

INTERVIEW WITH TZALI RESHEF

BT: Tzali, when did you hear about Bruno Kreisky the first time?

TR: I cannot remember.

BT: And what did you hear? What was it?

TR: I must admit that I don't remember and things are mixed, you know, in terms of times, things are mixed, because - as you know - people in Israel, politicians in Israel, the political structure in Israel, the political activists in Israel liked to hate Bruno Kreisky. So I remember a lot of smearing of Bruno Kreisky. We were never part of it. We never felt that he was anti-Israeli. We felt that his political views were very much similar to ours. I mean he was in front of, he was ahead of the developments in the sense that he thought in the seventies that the solution should be meetings between Israelis and the PLO and the Palestinians and an agreement about the establishment of a Palestinian state. And he was pushing it forward. This time to push forward. Such ideas, was considered by most Israeli public opinionists being anti-Israeli.

BT: You met him through Shalom achshav?

TR: Yes. We founded Shalom achshav, a group of young people, back in March of 1978. And a short time after it, I think that Karl Kahane, one way or the other, formed contact with us. Either we did it by recommendations of someone, or he was here and he looked for us. I don't remember really how it worked, but it was Karl Kahane ...

BT: Kahane.

TR: ... Kahane who was ...

BT: So first you met Karl Kahane?

TR: It was through ...

BT: You met him here, or in Vienna, the first time?

TR: I think the first time we met him here. No, I met him only once in Vienna, certainly. And I met him more than once here. So the first meetings ...

BT: You don't remember through whom the shiduch (Hebrew for recommendation, contact) went?

TR: No, it was almost twenty years ago. So it is difficult to remember. But ...

INTERVIEW WITH TZALI RESHEF

BT: Tzali, when did hear about Bruno Kreisky the first time?

TR: I cannot remember.

BT: And what did you hear? What was it?

TR: I must admit that I don't remember and things are mixed, you know, in terms of times, things are mixed, because - as you know - people in Israel, politicians in Israel, the political structure in Israel, the political activists in Israel liked to hate Bruno Kreisky. So I remember a lot of smearing of Bruno Kreisky. We were never part of it. We never felt that he was anti-Israeli. We felt that his political views were very much similar to ours. I mean he was in front of, he was ahead of the developments in the sense that he thought in the seventies that the solution should be meetings between Israelis and the PLO and the Palestinians and an agreement about the establishment of a Palestinian state. And he was pushing it forward. This time to push forward. such ideas, was considered by most Israeli public opinionists being anti-Israeli.

BT: You met him through Shalom achshav?

TR: Yes. We founded Shalom achshav, a group of young people, back in March of 1978. And a short time after it, I think that Karl Kahane, one way or the other, formed contact with us. Either we did it by recommendations of someone, or he was here and he looked for us. I don't remember really how it worked, but it was Karl Kahane ...

BT: Kahane.

TR: ... Kahane who was ...

BT: So first you met Karl Kahane?

TR: It was through ...

BT: You met him here, or in Vienna, the first time?

TR: I think the first time we met him here. No, I met him only once in Vienna, certainly. And I met him more than once here. So the first meetings ...

BT: You don't remember through whom the shiduch (Hebrew for recommendation, contact) went?

TR: No, it was almost twenty years ago. So it is difficult to remember. But ...

BT: But it was already - it seems - when his relationships had cooled off with the Labour party, because it was after '78?

TR: I am not sure. At the time we met Kahane, I think that he was still considered a very pro-...,

BT: pro-Palestine?

TR: ... pro-Israeli. He had investments here and he was still involved here in many ways. It was after that that he was getting disillusioned from the political views, or the political positions that Israel was taking and was really moved out of the political scene. But I must warn you that everything that I am saying is from my memory,

BT: But your first relationship with Austria was through Karl Kahane here in Israel?! Was it an immediate relationship, where you asked for money or not yet? Or did you very quickly come to the tachles (facts) and said, „Listen, we have to build up the movement. We need your help and money.“ How did that go?

TR: Well, to the best of my memory, Karl Kahane was one of the rare cases in which we did not have to ask for money, but we were offered money. I mean, he contacted us with a desire to help us, including financially. He was - as you know - a very affluent person and he used to use his money to support things that he believed in. The financial issue was an immediate issue, but I think, really, we did not have even to raise it.

BT: Did Karl Kahane invite you and Dedi Zucker to come to Vienna?

TR: It was a while later. I think that in the beginning he was supporting the movement, we maintained contacts and then there came the invitation.

BT: Was he the only one in Austria who supported, financially the movement, or did you have other Austrians who helped?

TR: Like good Israelis, we started raising funds in America, the way everybody does. And money came mainly from America. To the best of my memory, Karl Kahane was, certainly the only significant contributor from Austria. And even from other places in Europe we did not get much support. We mainly got it from the Jewish community in the US. Then came an invitation from Kahane that Kreisky wants to see us and we, of course, were very flattered.

BT: That was '79?

TR: That was at the end of '78. We went there - if I am not mistaken - in January of '79, but the invitation came some time in '78. We were invited, this was something like less than a year after we founded ...

BT: The movement.

TR: ... Shalom achshav. And we were invited. We went to Austria and were received by Kreisky at his office in the parliament.

BT: Now, when you arrived - you two - in Vienna, Karl Kahane took care at the hotel and he picked you up, I suppose, with his driver and ...?

TR: I don't remember ...

BT: And you went to the parliament to meet Kreisky?

TR: I think it was our second day in Austria. We first met with Kahane and sat with him. And then the next day we went to the parliament. We had a very long meeting with Kreisky.

BT: Now, I would like to know how was it, when you finally saw him? Because you heard so much of him and you read so many terrible things in the newspapers in Israel about him. How was this impression of seeing this man? How was his vibration? How was his charisma? How was the click?

TR: Well, I must say that, first of all, even though we heard all this smearing of him, all the news, we did not come there with a prejudice against Kreisky. We were among the few Israelis who were open-minded and viewed his views in a different way. So it's not like it was years later, when I met with Arafat. And meeting with Arafat in spite of everything was that kind of contradiction that you are talking about. This was a difficult experience in this sense, I mean, that you have to deal with an image. I don't remember a similar feeling with Kreisky. He was an European, I thought, supporting peace moves in the area. So we went there with a positive feeling.

BT: Kahane was present at that meeting?

TR: To the best of my memory, yes.

BT: When you were sitting in his office, was Kreisky squeezing you out for news about Israel, and what you wanted with the movement, and what your ideas are? Or did he tell you something. Did he speak. Did you speak?

TR: No. I don't know ... I don't know if it will go along with what you want to say about him. But my memory from his, from that meeting is: it was a very long lecture that he was giving us. For a long time we heard a lecture about his views about the Middle East and everything. Which is okay. I mean, you have to remember we were in our twenties, we met one of the most important politicians in the world. So I mean this was natural, that he was running the show. I mean, we were young, but we were not child. We said what we thought. And he held an objective in the meeting. What he really wanted us to do, was to meet with Arafat. And we said no. He said, „I would like you to meet with Arafat. I think that it is time that you meet with Arafat.“ And we said, „Look, if Arafat does not say that he recognises Israel or that he wants to

negotiate with Israel, we think that we will only be paying a very high price without getting anything in return. So we are not interested." This, of course, was a disappointment for him.

BT: This was in the end of the whole lecture?

TR: Yes.

BT: Aha, yes.

TR: This is what he was trying to convince us to do. And we said no. And I think that he was not surprised. I guess that the aim of the whole meeting with us was, that he wanted to take these young Israelis who were reserve-officers, I mean, who all served in the Israeli army and he wanted to help them with Arafat. He thought that this was a way to have a break through. We said, „No, under the present circumstances we think that we will pay a very high price in Israeli public opinion and we'll come home with nothing. So we don't want to do it.“ By the way, interestingly - I am jumping to ten years later in 1988 - the minute the PLO had adopted in Algiers, a policy of recognition of Israel, we said immediately, „This is the time to talk to the PLO, we will talk to them now!“ But at that time in 1979 we said no.

BT: Not even secretly? Did he propose a secret meeting maybe?

TR: I don't remember. We said no. And I think that we were mature enough to understand that there is no such a thing like secret meetings or at least you cannot guarantee that a meeting will be secret. Interestingly - this is not something that I participated in - but a year or two later Kahane or Kreisky initiated a meeting between two of the leaders of our movement, Dedi Juli Tamir, with Sartawi and then they went and participated at the meeting.

BT: In Vienna?

TR: I think it was in Vienna. And this led to one of the most serious crises in the history of our movement, because they did it without consulting - I was then out of the country, so I was not involved - but they did it without consulting with the rest of the leadership of the movement. And this was a serious crisis.

BT: Really?

TR: Yes.

BT: So ..?

TR: The crisis was, by the way, not only on the basis of the decision in principle, whether you meet PLO people or not, but this was also on the basis of having taken the decision without consulting with your friends in the leadership.

BT: Do you remember a little bit about what sort of lecture Kreisky gave you in this first meeting? Did he criticise the Labour party? Because in that time, if I remember right, Camp David was already on the way, no?

TR: It was after Camp David. Camp David was in September of '78.

BT: And before the Lebanon war?

TR: Yes it was after Camp David. But it was between Camp David and the signing of the peace treaty. The peace treaty was signed in March of '79. There was the signing of the peace treaty. So it was a difficult time for the peace process.

BT: Do you remember if Kreisky gave some remarks about what he thinks about Camp David? Wasn't he frustrated that the Palestinians were actually ignored there or that it was only between Egypt and Israel.

TR: Unfortunately, just like Kreisky, just like Kreisky we did not keep notes. So I don't...

BT: You didn't keep notes?

TR: It's a pity, it's a pity, we should have really. I mean, you meet Kreisky and you don't write down, but we did not, we did not. So I can only guess, that he focused on the Palestinian issue. I don't think he was that much concerned with the Egyptian part of Camp David, and I mean, this went along with the way we felt about it. I mean, if you take the officers' letters, the document which we sent to Begin when we established the movement, you will see that we talked about settlement and the Palestinian people as the core of the conflict even though it was at the time of negotiations with Egypt. So I think, basically, when I am saying that this was more or less an exhausting lecture, because he expressed things which were more or less acceptable to us. I mean, it's not that we had an argument with him, we were in agreement about most of the things.

BT: Did you want to ask him something? I suppose that you wanted to ask him if he can organise you some money or in what way he could do something for the movement?

TR: I don't know, if money was an issue at all. And I guess - even though I don't remember - that we had agreed about the framework of the meeting with Kahane before the meeting. So we did not trace things that we did not ..., I mean the preparation for the meeting went with Kahane. And I think the meeting was on the initiative of Kreisky and that there was something that he wanted to achieve.

BT: Was he a little bit frustrated or angry, when you said no?

TR: I don't know, if he was disappointed, but I don't think he was surprised. I think that he expected that kind of reaction. I mean, naturally, I mean, he could have asked

us in advance. i mean Kahane could have talked to us on the telephone and asked us, if it is at all acceptable to us. He , I guess, relied on making a personal impact and putting us, I mean, young people, pushing us to the corner in a meeting. But we were quite opinionated.

BT: But you were not so much pushed, I have the feeling?

TR: No, no. Because we knew, I mean ...

BT: You knew what you wanted.

TR: Interestingly, I mean, when we were very young, in our twenties, we were already quite experienced, experienced in terms of the understanding of the political impact of what you do. This is, I think, what made Shalom achshav a success. That we understood the public opinion in Israel and we played, even though we were peaceniks and we pushed for peace and everything, we positioned ourselves in a way that we maintained legitimacy more than other leftist groups in the history which preceded us. So we knew that this was something which was very important to us, we looked to the Israeli public opinion as a target, and we were not ready to sacrifice our position in Israel to satisfy someone outside Israel. We knew that this was short-run, that maybe Kreisky will be pleased with us and maybe he will do something, but in terms of the struggle, in terms of the essence we will lose him, we will not benefit for him.

BT: Did Kreisky mention to you that he felt frustrated with Israeli politics and that people don't want to have peace here and that without peace it won't work here?

TR interrupts: I cannot say ...

BT: ... that people don't understand him? Did he say something about that?

TR: I cannot quote Kreisky.

BT: No, no, but in your memory.

TR: I mean, you know, that these were his positions and certainly he would not keep them secret from us, when we were at his office on his invitation. So I guess that this was the mood of the meeting. But it included a lot of appreciation to what we were doing and a lot of, I mean, ...

BT: Was he well-informed about what was going on here?

TR: I think he was informed. I think that he knew a lot about internal politics here. He understood what role we were playing here. Maybe he underestimated the limitations that we had in our ability to move things here. And this is why he thought that we could go further than what we had agreed to.

BT: Do you think that Kreisky did not understand his limitations?

TR No, I don't think so.

BT: Because the question is in that time only he was the one, in Europe at least and probably in the whole Western world, who was trying to get Arafat together with people on the Israeli side.

TR: Yes, but he had nothing to lose and he knew it. He had the conviction, he believed that this was the way to solve the problem. As you know and now certainly we can say it in retrospect(ive), he was right. I mean, had we met with the PLO in 1980 instead of 1992 or '3, we would have saved thirteen years and a lot of bloodshed. So he had a conviction. He believed in what he was doing and he was ..., and in terms of his own politics, in his own internal politics he was losing nothing by trying to push it. It is not like an American politician who has Jewish public opinion, who has to take it into consideration.

BT: You mean his Middle Eastern politics did not cost him anything of votes at home or sympathies at home?

TR: Well, you know more, much more than I do about internal politics in Austria. But I tempt to think that he did not pay any price for it. I mean that from his own constituency, if people cared at all about it, they would not criticise him about it. And I think that he viewed himself as a world leader and not only as an Austrian leader. And as a world leader he wanted to make his contribution.

BT: How did the relationship continue between Shalom achshav and Kahane and Kreisky? Mainly through Kahane?

TR: Yes. And here, as I told you, you will have to get information from Dedi, because I was then more than two years in USA, I returned to Israel in the beginning of 1982. This was a few months ...

BT: Shortly after Lebanon...

TR: ... a few months before the, invasion into Libanon. Interestingly, as I told you, the crisis that I mentioned about the meeting with Sartawi led to a very difficult time for the movement for more than a year. The issue of meeting PLO leaders was a very hot issue, it was not an easy issue at all. The Israeli public opinion was not ready for it. You have to understand that the positions of the PLO at that time were not the positions of the PLO the way it was at the end of the eighties. There was already a development in the PLO, but in Israel it was still difficult to recognise it. And as a peace movement in Israel we fought very carefully for our position in the public opinion here, because we wanted to move as many people as possible and we felt that this was the right policy at that time. So this is one. Secondly, one can change such policy, but it is not a policy of a marginal issue. It was the policy of one of the central issues that the movement was confronted with. And when you have a leadership in a

movement like Shalom achshav, and this was a very important point in Shalom achshav all through the years to have a sort of a number of people who are within leadership and a lot of facing one another, unlike in many political parties where everyone is fighting everything. With us there was a lot of collaboration and feeling of partnership. And this was really different than in any other place. And the feeling was of betrayal, because it was clear that the people who went and did it, knew that they were doing it against the decision of the movement, without consulting their colleagues. So all of it together, together was personal arguing, which in spite of everything exists everywhere, led to a crisis and the crisis led to the leaving of the movement by Omri Padan who was a very important figure and is now, by the way, the owner of a franchise of Mc Donald's in Israel. But he left it. You know, it was a big crisis and when I came back at the beginning of '82, we had to rebuild it. We started rebuilding it. And by the time that the Lebanon war started, we were as strong as ever. And in fact the time of the Lebanon war was probably one of our most active periods, the most active periods in the history of our movement.

BT: Now, moneywise, the money came mainly from Kahane and not from the socialist party or workers' union? Do you remember if it was ...?

TR: To the best of my knowledge, only privately from Kahane.

BT: Was he generous?

TR: In our terms then he was very generous. I think that in terms of what we are spending now and raising now, it would have been peanuts. But then he was very generous. Yes, as a single contributor, I think, he was one of the more generous ones.

BT: But he did not, let us say, ...

TR: Condition, his condition?

BT: ... condition or advise you in a rather strict way what you have to do for that?

TR: No. I mean, maybe at a later time, I don't remember. But he shied away, when he felt that things were not done. It is not that he came to us and said, „You want fifty thousand dollar, so do A, B, C, D!“ He gave us and I think there may have come a time, when he felt that we were not meeting his expectations. So he did not give - which is more than legitimate. I don't think someone should support the political movement, when it does not do what you believe is right. So he was one of the people that I remember where the contact was very nice. Very easy about the money, I mean, I have a lot of respect for people who are ready to put their money where their principles are. There are too many people, who are easy in expressing their views, but are very difficult with their pockets.

BT: You met the chancellor once. You listened to him for an hour more or less what he lectured about the Middle East. And if you think back about this meeting so many

years ago, is there anything which sticks in your memory about him, or about his behaviour, or what he said? What comes into your mind?

TR: I must admit that probably the memories that I have from Kreisky are a mixture of mainly what I saw of him in public, on TV, etc., and the private meeting. I don't remember anything which struck me, which was very different. I mean, sometimes you meet a famous person and you say, „Wow, he looks different than the way I thought about him, or the way he looks on TV.“ I think he was a very opinionated person. He knew what he wanted. He had his own views. It was very important for him to make it clear what he wants and how he wants it. But he was not too open to listen. It is not that, I feel that we had something to say and we did not say. I think that it was like with many other leaders: it was more important for him to say, than to hear. I am not saying it in a critical manner. I think that it is natural, especially when you meet with such young people and you feel that you have so much to say. But this is what I remember from that meeting. It would be very interesting to crisscross it with Dedi, to see if he.

BT: I would like it, yes.

TR: I don't think we have talked about it at all. Also I will be curious to hear what he remembers.

BT: You met Kahane another time.

TR: More than once. We met a few times in Israel.

BT: Did he also lecture you or he listened more?

TR: No. He was a I would say very quiet somehow even shy person. I also met Kahane once outside the country. I think in ...

BT: In St. Moritz or in Venice?

TR: No, no. We were meeting maybe in the US or ...

BT: Or in Paris?

TR: No, no, in the US. Janet Ariad went to see him once in New York, I think. And Janet has a better memory than me and she is someone to talk with ...