

# **THOSE WHO TEARFULLY SOW**

A Proposal for a Thesis in Creative Writing

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## **הזורעים בדמעה**

הצעה לתזה בכתיבה יוצרת

המחלקה לבלשנות וספרות אנגלית

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### **Aims and General Description**

*Those Who Tearfully Sow* will be a collection of short stories. While each story will have its own theme, all will orbit around Zionism and Judaism through the life of fictional character John Freeland. His yearning for a peaceful lifestyle in Israel will be explored and be the core of this collection. John himself will be the protagonist in three stories and appear in others in a smaller role. The remaining stories will feature people in his life who help define him, thus reinforcing the main theme of the collection. Most of the stories will be written as literary fiction, but I plan to experiment with different styles throughout the project such as stream of consciousness and thriller/suspense.

## Conceptual Background

John's character, background, and family were inspired both by literature and my life experiences. For the past five years I have worked with a travel agency in Israel. Experiencing Israel through the eyes of hundreds of Jewish tourists has exposed me to new aspects of my country and its importance. I appreciate Israel much more thanks to the trips. Moreover, the tourists – especially the Birthright participants – were always interested in my religious upbringing. *How are you able to not use your phone or drive for a whole weekend? Are you serious that you're in your twenties and never touched a woman in your life? Do you always wear tzitzit, even when it is boiling outside?* Growing up in Israel, I never noticed how demanding my lifestyle is compared to those who are not religious.

It is not only the participants that amaze me. Visiting many sites and learning about the sacrifices the Jews made and the miracles they experienced to establish Israel is remarkable. One day my group could be touring the center of Tel-Aviv, a vigorous modern city, and after a two-hour ride to a southern kibbutz in the middle of the desert, the tour guide says this is what Tel-Aviv was like less than one hundred years ago. Israel is growing at a rapid rate. The economy, population, infrastructure, culture, and other areas are flourishing compared to the first *Yom Ha'atzmaut*.

Working for the agency also helped me learn about my own family history. I became interested in the sacrifices my family made and the miracles they experienced on their way to Israel.

My paternal grandparents were born and raised in Israel, but shortly after marrying, they migrated to America and had my father there. It was hard for both of their parents to make it to

Israel in the 1920s and live here. Both families had struggled financially while many of their siblings returned to Poland and never came back. Israel was dangerous then; both of my father's grandfathers were murdered by Arabs.

From my mother's side, it was financially challenging as well. My mother was four years old when her parents were smuggled into Israel in the 1960's from Iran, leaving their family and money behind. In her mid-20's, my mother did *shlichut* and met my father in America. With four young children in tow and my father's childhood dream, they decided to quit their jobs and make Aliyah with no place to live and without a definite plan. Although frightened - being "keyless" made him very anxious - my father later expressed to me that he felt it was *right*.

As for me, my high school principal was constantly talking about Zionism. He emphasized volunteering and group bonding activities over grades. I was only fourteen during the disengagement from Gaza, but he felt we needed to have a clear opinion on the matter and would send us to help the evacuated families. In my senior year I heard a story about an Ethiopian soldier who died in a military operation. The father couldn't speak Hebrew so his son, the soldier's brother, translated his eulogy:

*When I came to Israel I was jealous. In Ethiopia we'd dreamed of Israel, dreamed of kissing the holy ground and having a place that is our own. But when I came here I was too late – my brothers were here far more before me and they fought and earned living here. I was home, but I didn't deserve it. Until today. I sent my son to protect us and now that he died for this land, I can say I sacrificed something for Israel. My pain will be my sacrifice until I die.*

Living for Israel almost always means sacrifice. Not just *in* Israel, but *for* Israel. I believe there will always be a price to pay. A century ago Jews died fighting enemies but also nature.

The land was desolate, full of dangerous swamps, and, of course, the heat was unbearable.

Today, we still are under pressure from our enemies, but our next challenge, in my opinion, is living in an expensive country. Taxes, real estate, and groceries are high; salaries are low. Any person who made Aliyah must have been asked why they left their country for Israel – *it is so cheap abroad!*

All of these ideas were catalysts for my imagining John Freeland. His dream is simple: to watch the sun rise in Israel, with the undeniable faith that the day that follows be peaceful. Would all his efforts and sacrifices grant him his wish?

From the literary perspective, I drew inspiration from a variety of books that deal with inner conflict such as *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger, George Orwell's *1984*, Elie Wiesel's *Night* and my favorite short story, "Interpreter of Maladies" by Jhumpa Lahiri. In each story, the author made me feel that what happened to the characters, actually happened to me. Years after reading "Interpreter of Maladies," I can still identify with the struggles and desires Kapasi experienced with his feelings towards his client. I want my stories to evoke the same emotion. These authors and stories inspired me to make my readers, as John Gardner writes, "Read on – dream on – not passively but actively, worrying about the choices the characters have to make... exulting in characters' successes, bemoaning their failures" (31).

I was influenced by these stories, and wish to learn and emulate several elements: the characters' inner conflict, the author's style and the level of their success. Firstly, I want to improve my command of English. Growing up in a Hebrew speaking environment, I feel I have much to learn in order to master writing. For me, *The Catcher in the Rye* is a model of mastering

and manipulating English to convey a realistic character. The protagonist of the story, Holden, regularly violates grammar rules despite claiming that English is the only easy subject for him. For example, he confuses tenses (“I’d woke him up”) and the use of pronouns (“D.B. took Phoebe and I to see it last year” or “I and this friend of mine”) **despite** showing an understanding of the rules, often exaggerating with them (“I used to play tennis with he and Mrs. Antolini quite frequently”). The unique style of *Catcher in the Rye* is consistent and sound – the mistakes are not from ignorance but from Salinger’s intentional breaking of the rules to convey the voice of a teenager. I intend to research English grammar and usage to hone my personal style and to improve my writing, especially with the character’s speech .

As for Jewish literature, I’ve used conflicts from Wiesel’s *Night* for Birthright activities. Even though I’m aiming to write fiction, the struggles found in this book help me learn about conflicts that can arise between man and God or religion. For example, Wiesel shares his thoughts about fasting in the ghetto:

I no longer accepted God’s silence. As I swallowed my bowl of soup, I saw in the gesture an act of rebellion and protest against Him.

And I nibbled my crust of bread.

In the depths of my heart, I felt a great void.

Notable here is the difficulty in observing Jewish rituals, a theme in some of my stories. Observing Judaism can be stressful. Daily routines are demanding, and every couple of months there are obligations that seem, to me at least, unnecessary. In *Night*, Wiesel shares his experience of observing these laws in a time when he doubts his relationship with God, especially under those extreme conditions. This gives the reader moral conflicts to think about

that make the story compelling. I often ask myself, is it really worth observing Judaism? One of the stories will feature John's oldest daughter, Ma'ayan, who is a religious bachelorette in her mid-thirties. Beyond the social pressure she faces of marriage, she is also biologically running out of time to have children. For a woman like this, who has sacrificed her time to get married according to Judaic law – would it be wrong to have a relationship with the intention to get pregnant without getting married? And how will John feel about it?

Lee Child, who writes thriller novels and short stories, is very a different sort of influence. Child has always been able to catch my attention from the first page. In an article for the *New York Times* he wrote, "As novelists, we should ask or imply a question at the beginning of the story, and then we should delay the answer" (Child). His first book, *Killing Floor*, opens with a question only to be solved much later in the book. The first sentences of the book are "I was arrested at Eno's diner. At twelve o'clock" (1). The only information given to the reader afterward is where Jack Reacher, the narrator, was at the time; what he did before to prove his innocence; and that dozens of policemen were bursting into Eno's with shotguns. Why are they arresting an innocent man? How can they be so aggressive towards him for no reason? What kind of crime are we talking about? This is an example of how authors I enjoy reading create a positive experience from the beginning. I plan to learn from these elements and apply them to my own writing.



## Shape of Project

*Those Who Tearfully Sow* will consist of approximately seven to nine stories ranging in length from 2,000 to 5,000 words.

Each story will feature John or characters who are related to him. The stories will aim to create an intimate view of John's world, thoughts, and expectations. Instead of being arranged in chronological order, the stories will focus on events that have made an impact on his life.

The following is a tentative list of the stories:

1) "Always Were and Always Will Be" – John receives tough news one Friday afternoon and does not know how to deal with it.

2) "All Goes Away" – John's second and youngest daughter is in India, looking for something missing in Israel. The story ends with her writing a letter bearing news that will upset her father.

3) "My Friend and His Father" or "Jack and John" – Takes place when John is in high-school. He and his best friend, Jack, are the only Jews in his area. Something special happens to Jack, followed by a disaster that convinces John to join the IDF.

4) "November Heat" – The story of John's toughest mission as an IDF special force officer.

5) "Split of the Night" – John's wife, Vicky, is a school counselor. A student who survived a car accident starts therapy with her. The boy reminds her of John, in more than one way.

5) "That's Enough, Thank You" - Again, we go back to 18-year-old John. While packing his bags before leaving for Israel, his father tells him a secret John would not have wanted to know...

6) "Spices of Old" – Taking place the same Friday morning as in the story *Always Were and Always Will Be*, John's oldest daughter, Maayan, goes on a date that devastates her.

7) "Those Who Tearfully Sow" – Friday night. John distances himself from his friends at synagogue and his family back home. He sits quietly, wondering if his sacrifices were worth the price.

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