

# WEEKEND

Michael Milshtein

**M**ay 15, 1965, was not just another day in Amman. At noon, life in the Jordanian capital came to an abrupt halt for five minutes. Traffic stopped, radio stations went off the air, and a plane that was about to land at the airport was instructed to wait. Black flags flew above the buildings in the kingdom that day – especially in the West Bank – as everyone was primed to hear King Hussein's traditional May 15 speech. Hotels in the city also stopped serving their guests for those five minutes. Foreign tourists who asked what was going on were told, simply, that it was the day on which the "Nakba of Palestine" is commemorated. The five minutes of silence, it was explained, were intended to demonstrate the solidarity of the kingdom's inhabitants, on both banks of the Jordan, with those who suffered the trauma of 1948.

In light of that account, it's somewhat difficult to understand the dominant narrative among Arabs, Palestinians, Israelis and most scholars in the West in recent decades to the effect that during the first half-century after 1948, the memory of the Nakba (or "catastrophe," in Arabic, when more than 700,000 Arabs fled or were expelled during the founding of the State of Israel) was wrapped in forgetting, silence and suppression. According to that narrative, those who experienced the trauma were unable to process it, and that, along with a deliberate effort by Israel and the Arab states to erase the Palestinians' identity, resulted in the years-long repression of their collective memory.

The era of silence and the silencing of memory ostensibly ended in 1998, the 50th anniversary of the Nakba, when recollection of the past surged powerfully into the Palestinian consciousness. There were several reasons for this: a round-numbered anniversary, which can often bring historical memories to the fore again; a growing apprehension among many of the Nakba's first generation that they would pass away before their story was documented and imparted to younger generations; the fear that gripped many Palestinians about

## The Nakba is here to stay

Contrary to the prevailing view, the Palestinians have never forgotten the trauma of Israel's creation in 1948 – a fact that has been brought home again during recent events. A trenchant critical discussion by both sides is urgent



Arab prisoners in Ramle, 1948. The Palestinians are not the only people who have endured the loss of homeland territories and mass dispossession, but they are among the few who continue to exist in a state of prolonged rootlessness and instability.

David Eldan/GPO

a looming final-status agreement with Israel that would necessitate a painful forgoing of the idea of returning; and the Palestinians' desire to posit a counter-narrative to Israel's own jubilee celebrations that year.

The notion that there had been a period of forgetting and oblivion dominated the entire spectrum of discourse among Palestinians, and also gained traction in Israel and the West, to the point that it acquired the status of a full-fledged "historical fact." However, a thorough perusal of documents in archives, a survey of the Arab and Palestinian press since 1948, and conversations with Palestinians who have lived through the past seven decades reveal a different picture: The memory of the Nakba among the Palestinians was never subjected to silencing or suppression, and this seminal historical event still remains present in a number of spheres of discourse and activity.

For decades, the memory of the past was mobilized to advance political goals. The Palestine Liberation Organization, which spearheaded the community's national struggle beginning in the mid-1960s, aimed to bolster Palestinians' self-identity and promote their goals, and the memory of 1948 served them to that end. The trauma of the past was evoked to reinforce collective determination to achieve the goal of return and to cultivate a desire for revenge in the young generation. To underscore this point, on posters and in paintings, in literature and poetry, images of the defeated, tent-dwelling refugees were juxtaposed with those of young people imbued with the spirit of battle and fired with the aspiration to turn back the wheels of history by liberating all of Palestine through an armed struggle.

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## History in shreds

Official documents tend to disappear along with senior officials who retire. The real problems start when the defense establishment enters the picture



Ohad Zvigenberg

Adam Raz

**U**.S. President Donald Trump had a custom that expressed well his eccentric personality: He often tore documents he lost interest in to shreds. Former government officials revealed in 2018 how they would gather the torn papers and tape them back together. According to an article in Politico, the documents – which the president ripped up with his own hands, sometimes in two and sometimes into tiny "confetti-size" pieces – included handwritten memoranda; invitations to events; inquiries from citizens and legislators; and even a letter from Chuck Schumer, the Democratic Senate minority leader at the time.

Trump, to the delight of Clio, the muse of history, had an entire staff who salvaged the fragments. In Israel, it is not at all clear so far which documents Benjamin Netanyahu ordered to be shredded. The former prime minister denies last week's report in Haaretz, which claimed that official documents were shredded on his last day in office. Ruti Abramovich, from the Israel State Archives, wrote this week after a visit to the Prime Minister's Office that she was "not convinced"

that classified material had been shredded, but she added that until the investigation is completed, "there is no certainty." This is careful language. Indeed, how can one know about something like this?

As far as we know, this is the first time that any documents have been destroyed on the orders of a departing prime minister in Israel. But this is apparently not a first for Netanyahu. After the end of his first term, in 1999, journalist Mordechai Gilat reported in the daily Yedioth Ahronoth that Netanyahu removed classified documents and traveled abroad with them. This, it was reported, led to the opening of a Shin Bet security service investigation, which involved inspecting Netanyahu's baggage in New York.

Years of neglect have created chaos, and without the state archives leading efforts to retrieve the material, Malmab stepped in, lacking jurisdiction, and reclassified it.

However, the investigation was called off for unknown reasons.

Document shredding is a common practice in both oppressive and democratic regimes. A 1998 report by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa stated that one of the "tragedies is that the previous government deliberately and systematically destroyed a large group of state documents." The purpose of the destruction is clear: to prevent the new government from finding out about the deeds of the previous one.

Until now, the "ex-es" or "former-lys" in Israel have behaved differently: no shredding, just stealing; no destruction, just concealment – i.e., removing documents without authority and permission. This practice has a parallel in the actions of the Defense Ministry security authority, known by its Hebrew acronym Malmab, which for years has diligently gathered and archived stacks of documents, without the legal authority to do so. From the public's perspective, the results are the same: The activities of the state are shrouded in secrecy.

For decades, senior government and Israel Defense Forces brass took documents with them after they retired, and the state did nothing to prevent this. Even in the known cases, not much was done to retrieve the material.

In September 2016, a few days after former President Shimon Peres' death, a report about his life was broadcast on German television. The news team was given the opportunity to tour his archive at the Peres Center for Peace and Innovation in Jaffa. The camera briefly scanned the cabinets. One of them was labeled: "The reactor in Dimona" in bold letters.

Any request to review the documents stored in the Peres archive will be denied. Indeed, the writer of these lines has also been denied more than once. Not only is it a private archive, which is not subject to the stipulations of the Archives Law – unlike, for example, the state archives or the IDF archives – but any access depends on the whims of its owner or director. But an even more important question is how documents dealing with the Dimona reactor came to be held in a private facility.

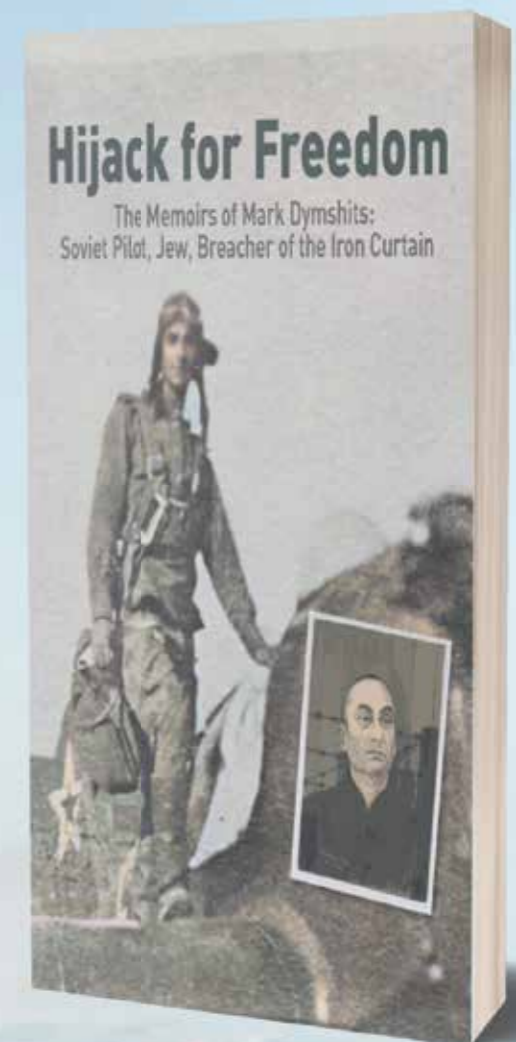
It's worth noting that Peres' conduct was no different than others'. In

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like “the voice of God” and marveled at how he managed to answer questions that were presented to him even as he was fighting off goblins in his dream.

People who have a lucid dream and are able to control it often try to direct it in order to fulfill fantasies like being able to fly or being reunited with a deceased loved one. “I’m the boss here,” the lucid dreamer will say to himself, “So why, in my dream – mine!! – should I be standing in a long line at the Jerusalem bus station instead of nibbling a croissant at a café in Paris?”

But even if a dream is lucid and controlled, it will never be fully controlled, research shows. You can’t just dispatch yourself from one point to another. Conditions must be created that will compel the brain to create a new scenario. If the researcher in the sleep lab asks you to hold your breath in the dream, you won’t be able to instantly create a swimming pool in the middle of a train station and dive into it. You will have to come up with something creative, but with more logic to it, like a nerve gas attack. If you suddenly ask another character in the dream to count to 10, chances are they’ll respond that that’s stupid, why should they do that? And if you try to pass through a wall, you’re liable to end up bashing your nose.

“I like the idea of comparing it to a sailor,” says neurologist Isabelle Arnulf, a professor of sleep medicine at the Pitié-Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris, who was also involved in the Current Biology study. “A sailor can change the direction of his boat, but he cannot change the wind.”

## REM thrills

Much can be said about the popular passion for lucid dreams, but one thing is certain: It is bringing the thrill back to REM sleep. We’re no longer as interested in dreams as we once were. We vaguely recall that Freud said they are important, but he also said that little girls are angry at their mothers because they don’t have a penis, and we forgot about that long ago. “I dreamed I was traipsing through the city sewer system dressed as Spiderman,” a person will suddenly recall in the middle of the day when he notices a manhole on the sidewalk. But his dream’s status has been downgraded. Now it’s on a par with a surprising video clip you came across on YouTube, and as such it obviously has much competition in your waking life.

“Today, too many of us view dreams the way we do stars – they emerge nightly and seem magnificent but are far too distant to be of any relevance to our real lives,” wrote Rubin Naiman of the University of Arizona in a 2017 article, “Dreamless: The Silent Epidemic of REM Sleep Loss,” published in the *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*. Naiman attributes this “epidemic” to the mounting use of substances that affect dream sleep. These include alcohol, cannabis and a long list of medications like sleeping pills, antidepressants, painkillers and more. He also notes that there has been a steady increase in the prevalence of sleep disorders, due in part to overexposure to artificial lighting from cellphone screens and other factors.

Naiman issues an urgent call for someone to examine all of the data and draw the necessary conclusions. “Despite the glaring prevalence of REM/dream loss, epidemiological research focused specifically on quantifying REM/dream loss is nonexistent... It is probable that tens of millions of people experience degrees of clinically significant REM/dream loss on a nightly basis,” he writes.

In recent years, there has been a discussion in the scientific literature about a “global sleep crisis.” It’s hard to know just what is happening in Israel, but our situation is probably not any better than that of dreamers worldwide. Israelis aren’t big consumers of alcohol, but cannabis is a bit of a different story. Data from the last few years shows that Israelis sleep an average of six-and-a-half hours per night, which is lower than worldwide figures and less than the seven to nine hours recommended by health organizations. There are studies that indicate that a

shortage of dream sleep heightens the body’s inflammatory response and its sensitivity to pain, impairs memory and depresses one’s mood. It’s time to wake up – and get more sleep.

## Controlling the plot

Naiman sees both a positive and negative side to the interest in lucid dreaming. On the one hand, the focus on this subject means that dreaming is being accorded the significance it deserves. But he also bemoans the fact that “dreams are being overly medicated, lucidly manipulated, and technologically hacked in the service of wake-centric purposes.” Some researchers in the field believe this is not just a theoretical concern, but that real damage may be done.

This is precisely what Dr. Soffer-Dudek, who also heads the Consciousness and Psychopathology Laboratory at Ben-Gurion University, argues. Her beautiful home in Moshav Gizo, between Rehovot and Beit Shemesh, is itself reminiscent of a dreamscape. Two colossal antique wooden doors open onto a large living room with a huge suede sofa. In the deep suburban quiet, I feel like I can practically hear the grass growing outside.

Lucid dreaming “has really caught on in the past 10 years,” Soffer-Dudek says. “I’ve been teaching a workshop on dreaming at the university since 2010, and I really see the change. At first, when I would ask the students, ‘Who knows what a lucid dream is?’ Maybe one or two would know, out of a class of 20. Today only one wouldn’t know.”

In 2011, Soffer-Dudek published a study showing that subjects who had tended to have more lucid dreams were more psychologically immune to distress after experiencing Operation Cast Lead, the 2008 Gaza war.

“In retrospect, I think this finding was too simplistic,” she says now. At the time, she did not distinguish between those who controlled the plotline of their dreams and those who were just conscious of it, but years later she zeroed in on the importance of this distinction. A study she published in 2018 with Liat Aviram found that the ones who benefited from lucid dreaming were the minority, who were able to control the content of the dream.

Out of 187 subjects in this same study who were asked if they did exercises in their free time for the sake of achieving lucid dreaming, 67 answered in the affirmative. This in itself is an astounding figure, even for the population from which the sample was taken – stressed-out psychology undergraduates.

This subgroup was asked about the intensity of the exercises, and various psychological symptoms were also examined. After two months, it appeared that the students who did the most dreaming exercises demonstrated a clear increase in dissociative symptoms (for example: “Sometimes I’m wearing clothes that I don’t remember putting on”) and in schizotypal symptoms (for example: “Sometimes I feel like strangers are reading my thoughts”). The dedicated dream exercisers also reported a high rate of sleep problems.

“Sometimes, this mixture of wakefulness and sleep is not good,” Soffer-Dudek tells me, as she pets the kitten



A scene from the Netflix series “Behind Her Eyes,” which deals with lucid dreams.

Netflix

that is snuggling on her lap.

That warning is echoed by someone who posted anonymously on Reddit: “Honestly? I felt like a God. It was such a rush. I did anything and everything. Then I tried to stop. All hell broke loose. If you constantly lucid-dream, your brain will go nuts. Mine replaced my dreams with my waking reality. All of the tricks I learned failed. I was a prisoner in my own world. BE CAREFUL!”

Most people who practice lucid dreaming do not become psychotic, I tell Soffer-Dudek. “That’s correct,” she replies. “But probably there are people who have a vulnerability to that, and you don’t necessarily know about it beforehand. Like with people who use marijuana and suddenly have a [psychotic] outburst. Let’s say that if one of your parents has schizophrenia, you might be better off not playing around with your sleep, just as you’re better off not playing around with other substances. A spontaneous lucid dream that happens once in a while is okay. But frequent experimentation with these techniques can confuse your whole system. Logic says this could be harmful, and that is

what the studies show, too.”

Psychologist Udi Bonstein does a lot of clinical work with lucid dreaming and says that he can induce such a dream in a patient by means of hypnosis, but he, too, feels that the cult of lucid dreaming may have gotten out of control. “The wish to uncover all of one’s dreams derives from the narcissistic notion that everything must be known and that we can solve everything,” he says. “Excessive control of dreams is akin to the American approach of ‘happiness pills’ – the idea that life should be all good and beautiful, that there is no place in one’s mind for an y crappy stuff. If dreams become overly simple and accessible, it will be a disaster.”

## ‘Trippy’ state of mind

Researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology developed a glove called Dormio that is supposed to assist in lucid dreaming. Rather than focus on REM sleep, with Dormio, the MIT scientists sought to affect Stage 1 sleep, or hypnagogia – the transitional stage between wakefulness and sleep – and its mirror image, hypnopompia, the stage between sleep and wakefulness.

When a person on in the hypnagogic stage is awakened, he is likely to report a visual, dreamlike experience. Dreams in this stage of sleep are less developed and emotional than those in the REM stage, and more transitory.

“This state of mind is trippy, loose, flexible and divergent,” explains doctoral student Adam Haar Horowitz, who led the research team. “It’s like turning the notch up high on mind-wandering and making it immersive – being pushed and pulled with new sensations like your body floating and falling, with your thoughts quickly snapping in and out of control.”

The glove was first presented to the scientific world as “a targeted dream incubation device” in an article published last summer. What is “dream incubation”? An example: Let’s say that I hit a mental block while writing this piece. I have a lot of material, a lot of quotes

and sources, but I’m not sure where to go from there. In the not-too-distant future, I would be able to pull this glove out of the drawer of “sleep engineering” (one of the hot terms these days) devices, grab some quick sleep, and break out of my impasse thanks to some brilliant insight that came to me in a dream.

First I would use my cellphone to record myself saying something like: “Don’t forget to find a good ending for the article.” Then I would put on the glove and retire to a short nap. When I fall asleep, my clenched fist will slowly open and the glove will recognize this; it will also notice I am falling asleep based on the change in my skin’s conductivity.

If behind the closed eyes of a lucid dreamer there’s active awareness, is it possible to communicate with him while dreaming? If the answer is yes, what can such a conversation teach us about dreams and their meaning?

It will relay a signal to my phone to wake me up gently, softly flooding me with an airy hypnompic sensation. Then it will play my prerecorded message (“Don’t forget to find a good ending for the article”) and allow me to go back to dozing, when, *inshallah*, the solution to my dilemma will appear. After a short time, there will be another awakening, in which the system will prompt me to recite what I dreamed into the microphone, so the solution won’t be forgotten. Then back to sleep, and so on and so forth.

Haar Horowitz and his colleagues showed how their system induced responses that were increasingly complex, bizarre and original. For example, a sub-

ject who was told to “think about a tree” said during his first awakening that he dreamed about “trees, many different kinds, pines, oaks.” In the third, he reported dreaming about “a tree from my childhood, from my backyard. It never asked for anything.” And in the fifth: “I’m in the desert, there is a shaman, sitting under the tree with me, he tells me to go to South America, and then the tree...”

Says Stickgold, who was also involved in the study: “The potential value of Dormio for enhancing learning and creativity is literally mind-blowing.” He describes the glove as a modern incarnation of more primitive and elegant methods used by prominent figures in history. Thomas Edison used to sit on an armchair with a metal spoon in hand and a dish on his lap, and let himself fall asleep while thinking about a problem that was bothering him. When he nodded off, his grip would loosen, the spoon would drop onto the dish with a loud clatter, and he would wake up with the answer he’d been searching for. Salvador Dali used a similar method to spark ideas for his paintings.

For the consumer of the future, Dormio ought to be a well from which to draw hidden aquifers of creativity. If the glove becomes a commercial product, it will join a number of other devices already on the market that are touting to induce ordinary lucid dreaming during REM sleep. Most of these are apparently not worth the cheap plastic, printed circuit board and LED bulbs they’re made of, at least according to a January 2021 survey in *Wired Magazine*. But Zmax, a device that premiered in 2018 and contains a home-EEG, apparently has genuine capabilities. It is now sold mainly to laboratories, but laymen can also buy it for about 1,000 to 1,200 euros.

“I think in about five years, maximum 10 years, we’ll have a device with an almost 100 percent success rate for inducing lucid dreams,” Achilles Pavlou, a doctoral student from the University of Essex in England who is studying the Zmax device, told *Wired*.

One can’t help but wonder what will happen if and when such a device is available. Will people be able to resist the temptation to dream lucidly all the time? The question calls to mind the experiment with the rat that had an electrode connected to the pleasure center of its brain and could not stop activating it.

“It’s such an exciting time to be a dream engineer – the field is moving fast,” Dr. Michelle Carr, a researcher from the University of Rochester, in New York, wrote in *Aeon Magazine*. “In the not-too-distant future, I envision a form of dream-interface therapy that combines the different strands of research that I and others are working on. Picture a device that detects the emotional content of your dreams (for instance, by monitoring your bodily arousal and facial expressions), and nudges you to feel calmer, either through scent or sounds, or by instructing you to visualize a previously re-scripted dream. You could then report back your success or otherwise using eye movements or other predetermined signals, making tweaks for the next time, as needed.”

I would say that restoring dreams to a more central place in the culture is a worthy goal. But as for “getting the maximum out of it,” I’m not so sure. For now, dreams are off-limits to technology – computers, in all their forms, do not appear in dreams. “Interestingly, we don’t dream about typing, or zooming, or skipping, or watching YouTube, we don’t dream about reading books, we don’t dream about writing, these things that most of us spend most of our time doing during the day have no role at all in our dreams. They tend to be stories about things that feel important to us,” says Stickgold.

Sort of like the baby who doesn’t yet get to play with his parents’ phones and has to settle for chewing on books and playing with blocks, the world of dreams is still in its electronic infancy. It has so far been spared the crude incursion of apps and wearable computers – in this case, easily accessible devices that might interfere with our sleep. Change may be the way of the world, and inevitable. But it still might be better for this dream to have a different ending.

## HOTHOUSE

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big city and I had big plans, and I felt that I had the tools to realize them, but my father kept pressing me to give it a try, and in the end I needed a home.”

In Sakhnin, she met the manager of a local supermarket and married him at the age of 20. “I told him straight off: ‘There’s no way that one day you’re going to tell me that I can’t study.’ That’s the agreement between us. ‘I’m with you,’ he said.”

The new reality of Sakhnin was brought home to her when she became a young mother, Hayadre says. “I remember that I bought this kind of fancy stroller, and very enthusiastically took the baby out for a first walk. Very quickly I realized that the broken sidewalks in Sakhnin simply aren’t built for strollers.” In the 17 years and two more children since then, she says, “Sakhnin has undergone incredible development,” and no less important: she became accustomed to the city’s cultural codes.

“In Jaffa, there’s no such thing as a neighborhood that’s [an actual extended] family, like here in Sakhnin, where everyone lives together,” she continues. “At first I found it strange, but after having children I saw the advantages of being surrounded by the husband’s family. It’s a type of safety net. If I weren’t

In Sakhnin, she met the manager of a supermarket and married him, at age 20. ‘I told him: ‘There’s no way that one day you’re going to tell me that I can’t study.’”

so busy, I’d probably find it stifling. But because I’m always going out and seeing the world, when I come back here, it feels like a safe space.”

Hayadre went on to a college education as she had planned, but the move to Sakhnin and her looming motherhood somewhat cooled her academic ardor.

The girl who on school vacations took a bus from Jaffa to the Beit Ariela library in Tel Aviv to broaden her education, who occasionally snuck into the Tel Aviv Magistrate’s Court to observe the attorneys’ performances, for whom everyone predicted a brilliant future as a lawyer or even a physician, found herself making do with less. “I always had a talent for languages, so I enrolled for English and linguistics. But throughout my undergraduate studies [at Haifa University] I had the feeling that I was missing out on something, and I asked myself what I was doing there.”

Hayadre decided to become a teacher, taught in a Jewish high school in the Misgav area council and concurrently embarked on an M.A. in English and linguistics. Presently she is completing her doctoral thesis, which compares reading processes in two systems of script – Hebrew and Arabic – and how a second language affects the inhibition and acceleration of comprehension.

“It’s only after I went on to the Ph.D. and became the principal of the Galilee school,” she says, “that I felt I had found my place, that I was doing something meaningful and that I could still do great things.”

## SHREDS

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Ariel Sharon’s case, for example, rumors have been circulating for years about a private document archive located on the ranch owned by the former prime minister’s family. Sharon even admitted this in his testimony to the Agranat Commission, when he confirmed that he stored “a number of padlocked iron crates.” The archive was shown on the “Uvda” investigative TV program in late 2011, when the show’s staff gained permission to roam the ranch.

Soon Gilad Sharon gloatingly displayed various notes and documents from his father’s estate to the cameras. It was difficult not to be impressed by the long and orderly rows of binders containing information accumulated over the years during which Sharon held senior government and army positions. But how did the state let such material fall into private hands and stay there – material that only in recent years has begun to be returned to it

after lengthy negotiations between the family and the state archives?

It hasn’t only been prime ministers who took possession of documents, but also ministers and other officials. The estate of Abba Eban, Israel’s third foreign minister, is currently stored at the Truman Research Institute in Jerusalem after being purchased for a respectable sum. A cursory examination of the materials deposited there is sufficient to establish that they are quite valuable in historical terms. Further proof for this comes from Malmab’s illegal demand to retrieve some of the archival material.

Anyone who visits private archives belonging to so-called formerlys scattered around the country – that is, archives that are not subject to the Archives Act, be it well-run institutions like the Peres Center, a hangar at Sharon’s ranch or crates stored in some warehouse – will encounter extensive, illegally removed documentation. Years of neglect and willful blindness on the part of the state have created chaos, and without the state archives leading the efforts to retrieve the material all the formerlys have at their disposal, Malmab stepped in, lacking

proper jurisdiction, and reclassified the materials.

In the case of Miriam Eshkol, wife of former Prime Minister Levy Eshkol, it was also Malmab that intervened and retrieved the documents she refused to hand over to the state archives.

Reason dictates that the material shredded in Netanyahu’s office, whether official or private, is valuable. There is no point, after all, in shredding worthless documents. From the public’s point of view, however, there is a difference between Netanyahu and his predecessors: Someday, hopefully, Israelis will be given access to the materials stored in the Peres Center archives. That is what happened to Eban’s estate, deposited in the Truman Institute (and not in the state archives) and this is what it will hopefully happen to the material on Sharon’s ranch. But shredded documents can never be recovered. In practice, Netanyahu thus took the Israeli policy of concealment even one step further.

Adam Raz is a researcher at the Akevit Institute for Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Research.