architect of the temple had been killed, and the murderers had escaped. When I remembered the conversations in the cave on the mountain, I realized who they were. I was scared. I left without making a sound. I left the herd unattended because I thought it was very important. They would gather at night and sleep anyway. I ran here, that's all.»*

There was silence for a short while. Solomon was obviously thinking.

When he asked*, «Can you find that cave again?»* Pharos replied, *«I know that territory like my palm.»*

When asked, *«Can you take us there right away?»* he replied, *«My Sublime King Solomon, the night is moonless. I can find the way, but you cannot climb there at night. If you carry fire, they will see you from far away. You know the best, but I think it is better to go by daylight. In any case, they will not be able to leave at night.»*

When Solomon asked how long it would take to get there, he replied, *«The sun was low when I left, but it was still above the horizon. I ran here, you calculate the rest.»*

Solomon thought aloud, *«So if we set out at midnight, we will get there before morning.»* He turned to Zadok and asked, *«What do you think?»*

Zadok said, *«We cannot find the place on our own. The shepherd must lead us, but don't look at him standing so straight, his face shows that he is extremely exhausted. First, he should get some rest. I don't think a few hours will make much difference.»*

Solomon said, *«You are right»*, and thought for a while. Then he asked Achizar to find and bring Zabud immediately, who was organizing the social affairs of the palace.

While Achizar was going towards the gate to tell Zerbal the king's command, Solomon said to Faros, *«Probably you are hungry. Sit down. Let them bring food.»* The Shepherd replied, *«My Sublime King Solomon, we will sit down if you command us, but it is not proper for us to eat in front of you.»*

Solomon gestured for him to sit down. Pharos sank down; he leaned on his staff.

Soon there was a random knock on the door. I was very used to the order here. I thought, *"What's going on today? Nobody is following the rules."*

I guess I hadn't yet realized how extraordinary the situation was.

Achizar went over and opened the door. Zabud had arrived. Solomon gestured for him to come closer. He ordered him to take this shepherd, feed him well, let him lie down and rest, and be ready to set out in the morning before sunrise.

Upon Solomon's signal, Pharos rose from the ground. He bowed to the king in his own strange way and left, following Zabud.

In the meantime, I was taking notes about what was happening, and simultaneously thinking.

The first and most important basis in searching the truth is the accumulation of scientific knowledge, which is also powered by reason.

However, this may not be sufficient at all times, in all environments and under all conditions.

Many times, in order to successfully distinguish right from wrong, people look for a leader who will help and support them, who will assist them in making use of the experiences of their lives, who will show them the way and the method.

The usefulness and value of a leader of wisdom in the search for truth cannot be denied.

But one may not always and constantly have the opportunity to follow a leader. Often, he does not even have a permanent leader. Such a situation should not deter him from the search for truth. In any case, one must rely more on oneself than on a leader.

A confident person is sometimes mistaken. He may even come to a dead end. Perhaps he becomes disappointed in his search for the truth.

Even so, one should not ignore the possibility that at some state in time, at some unexpected moment, one may encounter a light that illuminates the path of truth. One should never dismiss such a possibility from his agenda and shouldn't lose hope. A faint source of light in the darkness, which from a distance may seem like a feeble spark, may turn into such a glow that it may turn out to be one's true guide when he gets close to it.

Silence occurred. No one was making any sound.

As usual in most cases, it was King Solomon who broke the silence. But this time he spoke of something completely different. «You know» he said, «if we were to start digging into families now, this shepherd and I might turn out to be distant relatives or on the contrary opponents.

At that instant, I understood why Faros was hesitant to state which family he belonged to.

Don't say, *"Oh, he's just a shepherd grazing a herd on the mountain!"* This man was so pure, so noble-hearted, that he was afraid to reveal that he descends from another lineage on the same level as King Solomon's. When he was forced to reveal it, that caused a thrill on Solomon. The coincidence of life had led one to become king because of his descent from the family of Judah, and the other to become a shepherd because of his background is from the family of Benjamin, the original owners of Jerusalem in fact, as the Israelites had traditionally recognized. It was sometimes said among the locals that King David, Solomon's father, had done the Benjamins an injustice by taking Jerusalem as his capital after he had been victorious in battle. Jerusalem was considered as the property of the Benjamins, and King David should not have settled there, but should have established the capital of the country in the land of his own family. This was also the reason why Solomon called Pharos "kinsman or foe".

We were again focused on the murderers of Hiram Abif, which we seemed to have forgotten for some time. Solomon said, *«It's late. Let's go to bed. I'll expect you all at the door leading to the front courtyard before dawn.»*

We all got up. He went out first. He stood in the doorway and talked to Zerbal at length, giving instructions. We waited... When he walked away, we left too.

The Trek

Next morning, before dawn, I was in front of the main entrance to the front courtyard.

There were others too. Zabud, Achizar and Zadok came with Faros the shepherd. They all had volunteered to go after those who had killed Hiram Abif. Solomon had apparently given Zerbal orders in that respect.

When Solomon arrived, he saw the crowd and regarded it was too crowdie. Faros had already said that if there were too many people together, there would inevitably be noise while climbing the mountain, thus the criminals might hear them and run away. He suggested that only a few people should climb up to the cave and that the others should surround the environment.

Solomon decided that nine men were enough, three for each of the murderers. He said that he knew everyone was willing to go, that he would choose one and the others would be chosen by lot. *«Zerbal will be in charge. Those who go will obey him«* he said, thus indicating his choice.

Then, upon his instructions, Achizar counted how many volunteers had gathered. He filled a sack with pebbles he had brought earlier; eight were white, the others coloured.

Solomon said, *«Achizar, I see that you were prepared. How did you know that there would be so many volunteers?»*

Achizar said that it had happened when he had made an announcement at night, as he had commanded, and such a situation appeared.

A sack was passed from hand to hand. Everyone but Achizar and Zadok dipped their hand into it and picked up a pebble. I got a coloured stone, almost red. I was devastated, how could I not go! But my luck was not in my favour; I became tearful. I just stared at the stone in my hand.

At that moment, Ben Dekar came up to me; snatched the stone from my hand and replaced it with a white one.

I almost swallowed my tongue in astonishment. I looked at Ben Dekar without being able to say anything.

Ben Dekar tilted his head slightly forward and made an eyebrow-eye gesture that meant something like *"it's all right"*. When I whispered, *«But why?»*, he said, *«You obviously have a strong wish to go. Such a heartfelt wish cannot be resisted. I might as well not go.»*

At that moment I was amazed by Ben Dekar's magnanimity.

I thought, whether I would have done the same thing if I would be in his place?

I don't think so. I wasn't that mature yet.

By this means, the eight people who were to go with Zerbal were chosen.

While I couldn't know how to thank Dekar, he already had walked away.

Zerbal also had come prepared. He took out daggers from a sack and handed them to us. He said aloud, *«I hope you won't have to use them, but just in case! Keep them with you. Your only duty is to capture the suspects and bring them back safe and sound.»*

After the daggers being distributed, King Solomon warned us all, *«You may use the dagger you have been given only to defend yourself whenever it is necessary. If there is a clash, defend yourselves, but not one of them must be harmed. I want all three of them alive, captured.»*

At that moment, I think he realized from our eyes, from our looks that the question *"Why?"* was going through the minds of some of us. At least I thought so.

King Solomon’s words that followed explained the reason: *«Because even if we consider them guilty, they are still suspects. They will remain so until their guilt is proven. They must be in trial. We must give them the right and the opportunity to defend themselves. None of us can decide whether they are really guilty and, if so, how they should be punished. That is the job of the Board of Judges.»*

He asked each of us one by one if we understood what he said. When he thought we had understood, he saw us off.



I had been a builder all my life and had never picked up a weapon. My tools were things like a square, compasses, level, plumb line, trowel etc. I took it out of its sheath and looked at what it looked like, though I’ve come across with one in the hand of Hiram, King of Tyre. It was a slightly curved, pointed and sharp knife. I didn't know how to use it if necessary, but I kept quiet and placed it in my belt like the others.

Mount of Joppa

We set off on camels at dawn. A man could walk at least twice as fast as a camel, but Pharos said it was a long way. When we reached the plateau where Pharos grazed his herd, the sun was high above us.

We got off the camels where we couldn't be seen from the mountain and approached on foot. Following Zerbal's instructions, we split into three groups and started climbing.

In fact, this was not like what Pharos had suggested. He was of the opinion that the surrounding should be well guarded. When he reminded about this, Zerbal preferred saying, *«Don't worry, they will not be able to escape.»*

Pharos agreed helplessly; he was the commander, he must have known what to do. He pointed to a region of the mountain and showed us where to climb. The place that he pointed was a very steep slope. He suggested that us not to climb straight up, that it would be too difficult and dangerous, and that we should follow the narrow goat paths, and carry on slowly winding up.

I was in the group in the middle, just behind Pharos. As we climbed slowly, Pharos stopped for a moment, pointing with his hand to a certain spot above.

Nothing like a cave could be seen there. I snuggled closer to Pharos; *«Where did you say?»* I asked in whisper. I leaned on the outstretched arm of Paros and looked from that direction. Yes, there was something like a triangular blotch between the layers of rock. But if it was the entrance of a cave, it was not covered with bushes, unlike what Pharos had said earlier.

I became suspicious. Pharos had never seen them. He had only heard them while talking. Maybe they had just come here for the night. They might have left early in the morning. If what he said was true, that is, if the entrance of the cave had been completely covered with bushes when he had come up here last night, and it wasn't now, this was showing that they have come out.

I turned and looked back for a moment. Down below, Zerbal was waving his hand, trying to get our attention. I wondered if he could see the cave from down there. He seemed to be telling those in front, to go upwards and those further back to spread out to either side. Although he made no sound, he made his point so well that I couldn't help thinking, *“Was he a soldier before he became Solomon's chief guard?”*

Now I was in the middle and in the front of the three of us. We had come to such a point that we could no longer proceed in a whirl, we either had to climb straight up or turn around, go back down, and climb again from another side.

The slope was getting steeper and steeper. When I leaned my body firmly against the rocks and began to pull myself slowly upwards, the others followed me as well.

When we tried to climb steeply like this, we couldn't hold on to anything, our feet would slip and the rock piece as would tumble down with a crunch. That's when I realized why Pharos had advised us to climb roundabout, not straight ahead. But it was too late. We had come this far in silence; now we were creating a lot of noise. Who knows, maybe it was just me. But if we were really making noise, who knows how furious Zerbal was down there.

Therefore I wanted to stop for a moment, turn back, and go down... I tried... But no!... Turning back from this point meant tumbling down at any moment. Either I was going to stand there glued to the rocks or I had to keep climbing; there was no other way!

There seemed to be a narrow plain in front of the cave. Pharos had mentioned it, but apparently he had come around the other side. When we took a shortcut, we made it difficult for ourselves.



I was just about to reach that plain when someone appeared in the entrance of the cave. I couldn't quite make out who it was. He screamed and returned. So they hadn't left; they were here.

I was seen. The person who was screaming had probably seen those who had come there with me as well.

There was no longer any need to hide, to be careful, not to make a sound. I tried to get to that flat area in front of the cave as soon as possible, but I was unable to find a place to hold on.

With one last, desperate leap, I threw myself towards the edge of the plain. The sharp rocks cut my hands and knees. Ignoring the pain, I pulled myself up and sat up quickly, not stopping, not thinking to help those who were coming after me to get up here, now that I was up here myself, now that I had my feet firmly on the ground, I did the most inappropriate move.

I plunged straight into the cave.

It was dark inside, but I could see **Abiram** even before I entered. I noticed something glowing in his hand; it was too late when I realized that it was a dagger.

My foot hit on an outcropping rock, and I was thrown forward. Abiram, who was coming forth at full speed, crashed into me and rolled over. As I rolled out from under him, I drew my dagger out from its sheath, shouting as if to express my personal vengeance on him. But in the collision Abiram must have dropped the one in his hand or stabbed some place, for both his hands were empty as he grabbed me by my clothes and dragged me out of the cave.

He was stronger than myself. He spun me around, pounced on me and started pushing me down the plain in front of the cave. I struck him on the head with my hand for dear life, which was clutching the dagger. Abiram fell back, holding his forehead in pain. He let me off and rushed back into the cave, however instantly charged at me again with the dagger in his raised hand.

Whereas, I had not yet been able to get up from the ground. I was lying on my back with my head to the side of the cliff, thinking that I was dead, when Abiram immobilised over me, his eyes bulging out of their sockets.

This is what actually happened: Without being aware, I had thrust my dagger forward. Before he could hit me, my dagger had dipped into his chest.

Now Abiram was lying over me without any move. When I realized that I was not dead yet, I pushed Abiram to the side and stood up, without letting go of the dagger I was holding tightly. But I could not keep standing, and collapsed to the ground.

Just at that moment I vaguely saw that the other suspects in the cave had got out of the cave, jumped over me and run away, but I was not in a state of being able to do anything for that.

Immediately following all these that happened almost in the blink of an eye, those that managed to climb up, found me as covered in blood. They had also seen the other two running away, but instead of chasing them, they first preferred to take care of me. They pulled me to the side and made me lean to the rocks.

Now waves and waves of shouting was echoing from the surrounding hills. Apparently others had also seen what was happening, albeit from a distance, and were chasing those that have run away.

After a while I pulled myself together. They took me in their arms and lifted me up.



We entered the cave and investigated what was inside. In the faint light of a candle burning on a rock outcropping, a part of the cave could be seen. Nothing but a few pieces of clothing, an empty wine jug and the remains of food could be seen.

There was also a water source in the cave. This meant that one of them had known about this place previously, so they had come here.

Suddenly, I felt very thirsty. I drank a quite lot of water, then washed my hands and face. The others who had come with me also...

There was nothing left for us to do here.

Just as we were about to leave, I suddenly remembered the goat that Pharos had lost. Thinking, *"Could they have captured the goat, slaughtered it, cooked it and eaten?"*, I entered the cave once more and looked for animal bones; there were none. There was no fire here anyway. It seemed that the discovery by Pharos about their hiding place was just a coincidence.

The shouts we had heard a while ago had stopped. This could mean two things: They must have gone after the other suspects.

Now there was a problem here: What were we going to do with Abiram's body? If we would load it up and carry with ourselves, it would be creating a lot of trouble. Furthermore, it would be useless. But we had to be able to prove that he was dead, so we beheaded him. One of the missionaries wrapped it in pieces of clothing, and gave it to me.

We left Abiram's headless corpse there, on the plain in front of the cave. Slowly and gradually we made our way down the rocks.

As we descended, a vulture was already appeared overhead, started circling.

Pharos met us excitedly in the middle of the slope. He was very happy to see me safe and sound, but he looked at the pack of severed head with fear. He didn't say anything.

As we were heading towards the valley, Zerbal and the others arrived. They had seen the two other suspects fleeing, had chased after them but could not catch up and could not determine which way they had gone on the other side of the mountain.

Zerbal said our number wouldn't be enough to search for them. He was very upset with me too, because I had killed Abiram. *«Why on earth would you go off on your own...»* he began harshly, and didn't continue the scold, just contended by shaking his head from side to side.

I understood what he meant. He was right.

We said good-bye to Pharos, got on our camels, and were on our way to Jerusalem.

Cut-off Head

I wanted to reach Jerusalem as soon as possible, so I kept urging the camel.

When we arrived in the city walls, I couldn't resist anymore. I jumped off the camel, grabbed Abiram's wrapped head and started running.

I tripped over something, and felled down. Abiram's head rolled out of my hand. I hurriedly grabbed it. I forgot to wrap it up, grasped by the hair, and kept on running.

Zerbal also had left his camel and was running after me, shouting at the top of his lungs to make me stop. In fact, I could hear him, but I was in no mood to stop and listen. I wanted to get to the palace before anyone else, and tell King Solomon directly, first-hand, what had happened.

By the time I reached the gate of the palace, Zerbal had caught up with me. If it would be earlier, I would have had trouble getting in. Fortunately, I was now recognized by all the guards. Zerbal tried to stop me, but I dodged him and rushed into Solomon's reception hall. By the way, I had also unsheathed my dagger, which was stained with blood.

How did I know that King Solomon was waiting in the reception hall?... I didn't know. It was like a hunch. Hiram, King of Tyre, was with him. Adoniram, Zadok, Achizar, Stolkin and many others…

Without noticing any of the rules, I went straight and knelt before the King.

Solomon’s attitude in receiving me was not as I had hoped and expected at all. I had Abiram's head in one hand and a blood stained dagger in the other.

«Johaben!... What does this mean?.... How can you come in here like this?» he shouted.

I almost boasted by sayıng, *«I killed Abiram, one of the murderers of our chief architect, Master Hiram Abif. Here is his head.»*

He jumped to his feet.

«Shame on you!» he cried, *«How could you do such a thing?... Didn't I tell you, all of you, to be careful, to refrain from killing them, just to catch them and bring them in?... You are an official here who is also a “judge”. Do you think that justice can be served by such mutual killings? Is that fits you?... Now, the justice you have attempted to administer alone will be administered on you. The person you killed was a suspect. He should have been caught and brought into trial. If found guilty, he should have been punished accordingly. You killed him and obstructed justice. Worse, you have put yourself in the place of the judiciary. You have committed a great crime.»*

I was shocked. I didn't know what to do now... Whereas, I was expecting to be celebrated...

I wish I had listened to Zerbal when he tried to stop me. He would have known better than I how to explain this to King Solomon. Perhaps Solomon would still be angry because I killed Abiram, but Zerbal could have let him know the fact concerning this event in a proper way. As a result of my impulsive behaviour, I didn't even have a chance to defend myself.

As Solomon took his seat, he shouted at me one last time, *«Don't let me see you anymore. Get out of my sight!»*

As I staggered out of the reception hall, unable to even stand up, doubled over, with Abiram's cut-off head in one hand and the blood stained dagger in the other, he called after me, *«Throw this self-unaware in the dungeon. Let him stay there until he is interrogated.»*

How many times have I been in such a status!... Wasn't I supposed to mature?

As soon as I was out, Zerbal, who was waiting outside the door, reached me and took Abiram's cut-off head and the dagger from my hands and stuffed them into a bag. Then he said to me sharply, *«Look here! Now go straight to your room. Don't talk to anyone. Stay there and don't ever leave.»*

I obeyed. I went to where I was staying, and threw myself on the mattress without getting undressed. I felt like crying in tears. I was shaking like I had malaria. I wasn't guilty, but I had acted wrongly, and as a result, had been misunderstood. I had tried to do my duty in my own way, I had come close to death, and because of that I had caused someone else to die.

Even though I said I had killed Abiram, I couldn't believe in it myself. He had killed himself while trying to kill me. Maybe he deserved to die already, but King Solomon was right; that was not for me to decide. But I didn't deserve to be punished because I didn't mean to do it. Perhaps I could be punished for barging into King Solomon's presence with the cut-off head and the dagger in my hands, without following any rules, without even being allowed to do so...

The whole adventure of the day flashed before my eyes once again. That's when I realized how tired and even exhausted I was.

My eyelids felt heavy. I fainted out.

To Be Forgiven

Someone was calling me and shaking me at the same time. *«Joapert... Wake up!»* said he voice.

I blinked my eyes open, with difficulty...

It was Achizar who stood over me. When he saw that I was finally awake, he nudged me, *«Come on, get up! Come on, come on!»* he said.

«What time is it?» I asked, rubbing my eyes.

«It's time for those having a duty to be on their way» he replied.

I was unable to understand. Weren't we on our way yet?... Was I dreaming?... Did I think that everything that had happened hadn't really happened?

When Achizar saw me staring blankly, he said, *«So it's the beginning of the night.»*

This meant that I had been asleep just for quite a short time.

Achizar said, «Go and *splash some cold water on your face. Even wash thoroughly. Then change your clothes. You stink. Solomon wants to see you.»*

I sat up.

I was almost struggling not to be able to understand what Achizar was saying. *«Now you just said it's time for those having a duty to be on their way, and then you say that it is the beginning of the night. Didn't we set out at dawn?»*

Achizar said, *«In a way that is true, but yesterday you were supposed to set out at this time. Zadok advised the shepherd to rest, so inevitably you stayed until the morning.»*

I still couldn't understand what he was saying, what he was talking about, but I got up.

«So, what day is today?» I asked, to which Achizar replied, *«The same day... Don't worry, it's not tomorrow yet.»*

Then he summarised what had happened there after King Solomon had expelled me.

When all those that were on expedition following me arrived in the palace, Zerbal kept them waiting by the gate. At one point, he poked his head into the hall, told Achizar that they had all arrived, and that the King might like to hear their impressions as well.

Upon Achizar reporting Zerbal's proposal, Solomon asked to see both Zerbal and the other selected missioners. They were let in all together.

They had described the incident... Especially those who had followed me into the cave told in detail how Abiram and I had fought there, how he had attacked to kill me, how I didn't know how to use a dagger, how I had tried to defend myself but couldn't even do that, how - Achizar was laughing while saying this - Abiram was about to kill me when he accidentally fell on the dagger in my hand and died, and his head was cut off to be brought here later on.

Consequently, King Solomon had said that he realized to be wrong by judging me so quickly, and ordered me to be brought in.

So far so good, but I didn't understand why Achizar had come to fetch me. However, I didn't want to ask.

Nevertheless, Achizar said, *«I'm leaving. I have works to do. Don't linger. Get cleaned up, get dressed, get in to the reception hall as soon as possible»,* and went away.

I went out to the back courtyard and washed once more in the fountain there. I returned, tidied myself up, put on a particularly ordinary master's apron and went to the reception hall. At that moment, it seemed to me that it would be much better not to use any of the many titles I had been granted.

Zerbal was at the door, as usual. He seemed to be waiting for me. He didn't say anything. He just gestured for me to stop, and knocked on the door. When the door opened, he gestured to me as if to say, «Come on, come in.» He was smiling. Oh, what a surprise!

As I entered, I became aware that Zerbal had not stayed outside but had also entered in being right behind me.

The hall was quite crowded. The other brethren who had gone on the expedition were there; they had been taken in before me and had seated. However, Achizar had said they had been sent away; and he was not around himself. With Zerbal inside, it seemed that Ben Dekar, the Inner Guard, was the only one left in charge.

Black curtains were drawn on the walls, as they had once been, but this time not all along, leaving the white side columns as exposed.

Although it was night, the lamps were not put on. The hall was only dimly lit by a candlestick that stood beside King Solomon.

A stand covered with a black cloth was placed in front of the throne. Two swords were placed on it. Between the swords was a bloody dagger. I wonder if it was mine. On top of the dagger sat a hammer wrapped in a black cloth.

I waited in the doorway.

Solomon signalled me with his hand to come closer.

I didn't move.

A hand pushed me from behind. I think it was Zerbal.

I hesitantly moved forward.

I stopped in the middle of the hall. Solomon motioned for me to come a little closer.

I approached, but I avoided making eye contact with him. I sensed that he was frowning in the same way he had frowned before when I had committed a grave offense. I was looking straight ahead like a child who had committed a misdemeanour.

But when Solomon said sternly, *«Lift your head and look at me, Johaben!»*, I reluctantly did as he asked.

Oh, dear!... His eyebrows weren't furrowed like I anticipated.

«They told us what happened in the cave. Now we understand everything much better» he said. He paused for a moment. *«How did you hold the dagger when Abiram attacked you? Show us.»*

Was that a joke?

No, it wasn't!

I showed him.

Solomon said, *«Just come near to me like that.»*

I advanced without breaking my posture.

He said, *«Give me your hand.»*

I did not fully understand, so I stretched out my left hand, which was free.

He warned me not to extend that, but the one as if I was holding a dagger with.

I had just extended my right hand to him, fist clenched, thumb outstretched, when he asked, *«What's your name?»*

He always called me “Johaben”, but I chose to say what seemed right to me and said ***«Joapert»***.

He reached forward. He grabbed my open thumb and said, ***«Abiram.»***

I shook a little at the sound of that name, but I noticed a sweet smile on Solomon's face.

I was forgiven. My heart was suddenly filled with joy and happiness.

Solomon let my hand free, and told me to go to my seat. He had just looked around and asked, *«Has Achizar arrived?»* when there was a knock at the door.

Ben Dekar opened the door ajar, looked out, then turned and announced that Achizar had arrived.

Solomon ordered him in, and Achizar entered. He was carrying a huge, man-sized candlestick, not like the one in the Inner Chamber of the Sanctuary, but different... A giant candelabrum with eight lamps around the perimeter and one high in the centre, nine in total...

He placed the candlestick in the centre of the hall.

The Nine Virtues

King Solomon said, «*It has become dark. It is hard to see. Now, let's light the lamps of this candlestick.»*

Achizar ignited a stick and was about to light the lamps of the huge candlestick he had brought when Solomon stopped him and said: *«No, tonight we will do something else. The killing of Abiram, one of the suspects in the assassination of our Chief Architect Hiram Abif, whether by coincidence or accident, tells us this: No positive progress can be achieved through brute force. Virtues will eventually prevail over all. Of course, everyone can prioritize a certain virtue over others according to their own value judgments. Let each of the lamps of the candlestick in front of us be lit by one of those who were on the expedition to catch the assassins. As he lights it, let him briefly explain us the virtue he considers as important.»*

Then he turned to me. *«Johaben, since you are the hero of the day, you start.»*

If it would be at any other time, I might have been at a loss as to what to do in this situation, but now – probably due to the feeling of being forgiven- I was very calm.

I rose up slowly from my seat, took the fire from Achizar, and as I lit one of the lamps of the candlestick, I recalled an advice he had given me as my master, ***«humility.»*** Then I added: *«One must be able to make a clear assessment of his own qualities. He should know what he is as well as what he is not, and act accordingly. He should not be vain and proud, but on the contrary, he should not oppress himself. Nor should he see himself as anything other than what he is. He must first of all sincerely judge himself and indicate his own judgment.»*

The one after me supported my statement by saying ***"self-criticism"***: *«We need to examine our beliefs, thoughts, attitudes, words and behaviours objectively, looking for and finding the wrong or erroneous ones, then comparing these with those that are correct.»*

His successor took our thoughts a step further by calling for ***"purity of heart"***: *«We must be sincere in our thoughts, words and deeds, never harbouring ulterior motives and never being motivated by self-interest.»*

The next one changed the route a bit and said ***"fearlessness"***. *«When encountering negative factors and obstacles, one must be able to overcome them and not collapse. He must be able to endure sorrow and hardship, to take the risk, to be patient, to face dangers and even to take the plunge if necessary.»*

The one following him added the concept of ***"bravery"***: *«One must also succeed in being brave and altruistic. Instead of remaining isolated, one should share everything bravely and protect the common benefits.»*

The next one supported the previous by saying ***"endurance"***: *«Difficulties and obstacles should never deter us from our path. We must not give up, we must persevere under all circumstances. We must remain steadfast, and always consistent.»*

The one in the eighth row lit his lamp by mentioning, ***"charity"***. He made a brief statement as *«We should be able to give from ourselves, to show magnanimity of heart.«*

Zerbal was the last. Slowly, he reached for the ninth lamp, which stood in the very centre, and raised all the virtues to a sublime level by saying ***"patriotism"***. *«One must look after one's own country and nation. He should put all his means and skills at the service of his country and his fellow citizens. Whatever he wants for himself, he should want the same for others. In fact, he should not only ask for it, he should try to provide it.»*



When Zerbal was about to return to his place, Solomon called out and stopped him. *«You know that a temple is being built here. This is not just for the people of this country, not just for those of a particular faith, but for all, no matter what country or what faith. Our aim here is directed towards humanity»* he said, *«Therefore, doesn't* ***"humanitarianism"*** *rises above patriotism that you mentioned?»*

Zerbal gave a respectful answer to this question: *«A person who cannot love himself cannot love his family. A person who cannot love his family cannot reach patriotism. The one who lacks love of country cannot progress on the path that leads to love of humanity. Undoubtedly, "human love" surpasses all virtues and rises above them all. But it is not for me to express it. If our Great King says so, then it is so.»*

Upon this comment, *«Zerbal is right»* Solomon concluded, *«Humanitarianism should be the highest virtue for all of us.»*

Sterkin and Moria

King Solomon conducted his current affairs, sometimes in his study, sometimes in the assembly room.

There were people coming and going, various matters were being discussed, decisions were attained, officials briefed the King, and then received instructions or directives.

Hiram, King of Tyre, was also coming to Jerusalem every now and then. It seemed to me that he had made Jerusalem his neighbour's gate and even subscribed to the reception hall. Moreover, he was also present in the meeting room sometimes, where local affairs were discussed.

In the meantime, Solomon had been to Tyre only once.

Hiram, King of Tyre, was considerably older than Solomon, and much more experienced. Nevertheless, he once said that he had learned a lot about statecraft here. Solomon was very pleased with this remark. I never asked, it was none of my business, but I think because of that, and also as a show of honour to those who came and went from other countries, Solomon didn't mind King Hiram standing next to him.

From time to time, Solomon would go into his study room, and either work alone or meet with someone one else as well as taking me in to write notes.

One such day, when it was just the two of us working, someone knocked on the door.

We exchanged glances.

Solomon said, *«Get up. Let's find out who is knocking on the door like that.»*

When I went to the door and opened, I saw that it was Ben Dekar... Look at the situation!... If it would be in the reception hall now, and I would came and knock on the door, it would then be him to open.

Ben Dekar had been absent for a few days. Someone else had to take his place when needed. When I informed Solomon that he had arrived, he was a little surprised. *«Why did he come? He was on leave»* he thought aloud, then said, *«Don't keep him waiting! He must have a problem. Tell him to come in. Let's understand what his problem is.»*

When Ben Dekar entered, he first knelt before Solomon, then stood up and greeted him once more.

«What is it, Ben Dekar?» asked Solomon, *«Is it something important? Besides, as you said before, shouldn't you be in Gaza with your family? You had permission for that. What happened?»*

Ben Dekar said that something really important had happened, which was why he had left his family problems in Gaza, and immediately returned.



What he told was really important. After crossing Lachish, he reached the town of Ashdad. From there he would travel to Gaza by sea. Then he heard a rumour about the people who had killed Hiram Abif. The two suspects were probably hiding in the country of Gath.

«So that's where they fled» Solomon said, *«but if it's just a rumour you've heard, it may be untrue. Otherwise, we must get prepared.»*

Proximately he had me write a letter to Maaka, King of Gath. He ordered Ben Dekar to go, find Zerbal and Zadok and bring them to the meeting room, and provide Adoniram as well.

When the letter to the King of Gath asking for his assistance was finished, Solomon wrapped, and sealed it. We went into the meeting room, he in front and I behind.

Zerbal, Zadok and Ben Dekar were already there. Adoniram was at the construction site and we would have to wait until he arrives. But Solomon could not wait.

He began by saying to Zerbal and Zadok, *«You know the information Ben Dekar has brought.»* They looked at each other in surprise, then back at Ben Dekar. When Solomon asked, *«So what? don't you know?»* They bowed their necks.

It became clear that Ben Dekar had not told them anything. He personally did not want to decide on his own what should and should not be told to whom, but merely summoned them at the King's behest. Indeed, that was the proper thing to do.

At Solomon's demand, he told it again.

Solomon asked Zadok, *«Should we send the same group to Gath; do you think it would be appropriate or should we think of a completely different team? What do you think?»*

«The information Ben Dekar brought is just a rumour. It may or may not be true.»

«Well?»

«If it's true, we should definitely send a team there.»

«If not?»

«We cannot attempt to investigate the truth of this. We shouldn't take that risk. We better send a team. It may not be true. Then they will have travelled in vain. It won't cost us much.»

«So you're saying we should definitely send a team there. At least let them go and investigate.»

«Yes, but our King knows the best and most accurately.»

«That's fine! Tell me anyway.»

Zadok said that the previous group could have been sent as well, but that it might be useful to increase the number of people going as the country of Gath is a complicated place.

Solomon then turned to Zerbal and asked, *«Do you think fifteen is enough?»*

Zerbal bowed his neck.

Just then, there was a commotion outside. When Zerbal opened the door to see what was happening, Adoniram came in, out of breath. They had told him that something very important arose, and that he must come at once, so he ran from the Temple to the palace.

Solomon said, *«They exaggerated.»* Then asked Ben Dekar, *«Is that what you said to the man you sent?»*, but he didn't wait for an answer and added, *«Well, it doesn't matter. Adoniram is a little tired, that's all. Let's get on with our work.»* He told Adoniram to sit down and rest.

I was thinking as «Now King Hiram might show up» when there was a knock at the door.

Zerbal looked out once more. It was Stolkin. He wanted to talk about some accounts. Solomon told him, «Now is not the time. We will deal with that later», and sent him away. Then he regretted it: *«He could have participated in this meeting, but it happened anyhow.»*

He turned to Zadok again: *«Do you think we should choose the others that are going to attend again by lot?»*

«Adoniram has just arrived and does not know what the subject matter is about» Zadok said, suggesting that first he should be informed also.

Solomon said, *«Oh, that's right! I forgot that he didn't know the subject. But it's good. Since he doesn't know, he won't be under any influence. Let's ask him make the choice.»* He turned to Adoniram, *«Now tell me the names of six men from the site, who you think are trustworthy in every way and who can do anything, no matter what.»*

Adoniram was in difficulty.

More or less four months had passed since Hiram Abif's murder, and the two suspects, who had not been heard from since I killed Abiram, had faded from memory. Meanwhile, the construction of the Temple was almost completed. Adoniram had very few men left. If he had known what the task was, perhaps he would make a choice accordingly.

He looked at our faces… None of us gave a clue..

I thought Adoniram would complain about this, and ask for at least a hint so that he could make a right choice.

I was wrong. (Being wrong has always been my habit, you know.)

Adoniram had a very strong character indeed. He was asked to name "six men from the construction site who were trustworthy in every way", and he offered his suggestion:

«Ben Chesed... Ben Abinadap... Achimaz... Josafat... Ben Faro.»

He stopped. *«That's five people. There should be six, right?»* he thought aloud, *«Of course! How I skipped! First of all, first of all, Ben Gaber.»*

Only then did Solomon tell Adoniram why he had made this choice.

Adoniram seemed a bit downcast.

On a much later occasion, when we recalled the adventure, he said to me, *«If I had known, I would have made a slightly different choice. Anyway, at least Ben Chesed and Ben Gaber were well suited for the task.»*

Solomon ordered that there was no need to be alarmed this time, and that the fifteen appointed men should be brought to the forecourt before dawn the next day.

Then he sent for Zabud. He instructed him to make preparations for a relatively long journey that the fifteen selected men would undertake. Closing, he said he would take some rest and allowed everyone to leave.

In the meantime, interestingly, no one mentioned me. I was expecting Zerbal, or maybe even King Solomon himself, to pull me in front of him and give me a hard discourse, but in vain!

Who knows, maybe I already had my lesson.

Maaka, King of Gath

Next day, the six newly chosen ones and the previous Nine Elect, fifteen in all, gathered in the forecourt of the palace at five o'clock in the morning.

King Solomon told us all at once what our mission was. He also gave us a warning, as he had done last time. Then he made it repeated one-by-one to reassure us that we all understood what his instructions are.

It was clear to all of us that if the suspects were there and were found, they would be caught, brought in, subjected to trial, and punished only if they would be regarded as guilty.

In order for a judgment to be considered as "full and correct", the right to self-defence must be respected. This respect should not remain only in imagination. The defence of the person on trial should not be looked upon with a prejudiced attitude, deciding in advance that he is already "guilty". This is because "truths", which are in harmony with the laws of nature and which point the way to the truth, can only be obtained by examining events and facts in all their accessible aspects, both from above and in depth.

I was expecting Zerbal to give each of us a dagger again, but this time he had his sword on his waist and a saddlebag slung over his shoulder, that was obviously very heavy. Ben Dekar also had his sword on his waist. Apparently Zerbal had been instructed to keep the other weapons with him this time, to distribute them to us only if necessary. Perhaps he himself thought it more appropriate. Because of me!

Zabud had prepared sufficient number of camels for all of us, as well as food, water, blankets and other supplies we might need on the way. Solomon entrusted me with the letter he had dictated and sealed for King Maaka, and instructed to deliver it with my own hand.

When we arrived in Gath after an uneventful journey, we went straight to the palace. When we told the guards that we had a letter for King Maaka from King Solomon of Jerusalem, they kept us waiting for a short time. Then they said they could let in only the envoys, not all of us.

Zerbal, Ben Dekar and I, the three of us, were taken into the king's reception hall. Zerbal, being our leader, explained the matter to Maaka. I presented the letter that Solomon had sent.

Maaka first kissed the seal, then tore it off and handed the letter to his scribe to be read . He listened attentively. *«We are also looking forward to the completion of the Temple. We were very sorry when we heard about the occurrence. The wish of our brother King Solomon is a command to us.»* he said.

He sent for his men. He ordered them to search for foreigners in his country, to see if there were such two who had been staying together for several months, and to inform him immediately if they were found. He also gave instructions that we should all be welcomed in his palace and guided if we needed to go out.

After Zerbal thanked him on behalf of King Solomon, we left Maaka.

The Quarry

A day had just passed when news came that two foreigners had been working in a quarry for some time. But their names were different. It was said that one was called **Raha** and the other **Nahasa**. They could have introduced themselves here under pseudonyms. If they wanted to hide, they couldn't use their real names.... We considered this possibility and quickly packed up. Together with Maaka's soldiers who joined us, we went to the place mentioned.

The quarry was in a valley with a hill on one side and an open on others. While we were still quite far away, the sounds of stone crushing echoed. The closer we got, the louder the noise became. It was a moment when we could no longer hear each other.



Source: www.meilianchina.com

As far as could be seen from a distance far away, some were removing stones from the quarry, others were carrying them on a slide, while others were breaking the removed stones into smaller sizes and shaping them for processing. Zerbal said, *«There are many workers. If they are here, who knows where they are working. If we enter the quarry now, they might recognize us and run away before we can see and distinguish them. We should wait until they call it a day and keep our eyes open.»*



He divided us into groups, formed three teams of five, led by himself, Ben Dekar and Ben Chesed, to hold all three sides. When he formed these groups, he kept me especially close to him. Saying, *«Just in case!»* he took wedges out of his saddlebag and handed it to each of us. I took the wedge and looked at it. To me, it was not much different from the previous dagger, except being not curved but straight, that's all.

We slowly approached the quarry in three separate directions, and then, upon Zerbal's signal, stayed where we were.

King Maaka's soldiers had settled around us and surrounded the area. But they were only there to provide security; they were not to interfere.

We kept waiting until evening. The sun was almost down. A horn was heard. The sounds of stone crushing suddenly stopped. The workers began to disperse in doubles and triples.

«You are the one among us who knows them best» Zerbal said to me, *«Watch carefully. Is there anyone who looks like them?»*

We were too far away. I couldn't make out any of their faces. I suggested we get a little closer. *«If we do that, they might see us and run away»* said Zerbal, *«although there are soldiers behind us, I'm not sure how much we can trust them. You know we lost them at Joppa. Let's not repeat the same thing here again. We have no hurry. We should get to the end of this, when we've seen them clearly. Let's just crawl a little closer.»*

Zerbal and I, just the two of us, crawled on our elbows closer to the valley. The others stayed where they were.

In the middle of the valley, a man with a large square in hand was standing over a large stone, arguing with two men. As far as I could understand from a distance, he was one of the inspectors here, and explaining to the two men that a huge stone they had carved was not regular, while the other two were trying to get him to accept their work.

Such incidents were quite common in the quarries. While that person was placing the square on the stone, left and right, trying to prove why it wasn't right, one of them turned towards us.

I recognized him. He was Sterkin. I whispered to Zerbal, *«That's him! That's them! There they are.»* Zerbal asked, *«Which one? Which way?»*

At that instant, I instinctively did the wrong thing again. I got up on my knees and pointed with my hand.

Zerbal tried to pull me down, but Sterkin also saw me. I don't know for sure whether he recognized me or not, but he immediately went over to the other one, said something and started to run to the right With respect to our direction. Then the other one followed him.

There was no longer any need to hide. Zerbal quickly stood up and shouted in a loud voice, **«Stop!»** The sound echoed off the rocks and everyone in the hearth seemed to as being nailed to the ground, but the two kept running.

«Stop them!» Zerbal shouted, as he drew his sword and ran towards them.

I and all others in our group got up together.

We started chasing them.

The direction that they were running was not left free. They stopped when those who were lurking on that side suddenly stood up. I guess they were not expecting that.

They turned and this time tried to run to the left. But the five on our left flank were already on their feet, and were approaching slowly. They were led by Ben Dekar who had already drawn his sword also.

Sterkin and Moria became aware of the fact that they were trapped. It appeared that they didn't know what to do. This time they started to run towards the mountain.

The people working at the quarry were watching us in amazement. One of them made a move to catch them. But both of them drew their daggers, and he retreated.

Zerbal shouted, *«You can't run anywhere. You are surrounded.»* All together, we started chasing them in three directions.

First they tried to climb the hill where the stones were being extracted. When they realized they couldn't do that, they turned towards us, and stopped. The distance between us had now became considerably less. We could see their faces. Were they thinking of attacking? No... There were too many of us. They wouldn't risk it.

Moria jumped over a large boulder that had been torn from the hearth. He rested his dagger under his neck. *«Get back!... Or I will kill myself!»* he shouted.

Just then Ben Gaber rushed forward, turned around, cut us off and said, *«Stop! Stay where you are. Don't move and don't get involved. I will handle it.»* He said this in such a commanding manner that you would have thought he was the leader of the team, not Zerbal.

We did as he said. Ben Gaber walked towards them alone. *«You don't need to do this. Come, surrender. Trust in King Solomon's justice. We are not here to kill you. We will take you back to Jerusalem. There you will be judged»* he shouted.

They paused... Sterkin didn't seem to mind. Moria assumed Ben Gaber was in charge and started negotiating with him: *«How can we take your word for it?»*

Ben Gaber called out to us, *«Everybody, put down your weapons.»* We all did as he said, with a clear show.

There was silence for a while. Then Moria came down from the rock he had climbed up from. A short argument between him and Sterkin occurred. Sterkin said *«No!»* and tried to hold Moria, but he shook him off. He threw down his dagger and stepped forward, raising his hands, and walked towards us.

Sterkin was actually more scared. He threw himself down on the ground, and began to cry.

Ben Gaber took advantage of this moment of weakness to rush forward and grab both of their daggers.

As a matter of fact, on the way back to home, we learned that Sterkin had been afraid for a long time. He perpetually was saying. *«They will catch us and kill us»* Moria, on the other hand, was trying to encourage him by telling him that their traces were long lost and they would never be captured.

We tied up their hands and arms tightly, and returned to King Maaka's palace to submit our thanks, and say goodbye. I don't know whether the soldiers were happy that they had nothing to do or they felt that they had come here with us for nothing.

*Even if people and societies are sufficiently purified of ignorance, **bigotry and negative passions** will continue to plague and harm them. Therefore, it is not right to be satisfied with eliminating ignorance. This is deficient. It is also necessary to prevent bigotry from creeping into minds, and to prevent individuals from indulging in negative passions and attempting to fulfil them.*

A person who has got rid of ignorance, who has taken the path of knowledge and wisdom, must also search deep within his own self for any bigotries, superstitions, negative passions, fears or reservations that may have remained despite everything, and must be able to judge himself before he can eliminate them.

If this judgment is not made, superstitions, passions, fears and bigoted tendencies remain in the subconscious, not completely eliminated. They always nudge the person who does not realize this. When their influence grows stronger and stronger, they rise to the surface of consciousness again. Then one may not be able to eliminate them once again.

*In order for a judgment to be considered "full and correct", the right to self-defence must be respected. This respect should not remain only in thought. While taking the defence of the person on trial, one should not act in a prejudiced manner by deciding in advance that he is already "guilty". This is because **"realities"**, which are in harmony with the laws of nature and which point the way to the truth, can only be obtained by examining and analysing events and facts from all sides, from all angles, both from above and in depth.*

King Maaka did not let us leave that day. He said that we should be on our way early the next morning and kept us for another night. He had the suspects locked up in separate places. In the morning he handed me a letter to King Solomon, which he dictated and sealed. He saw us off as far as the outer gate of his palace.

The Judgement

It was six in the evening when we arrived in Jerusalem.

King Solomon had ordered us to see him first, no matter what time we return. However it would be inappropriate to appear before the King in such dust and dirt. Therefore,0 Zerbal instructed us all to wash our hands and face, but not to spend time by changing our clothes, and be ready to appear in front of the King as soon as possible. He handed the suspects we had brought as hands and feet tied up, to the other guards.

We were told that King Solomon was in the meeting room. That place was used only for administrative business, it could hardly hold all of us, but it was the King's will and that was unquestionable. When we all went there, Achizar met us at the door. Upon seeing that we were complete in number, he knocked on the door.

Zabud was the one opening the door. Achizar said, *«The Elects have returned. They are waiting to be admitted.»* Zabud must have received instructions to that effect beforehand, for he stepped aside without informing Solomon, saying, «Let them enter.»

We went in, with Zerbal in front of us, and waited on foot.

Solomon said, *«Zerbal, first tell me this: Have you captured those who killed Hiram Abif?»*

Zerbal replied, *«Yes! Our King's order has been carried out.»* At Solomon's instruction, he told what had happened, in detail.

Solomon made me open King Maaka's letter and read it.

In fact, there was nothing remarkable in the letter. He expressed his joy at the capture of those who had murdered the chief architect of the Temple and reiterated that he looked forward to the Temple being finished as soon as possible.

Solomon said that it would be appropriate for the suspects to remain in the dungeon for the time being, that he would convene the Board of Judges immediately the next day, that he would then call us all again, and that we could rest now as we were road-weary.

***

The next day the Board of Judges met in its usual tent. I attended this meeting again in my capacity as a “judge”.

King Solomon presided over the trial himself, taking Prince Tito of the Harodim with him.

The two suspects gave a full account of how they had prepared and trapped Hiram Abif in the Temple area to get the password of the masters and other information, failed to get what they wanted and killed him, in full detail.

When they were interrogated separately, there was a difference in interpretation between their accounts, but the common thread in what they said was that this is what happened:

Sterkin was the first to attack Hiram Abif, and when he wasn’t able to obtain what he wanted, he got angry and hit him on the shoulder with the heavy ruler he had brought with him.

When Hiram Abif staggered out the other door of the courtyard, Moria confronted him. Upon being unable in get what he wanted, he hit him with the heavy square he had with him and battered him.

Hiram Abif was covered in blood, but he went to the other door of the courtyard to escape. This time Abiram caught him. He dragged him to the back of the courtyard. When he could not make him talk no matter what he did, he became very furious and hit him on the head with the heavy hammer he had brought with him.



Source: https://www.diariomasonico.com/planchas/los-juwes

The courtyard had been in blood. When they realized that Hiram Abif was dead, Sterkin had been so scared that he wanted to run away. Abiram had caught him and tried to kill him too. Moria had interfered and calmed them down. They had sat down, and thought what to do.

Sterkin had suggested that they should run away as soon as possible. Moria had told them that if they left the body here like this, they would be caught immediately. Hence, they had dragged the body back to the rubble piled up near the temple and covered it. They had not shown themselves to anyone that day and hid themselves until nightfall.

When the coast was clear, they had recovered the body out of that place, and wrapped it in with some of their own clothes. They had tied it tightly so that it would not untie and carried it away, out of the Temple.

Each of them had first went to the place where he stayed and collected the necessary personal belongings. Then they had met again and carried the body as far as they could until morning.

After burying the body, Abiram had suggested that they get separated and flee in different directions, but Sterkin and Moria refused. Sterkin had even been inclined to go alone by himself and surrender. Therefore, they always had stayed together.

They had gone to Mount Joppa and hid themselves in a cave that Moria knew about.

When Abiram was caught in the raid on the cave, - they did not yet know that he had been killed there- Sterkin and Moria thought of running away out of the country, or even reaching the sea and jumping on a ship. But they couldn't afford it, so they had to work. They hid their identities so that no one would recognize them and took a job in a quarry in the land of Gath.

I was very interested in something. I raised my hand and asked for the floor. When it was granted, I asked the suspects a question: *«How did you manage to get the body out of the Temple without being seen by the guards?»*

Moria answered my question: *«We took a long rope. We tied it to the body and first pulled it up to the outer wall at the back, then we lowered it down from there, and then we also climbed down one by one from the same place, so that no one could see us.»*

When Moria answered my question like that, I thought of something else. With Solomon's permission, I asked: *«How did you dare to leave the rope there like that? It would have been noticed immediately.»*

«We didn't» said Moria, *«If you tie a rope to a pillar in the middle with a specific knot, one end is very strong and will hold a load. If you pull on the other end, the knot unties and the rope comes loose. We used this method occasionally when we were working, and the rope came in handy later on. We placed the body on a slide out of timber, and carried it by pulling.»*

It was quite clear that they had processed something very cleverly. If only they had put their intelligence to good use.

Adoniram requested permission, and asked, *«Which of you planned this?»*

Moria immediately replied as *«Abiram»*, but Sterkin claimed that it was an idea that Moria had proposed. He said that he had deceived Abiram and forced him to join them. Moria said, *«This would not have happened if Sterkin hadn't gone and tried to force Master Hiram. He started first.»* He turned to Sterkin and said in an attempt to exonerate himself, *«Tell me! Wasn't that so? Weren't you the one started the whole thing?»*

Solomon said in a stern voice, *«All right! Enough!... Shut up!... You will be given the opportunity to defend yourselves... Do not accuse each other and speak only to me.»*

Then he asked his companions, *«What do you accuse these fellow craftsmen of?»*

Zadok said, *«They killed a man together. This is the greatest crime in all religions and beliefs.»*

Hiram, King of Tyre, made his own accusation: *«The man they killed was the most experienced, the most skilled, the most highly qualified architect in our land, and a righteous man who loved and cared for everyone.»*

Adoniram made an evaluation concerning only the issue of the construction of the Temple. He said, *«Because of this incident, the completion of the construction of our Temple was delayed considerably. This setback and the absence of our chief architect caused a lot of difficulties.»*

Zabud was mostly interested in the social aspect of the matter: *«When the construction of the Temple stopped, many people were left idle and unemployed for a long time. They could not work, so they waited without receiving their wages. Their families were devastated»* he said.

Tito, Prince of Harodim made the following statement: *«If everyone tries to take by force what they do not deserve, the order of society will be disrupted. I think this is the biggest crime committed by the three fellows.»*

Solomon corrected him by saying, *«Not three, but two.»*

Tito, on the other hand, pointed out that if one of them had been killed, the crime would not only fall on the remaining two, that it does not matter who struck the fatal blow to Hiram Abif, that if there was a crime, they had all committed it all together, and therefore they could not be distinguished from each other.

Only then did Sterkin and Moria realize that Abiram was dead.

Solomon said, *«You have heard the accusations. Now it is your turn. Make your defence.»*

Solomon was the king. He could do whatever he wanted to, but Tito was undoubtedly much more knowledgeable and experienced in judgment than he was. He leaned into Solomon's ear and said something.

Then Solomon said to Tito, *«You are right! Let's do like that.»* Then he addressed the suspects, *«If you wish, you can confer among yourselves before you make your defence. If you want, you can do it alone, without the other hearing you.»* He thus granted them another opportunity.

They didn't feel the need to go out and talk between themselves, but each wanted to make his defence alone.

Solomon agreed. *«Keep one of them here. Take the other one out.»* He said, *«Which one of you will start?»*

When neither of them made a sound, Solomon gestured for someone to be taken out. It was Sterkin. As he was led out, it was clear that he was crying.

Moria, who stayed inside, said nothing. He just stood there.

When Solomon said, *«Come on, make your defence»*, he became angry. *«It seems you killed Abiram. You will kill us too. There is nothing to say. Kill now. Both you and we will be off.»*

Solomon became furious. *«You are on trial here. If we were going to execute you without trial, we would have done it long ago. Do you think everyone is as vulgar as you are?»* he shouted.

Tito gently grabbed Solomon's arm and got his attention, then closed his eyes as if to say, *"Enough!"* Most of the people in the courtroom probably didn't even notice it; I saw it because I was sitting close to and opposite to them both.

Solomon ordered angrily, *«Throw this rascal out. Bring in the other one.»*

Moria was taken out and Sterkin was brought in.

His knees seemed as broken. Ben Dekar took him by the arm and helped him to stand.

When Solomon told him to present his defence as well, he began to cry and beg. He said that they didn't want to kill Hiram Abif, especially that he had nothing to do with it and not guilty, that the others had compelled him and then an accident occurred, that he had been directed into this, and once he was involved he couldn't let himself out.

Solomon got bored and warned him that there was no need for him to retell the events, but only to make his defence.

Sterkin burst into tears. Sobbing, he asserted that he had been suffering for months, that he could not sleep, that if ever he did, he dreamed of Hiram Abif, that he already regretted it, and asked for his life to be excused.

Solomon said, *«Shame on you! You are already a scoundrel, but you are lowering yourself even more.»* He ordered him to be taken out.

The Board of Judges, to which Solomon attended as well, deliberated among themselves. I think they had reached a decision when Solomon said that the suspects should be taken in again. They were brought in together.

Tito said, *«You have both been found guilty of participating in the murder of Hiram Abif and creating the trouble that resulted from this event. Your punishment is execution.»*

He was about to specify the method of execution when Solomon interrupted Tito by gesturing with his hand. *«I am taking matters into my own hands, and whichever of you answers my question first and truthfully, I will excuse him for his life.»*

He asked, emphasizing each word:

«Where is Hiram Abif's jewel? Which one of you took it?»

Sterkin and Moria looked at each other.

They were surprised.

I could almost hear both of them saying with wide-open eyes *"I don't know."* If one of them had known, he would have jumped in, answered the question before the other, and tried to save his life. They didn't even know what the jewel was, let alone that Hiram Abif wore such a thing around his neck.

Solomon realized that neither of them knew anything in this matter. But it was as if he was also against their punishment by putting them directly to death. *«Justice is not provided by simple killing the murderer»* he said, *«We know that these criminals did not mean to kill Hiram Abif, that they killed him by accident. But their crime is so severe that we cannot let them go unpunished. We cannot feed them for years in prison for life instead of executing them. Moreover, everyone must see that they are punished for the crime they have committed; it must be known that a crime cannot be left unpunished. So tomorrow morning they will be hung upside down from a pole in front of the place where they committed the crime and left there for seven days. Those who cannot stand it will die there; the judgment will hence be carried out. Those who can endure and survive will be allowed to go away.»*

When he stood up after giving his order in this way, we all stood up.

Solomon said, *«The trial is over. Let the criminals be taken away and dealt with.»*

First the criminals were taken out of the courtroom. After them, Solomon also left.

We waited for Tito to close the meeting of the Board of Judges.

Execution

The next day Solomon's decree was carried out. Two wooden poles were erected in front of the main entrance to the Temple. The hands and eyes of the criminals blindfolded, and they were hung by their feet, half naked. Two guards were placed next to them.

Some of those who came to see the criminals taunted them. Some just spat at them, but others hit them with a stick or something else. Some threw stones and injured them with knives. The guards showed understanding against the public reaction. They occasionally chased some of them away, but that was just for show.

When the criminals were bruised and bleeding here and there, flies and insects swarmed on them. Even the birds pecked at them from time to time.

I went and saw them occasionally, and I could tell they were in a lot of pain. On the second day they were already begging the guards to kill them.

On the third day the situation was reported to Solomon. He said that the sentence could not be retrieved, and that it would remain in effect until the end of time. But he sent an executioner to put an end to the life of the criminals if they wanted to.

The criminals said that they could not bear the pain any longer and asked to die. Thereupon, the people gathered around the place where the criminals were hanged were sent away not to see what was going to happen. The executioner took them down, and beheaded with a machete.

The fact that a judgment made in accordance with the laws, the values or customs of society, and especially the methods of reason is correct, does not ensure that its fulfilment will also be good and beautiful. In real life, ***science, which lacks wisdom, and power, which lacks beauty,*** *can produce bitter results and ugly appearances. For this reason, the most important and prioritized criterion in the fulfilment of any judgment should be* "conscience".

Bigotry and negative passions will never, at any time and in any environment, be comfortable and secure. Minds seeking freedom, prosperity and happiness must first realize the necessity of keeping reason alive and the necessity of eliminating bigotry and negative passions along with ignorance.

Ignorance, bigotry and negative passions are outside of the individual's own self and are not peculiar to others. Each person must first look for them in his own self, investigate sincerely and self-critically whether he has dogmas and superstitions, if so, find and try to eradicate them. Only then should he attempt to purify his environment, society and humanity from the effects of these.

It would be a futile endeavour for a person who is unable to fight the battle against himself, primarily through self-control, and who fails to successfully conclude it, who fails to comprehend or ignores the necessity of it in the first place, to attempt to develop others by raising their consciousness.

***

By means of all these events, I learned something I didn't know before:

Abiram's cut-off head had been medicated and hidden.

King Solomon had the heads of the three collaborators in the murder of Hiram Abif hung above the three side-by-side arches that formed the entrance to the outer courtyard of the Temple.

The cut-off heads remained there until they were rotten.



That is the end of the rather sad story concerning Master Hiram Abif and the assassins.

There is No End to Virtues

After all these events, King Solomon set a day and announced that on that day at three in the afternoon all those who had participated in the capture of the assassins should come together in the reception hall.

On the appointed day and at the devised time, we all gathered in the waiting area in front of the reception hall. Zerbal and Ben Dekar were also with us; their usual duties were temporarily undertaken by others.

When we arrived in, the temporary outer guard looked at us, made a count, and then knocked on the door. The temporary inner guard called out to King Solomon announcing our arrival.

Although it was relatively far, and there was a curtain in between, Solomon was heard saying, *«Let us stand up and welcome those who have captured and brought to justice those who murdered Hiram Abif, our former chief architect.»*

The inner guard opened the door wide. We all went in, one by one, with Zerbal in front. We greeted King Solomon.

This time Hiram, King of Tyre, was on King Solomon's right. On his left was Adoniram.

The hall was again covered with black curtains. Currently there were five lamps on three candlesticks, each with five arms, a total of 15 lights.

While examining the environment, I thought, *"Just as we have named each of the nine lights with a virtue, so should be the 15 lights here"*, and tried to find an answer to the question, *"What should be added to the previous nine virtues?"*

Solomon saved me from that concern. *«In the previous phase, each of the elects offered us a virtue. Now that they have joined them, the rest of the fifteen must have something to add»*, he said. This meant that only the last six were to make the statements.



The first concept was **"freedom"**. Ben Chesed and Ben Gaber raised their hands. Solomon gave the floor to Ben Chesed. He explained the concept as "the ability to freely decide and act on one's own, without any influence." Of course, much more could have been said about this issue. Indeed, Ben Chesed could have done so, but he chose to summarize it in a single sentence.

King Solomon paused for a while. Ben Chesed considered this as a hesitation concerning his definition, and said that if asked, he could explain the concept in a more comprehensive way, looking at it from many different angles. I thought Solomon was going to give Ben Gaber the floor, but he didn't; he said, *«A brief definition will suffice for now.»*

His statement turned out to be an example for the others that will follow.

Ben Abinadap took the floor on **"knowledge"**, which Solomon referred to as the opposite of ignorance. He submitted a brief explanation: *«The prioritization and application of scientific knowledge at all times and in all places.»*

Akimaz was the one who wished to explain the concept of **"tolerance"**, which was regarded as a virtue. He said, *«The acceptance of people's beliefs, opinions, tendencies, customs and behaviours without prejudice and the recognition that they may be right or justified in their own way.»* If it would by myself, I would rather make a different definition.

Solomon gave the floor to Ben Faro for the concept of **"diligence"**, which was also regarded as a virtue. Ben Faro said, *«To willingly undertake and persevere in labour and effort in any production.»*

When Solomon said **"charity"**, both of the last two raised their hands. Solomon gave the floor to Josafat. He made a short explanation as *«We must be both willing and sincerely ready to use our powers and means for the benefit of others.»*

Solomon addressed to Ben Gaber: *«You alone have always raised your hand to give an explanation for each of the previous ones. Look, you have the last and most important one.»*

I haven't notice that Ben Gaber raised his hand for each concept; so that was like that!

I expected that Solomon would ask Ben Gaber a definition for **"humanitarian"**.

This time I wasn't wrong. That's what happened.

Ben Gaber explained this concept as *«To devote oneself to providing every human being, without distinction, with a way of life worthy of him, to educate him, to improve and increase his knowledge, to see to that each of them lives happily in a just and prosperous environment, and all evolve collectively.»*

Solomon said, *«Among those who have successfully carried out all these tasks, there is one person in particular whom we must congratulate. We cannot forget him: **"Zerbal"**.»*

Zerbal responded to this praise by saying ***«Benijah».***

At first, I couldn't understand why he pronounced such a word, because in the local language it could only mean "son of God". At that moment, I was confused by his thinking this, but later I resolved his reason.

I once asked Zerbal if his name had a dictionary meaning. He told me that it could mean something else, but with the right emphasis it means "the product of a master". So when he responded to King Solomon saying his name loudly and with the right emphasis by calling him "Benijah", he actually meant to combine the two words to state:

"The product of the master or the son of God. These two are equivalent. An artifice that has been created with labour and care, armed with knowledge and strengthened by the accumulation of experience, is considered sacred."

Then Solomon, Hiram, King of Tyre, and the other rulers talked loudly among themselves about various matters. We just listened to their conversation. King Solomon wanted us to stay and listen so that we could learn a little about the affairs of state. At six in the evening he gave us permission to leave.

As far as I'm concerned, this meant that it was time for us to leave anyhow.

***

Every positive work can only be realized through reason, knowledge, the ability to design and effort. Every work created for the benefit of humanity is a product of labour.

Labour and its production have always and everywhere, in all religions and beliefs, in all cultures and customs, been exalted to the level of sacredness. The person who serves society and humanity in this way is honoured and exalted, even though he does not receive any tangible reward for it during his lifetime.

Labour is sometimes concrete and objective, it is abstract and intellectual at times. Both contribute to the development of human beings and society in the direction of evolution. For this purpose, some use physical labour, some brain labour, some both.

Physical labour is equivalent to brain labour. A positive work can only be achieved by combining brain power with the physical. This requires harmony, solidarity, cooperation, coordination and shared work within society.

One that works only for himself, lives and dies bodily on his own, in a manner just as he came into this world. His body, having come from nature, returns to nature. The one who works for the society and humanity leaves his body in nature but attains immortality because he lives in society, not in himself alone.

***

To be continued in the **Fifth Episode**