

## Military Stirrings Hashomer Lesson Plan

**Central Historical Question: What spurred the creation of a Jewish defense force in Palestine?**

### Materials:

- Hashomer PowerPoint
- *Hashomer* Video
- Copies of *Documents A-G*.

### Plan of Instruction:

*The PowerPoint, video and supporting documents reinforce lesson content through purposeful repetition and the gradual addition of new material.*

1. Pass out Documents A-G.
2. Mini-lecture with PowerPoint:
  - Slide: An Unhealthy Situation: *In the 1890s, Jewish self-defense in the Land of Israel is at a low point. While Baron Edmund de Rothschild adopts several Jewish settlements, saving them from failure, the officials and clerks he appoints to act as his representatives are not interested in Jewish self-defense. They hire Arab guards, sometimes the very Arabs who had only recently attacked the Jewish communities. The Baron's officers see hiring them as guards as an effective way to buy them off. While it works to some degree, it creates an unhealthy situation where the Jews are the only ethnic group in Eretz Israel who rely on others for defense. The Arabs nickname the Jews "the children of death," reflecting the low regard in which they are held.*
  - Slide: Israel Shochat: *Israel Shochat is born in 1886 in the Russian Empire (present-day Belarus) to Jewish landowners. He's a staunch Zionist and a member of the socialist-Zionist Poalei-Tzion party. On arriving in Palestine in 1904, he tours the country and is stunned by the Jewish reliance on non-Jewish defense. He recognizes the damage this does to the Jews' status. In some cases, as in the settlement of Yesod-Hama'aleh, the Arab guards act as if they're the masters of the Jews for whom they work.*
  - Slide: Story of the Circassians: *Shochat is inspired by the story of the Circassians, an ethnic group that had recently immigrated to the Land of Israel after they were forced to leave their home in the Caucasus. A small tribe, it managed in a short time to inspire fear and respect among its neighbors. For Shochat, the story of the Circassians, who he first learns about while working in the vineyards of Rishon LeZion, is like a light*

- through the darkness. He said: "If the Circassians, a small and weak tribe, that came to a foreign land, could gain for themselves a place of respect among many enemies, why not a select group of young Jews in the land of their birth, whose spiritual and material powers are greater beyond measure than those of the Circassians?"*
- *Slide: Bar-Giora: On Sept. 29, 1907, on the night of the Jewish holiday of Simchat Torah, Shochat organizes a meeting of a select group in the apartment of Yitzhak Ben-Tzvi in Jaffa. (Ben-Tzvi will go on to become Israel's 2<sup>nd</sup> president.) About 10 people are present. It is the founding meeting of Bar-Giora, named after Simon Bar-Giora, a Jewish rebel who fought the Romans in the first century C.E. The group is secretive, modeled after underground socialist revolutionary groups in Russia. Bar-Giora's members want to be sure that the Ottoman rulers don't discover their existence. From Bar-Giora's slogan, "In blood and fire, Judah fell. In blood and fire, Judah will rise," it's clear that the group is about more than guard duty. It wants to see the Jews again become a free nation in their own land.*
  - *Slide: Sejera: Shochat decides Bar-Giora needs a base of operations and selects Sejera, a new Jewish settlement in the Lower Galilee. He's convinced to go there by Manya Wilbuszewicz, a founding member of Sejera whom Shochat will eventually marry. Active in self-defense, Manya helped protect Jews in Russia from pogroms and organized shipments of arms to Jewish settlements in Eretz Israel with money given to her by Baron Rothschild. Bar-Giora's members initially don't reveal that they're part of a guard group. But soon they announce the need to take over guard duty. "We need to raise Jewish honor in the eyes of our neighbors," they say. Everyone at Sejera agrees except Eliyahu Krause, the manager. When they observe the Circassian guard sleeping on the job and warn Krause, he still refuses. Finally, the Bar-Giora members steal a mule from under the nose of the Circassian guard. Krause comes around. He fires the non-Jewish guard and hires one of the Bar-Giora members in his place.*
  - *Slide: Mescha: Bar-Giora's usefulness is proven when Mescha, another town in the Lower Galilee, urgently needs help. At the start of 1908, a quarrel breaks out between the Arab guards and the farmers. One of the guards shoots at the farmer. The bullet ricochets off a stone and hits the Arab, killing him. The Arabs threaten revenge on Mescha. Shooting attacks start a week later. Arabs lie in ambush and Jews are beaten. The settlement only has a few rusty rifles, and the farmers aren't prepared to fight in any case. They put out a call for help and this eventually leads to*

*Mescha entering a contract with Israel Shochat for the protection of the settlement.*

- Slide: Young Turks: *In July 1908, the Young Turks take power, ousting Sultan Abdul Hamid II. They promise more freedom to the various nations that make up the Ottoman Empire. The feeling among the Arabs in Palestine is that a yoke has been removed. Now they can do whatever they please. The settlements are exposed to constant terror from their Arab neighbors.*
- Slide: Hashomer: *As a result of the growing tension, Shochat realizes a larger organization is needed, one that can operate in the open and cover a wider area. As historian Yaakov Goldstein says, "There is no doubt that the revolution of the Young Turks on July 24, 1908, and its success in overthrowing the tyrannical regime of Abdul Hamid II ... influenced the transition from Bar Giora to Hashomer."*

*In Mescha, on April 12, 1909, Shochat founds a new organization: Hashomer or "the Watchman." That very day two Jews are killed by Arabs, putting into bold relief the need for an expanded guard organization. So as not to alarm Turkish authorities, Hashomer's official program avoids politics. Its stated goal: "To develop in our land an element of Jewish guards suited for such work." . But to its members Hashomer is more than a professional security group. As one later described it: "Hashomer was a political movement. The intention was to create a national army." Sejera and Mescha provided the space for guard training.*

- Slide: Expansion: *Hashomer grows quickly as a result of the deteriorating security situation. Historian Yaakov Goldstein writes, "With Hashomer's establishment, its successful development began, and continued in a upward line, almost without pause, from the year 1909 until the start of 1913. In 1909 and at the beginning of 1910, the organization took over guarding the settlements of Beit Gan and Yavne'el." In Beit Gan, Hashomer was called in after a Circassian guard shot a farmer six times in broad daylight after a fight. Hashomer dramatically improves Jewish self-respect and changes Arab attitudes toward the Jews. By the end of 1912, Hashomer has sent its members to every corner of the Land of Israel where Jewish settlements are found.*
- Slide: Hashomer Tactics: *Hashomer is successful, failing in only two places where its members were forced to operate with Arab guards. After these experiences, Hashomer resolves never to work in tandem with Arab guards. Although the Jewish guards are armed to the teeth, they do all they can to avoid using their weapons. This is because of the Arab custom*

*of blood revenge with every death to be answered with another death, regardless of the way the death occurs. The incident at Mescha is a case in point: Although the Arab shot himself his people still demanded revenge. To avoid these kinds of blood feuds, Hashomer strives to defuse crises without gunfire.*

*As you've noticed from the pictures, Hashomer members adopt Arab dress and strive to understand Arab language and culture. Israel Shochat said, "We knew that the Arabs would be our neighbors and we would need to reach a modus vivendi and to a degree adapt ourselves to them. Members of Hashomer learned Arabic, which helped them to understand their Arab neighbors, and they wanted to learn from the Arabs as much as possible and to teach them in return about us. The shomrim were not satisfied with visits to the Effendi and Sheiks alone. They preferred the "madafia" (the visiting halls of the villages) where they could meet with the Arab peasant, the sharecropper, or worker. The shomrim became familiar with the milieu of the Arab village. Wherever they guarded, the shomrim set up a "madafia," and all Arab passersby – on foot or on horse, rich or poor, worker or peasant – were received with courtesy, as was customary in Arab villages. In this way the Hashomer learned the way of thought and moral outlook of the Arab."*

*In the days before Hashomer, the accepted practice in land disputes between Jews and Arabs was for the Jews to head into the fields, get into a fight and absorb blows. The wounds became evidence in court. When Hashomer comes on the scene, all this changes. The guards go into the fields and take back the land owned by Jews, which the Arabs had simply taken for themselves. The Shomrim also play an important role in guarding new lands that Jews have purchased to make sure Jewish rights are enforced.*

- *Slide: Crisis: Starting in 1911, a number of Hashomer's members are killed by Arabs, sparking a crisis within the organization that almost leads to a split. Although Hashomer's leadership forbids blanket revenge attacks, some of the younger members take matters into their own hands, shooting at Bedouin tents and taking sheep and cattle. These members feel that if the Jews don't punish the murderers, respect for Jews will decline and the murders won't stop. Shochat and the leadership committee manage to retain control of the situation. An agreement is reached whereby the Arabs will be informed that a situation of "blood vengeance" exists but Hashomer will only go after the actual killers. Ultimately, Hashomer doesn't carry through with "blood vengeance." The issue will again lead to a crisis at the end of 1913 with the murder of several more Hashomer members.*

- Slide: Decline: *In 1913, Hashomer is at its height. Ironically, 1913 also marks its decline and the organization is pushed back to the Galilee. One of the main factors is money. The Jewish guards cost about twice what Arab guards cost. Another reason is that the farmers fear that the continued presence of Hashomer guards will increase tensions with the Arabs. Finally, the Yishuv views Hashomer as too independent, an organization that answers to no one but itself.*
- Slide: World War I: *Hashomer is already in a weakened state when World War I starts in 1914. Its attempt to become a Yishuv-wide defense organization is blocked by strong opposition among the Jewish settlements themselves. With the outbreak of World War I a hostile Turkish administration puts Hashomer outside the law. While it continues to operate underground, its activities are sharply reduced. The Turks exile its key figure, Israel Shochat.*
- Slide: Shochat's Return: *With the end of WWI, Palestine is ruled by the British. Israel Shochat returns in 1919. Shochat hopes to renew Hashomer. But he finds that the attitude in the Yishuv is that Hashomer is no longer needed because the British will provide security. Historian Goldstein writes, "In the general euphoria within the Zionist movement and the Yishuv after the end of Ottoman rule, the establishment of the British Mandate over the Land of Israel and the appointment of a Jewish High Commissioner, sizeable segments of the Zionist movement and the Yishuv reasoned that security concerns, from here on in, were a matter for the mandatory rulers." This view would ultimately prove mistaken.*
- Slide: Contributions: *Although Hashomer only numbered about 40 sworn-in members and its maximum force was about 300 taking into account guards hired for temporary work, the organization left its mark. It established the principle of self-defense. The Arabs did not return to guard the settlements where Hashomer had once been. And Hashomer succeeded in changing the perception that Jews were the "children of death." Hashomer also inspired a youth movement in the Diaspora which looked up to Hashomer as the ideal of what its members should aspire to become. Members of Hashomer would go on to help establish the Haganah, the Jewish defense force that would eventually become the foundation for the army of the Jewish State.*

### 3. Play video: Hashomer

Introduce inquiry question: What spurred the creation of a Jewish defense force in Palestine?

### 4. Whole class discussion:

- Jewish self-respect and honor played an important role in Israel Shochat's thinking. How much should concepts like this have in affecting a community's decision-making?
- Given that Hashomer was doing an effective job protecting the Jewish communities, do you think the Jewish farmers should have supported them more instead of turning on them?
- Who do you think was right on the issue of blood revenge – should Hashomer have struck back adopting Arab methods or refrained from doing so?
- Was the Yishuv, or Jewish community in the Land of Israel, right to expect Britain to defend them or should they have continued to develop their own security forces?

5. Hand out Review Questions (may be used as end of class Quiz).



**Document A: “Forefathers of the Israel Defense Forces” Yaakov Goldstein (1994)**

In general, from a security viewpoint, it's possible to divide the time of the First Aliyah (1882-1902) into three periods: a) the Heroic period B) Baron Rothschild's sponsorship C) The crisis period that came with the transition to the Jewish Colonization Association (1900), and which continued into the Second Aliyah. ...

In the heroic period – which encompassed the first phase of settlement – the settlers were forced to prove to their neighbors their ability to stand up for their rights. This included, of course, first and foremost the defense of person and property. ...

The sponsorship period saw the responsibility for protecting the colonies transferred from the settlers themselves to the Baron's officials. ... These clerks operated in a chain of command that was based on: a) Relations with the Turkish authorities by using the Baron's name and the influence of the European consuls ... b) Bribery – "buying off" – local aggressive actors.

The protective umbrella of the Baron provided relatively peaceful relations for the colonies, although this did not prevent the thievery and damage to property, which required guards. The guards were, in most cases, non-Jews. ... This transfer of responsibility for the protection of body and belongings from the settlers to the Baron's officials and on to Jewish and non-Jewish contractors led to a weakening of initiative, a loss of spontaneity of action, and the erosion of the spiritual and physical ability for self-defense among the farmers – the foundations for which had started to develop in the early period. ...

A characteristic story is that of Petach-Tikvah, a good section of which enjoyed the protection of the Baron, and one of the neighboring Arab sheikhs, Sheikh Abu-Rabah, with whom there were many problems. In 1891, the clerks reached an interesting understanding:

"Abu-Rabah was obliged to 'defend' the colony at an annual wage, and frequently he would take various things, like a cart,

harnesses, trees, work tools and so on that he would 'forget,' of course, to return. The clerks also gave – for the sake of good will – a 200 dunam portion of land that was plowed with a tractor at his request.”

We are in fact speaking here of a partial subjugation to a local Arab attacker, and this in regards to a large settlement like Petach-Tikvah which had a tradition of self-defense and well-known Jewish guards.

*Source: Forefathers of the Israel Defense Forces: The Bar Giora and HaShomer Underground Associations 1907-1935 (BeDerech el haYa'ad), Yaakov Goldstein, Ministry of Defense, Israel, 1994, p. 8-9.*



**Document B: “Forefathers of the Israel Defense Forces” Yaakov Goldstein (1994)**

Bar-Giora, from the moment it arrived [in the settlement of Sejera in the Galilee], endeavored to take over security, while the director, Eliyahu Krause, refused. Even before they took charge of security, and afterwards, the people of Bar-Giora engaged in physical training, in weapons instruction and target practice. In their time off, they toured to learn the surroundings. They also learned Arabic and Arab customs. Krause, despite his sympathy for the youths, was not inclined to hand over protection of the farm only to Jews, and for the same reasons that characterized the resistance of the settlements to Hebrew guards in general: They didn't believe in its effectiveness. They were afraid to endanger the lives of young Jews, and above all, they feared the transition to Jewish defenders would endanger the settlements because of the desire for revenge of the non-Jewish guards. Also they were afraid of “goom” [blood revenge] ... In regard to the Sejera farm, it's said that the opposition of E. Krause was broken the moment the Circassian guard wasn't filling his duty. The chapter occurred on the night when “Bar Giora” removed a mule from the stable of the farm. They roused Krause and showed him the quality of the Circassian's defense. Only then did Krause fire the Circassian and hire Tzvi Becker [a Bar Giora member] in his place.

*Source: Forefathers of the Israel Defense Forces: The Bar Giora and HaShomer Underground Associations 1907-1935 (BeDerech el haYa'ad), Yaakov Goldstein, Ministry of Defense, Israel, 1994, p. 22.*

**Document C: “History of the Haganah”, (1954)**

These were the days of the revolution of the Young Turks and the declaration of liberty [hürriyet]. As we have seen, this event, together with the general rejoicing, brought with it a feeling among the bedouins and fellahin [Arab peasants] of breaking a yoke, on the assumption that there was no longer law or judge. The atmosphere in the Lower Galilee, which had been tense since the early days of the settlement, served as a convenient backdrop for clashes. In 1909, land disputes broke out between the village of Kana and Sejera, and between Yama and Lubya, which led to renewed fights...

The Jewish colonies were subject to constant terror from the neighbors. Were it not for the steadfastness of the Hebrew guards, the lone attacks might have turned into mass violence and attempts to uproot entire settlements. On the other hand, the Hebrew guard aroused feelings of envy and anger among the local tribes and villages, who feared the end of the golden age of their rule over the area and their monopoly on security and labor in the Jewish colonies. The experience of Sejera and Mescha had already drawn the attention of other Jewish communities in the Galilee and Samaria.

*Source: History of the Haganah, Part 1, (Sefer Toldot haHaganah), Israel Defense Force Archives, Israel, 1954, p. 212.*

**Document D: “Forefathers of the Israel Defense Forces,” Yaakov Goldstein (1994)**

Rules of guarding and reaction to hostile Arab activities were first and foremost adapted to the custom of blood revenge, the "goom" that was common among the Palestinian population in general and the Arab community in particular. The killing of a person automatically led to a blood feud and the risk of a chain reaction that could bring disaster not only upon Hashomer but also upon the communities it protected. As a result of this danger hanging over everyone's head, it was common practice in the quarrels between Arabs ... that despite hundreds and thousands of bullets flying, the number of actual victims was amazingly small. This phenomenon was the fruit of deliberate restraint. It was common practice among combatants who feared becoming mixed up in a blood revenge. Therefore, an iron rule was also established in the education of a member of Hashomer, according to which he was required to develop the ability to absorb blows, and at the same time, to use only 'dry blows' in order not to spill blood that would immediately raise the issue of blood vengeance. According to Tzvi Nadav, it was permissible to use firearms and shoot in order to strike "only as a last resort when there was no way out. And in these cases, too, we insisted that the member aimed to wound the assailant or kill the horse on which the assailant came – in fact, the model was to extract oneself from a complex situation with honor without firing a shot." ...

The artistry of the guards was reflected in their ability to repel all attackers without loss of personal or public property, and at the same time, without harming the aggressor, or thief, with a mortal blow that would lead to the risk of blood revenge. A member of Hashomer was required to act in a manner that would bring honor to himself and those he represented. These rules of behavior crystallized in the days of the Galilee before the Hashomer broke south into Judah and Samaria. ...

[Blood revenge] was one of the most fateful issues and stirred up the Hashomer for several years. It was aroused in the most painful way after the murder of Yehezkel Nisanov by the Arabs of the Sharon on February 13, 1911, when he and Tzvi Nadav traveled in a cart from

Merhavia to Yavne'el. Naturally, the desire arose to avenge the death of a beloved friend who was one of the founders of Bar-Giora and Hashomer. Associated with this was the fundamental problem of whether Hashomer should adopt the norms of the Arab society in which it operated, and the fear that if they did not adopt the accepted practice of "goom" it would undercut Hashomer's status. The majority of Hashomer members demanded blood revenge, but the committee rejected the claim, saying that it would entangle Hashomer and complicate the methods in which it operated in the settlements. Most of the ongoing debate took place in a secret meeting attended only by members of "Bar-Giora" on the slopes of the Carmel, not far from Atlit, in March 1911. Until the death of Nisanov, the majority tended to reject "goom," but the balance of power in the group flipped after his murder. The main supporters of "blood vengeance" were the members of the "Caucasus Group," but not them alone. In the end, the committee's position was accepted and "goom" rejected, but the Arabs of the Sharon were informed that Hashomer was in a state of "goom" with them. A decision was made to find the murderers and only harm them. According to Shochat, three members, whose names were kept secret, were chosen to carry out the act. In practice, the decision was not implemented and the issue was abandoned for two years, but at the end of 1913 it arose again as a result of the deteriorating security situation in the Galilee.

In a short time, Moshe Barski ... Yosef Salzman ... and Yaakov Feldman was murdered ... The organization's withdrawal, the sense of fatigue and failure, the lack of implementation of decisions regarding settlement, the grave security and finally the murders, the straw that broke the camel's back, led to the formation of an opposition to the committee headed by Tzvi Becker. The opposition demanded a response. This episode was one of a series of problems that arose at the time in Hashomer and threatened anarchy within the organization.

*Source: Forefathers of the Israel Defense Forces: The Bar Giora and HaShomer Underground Associations 1907-1935 (BeDerech el haYa'ad), Yaakov Goldstein, Ministry of Defense, Israel, 1994, p. 32, 78.*

**Document E: “History of the Haganah”, (1954)**

Precisely during the period when Hashomer reached the height of its strength, the moshavot developed strong opposition to its actions and methods, which grew until Hashomer’s advance was stopped and forced to retreat from its important positions. This opposition derived from three different sources. One was very prosaic, but its influence was great. That was the question of money. We have already mentioned that the shift from maintaining Arab to Hebrew guards raised the security costs by large amounts, at least double the Arab guardianship. ...

The second source of the opposition was the behavior of Hashomer in its relations with the Arabs. ... In general, Hashomer knew how to find the right line – guarding Jewish property and honor without arbitrary harm and without degrading the honor of the Arabs. Many feared, however, that the very appearance of armed Jews and the exclusion of Arabs from the security of the settlements could cause tensions and endanger the peace of the Yishuv. ...

But the third source of the opposition was the most serious and difficult, and involved the form and organization of Hashomer. "Shomrim are a closed organization and not subject to supervision," writes [Yehiel] Tschelenov [a Russian Zionist leader] in his book, apparently referring to the claims he heard during his visit to the Land of Israel from circles opposed to Hashomer guarding the community – “[They follow] strict discipline, which knows only one authority – the authority of their leaders. The representatives of our institutions in this country have no influence on them. And they do not even give them an accounting of what’s going on ...”

*Source: History of the Haganah, Part 1, (Sefer Toldot HaHaganah) Israel Defense Force Archives, Israel, 1954, p. 237-238.*

**Document F: “Forefathers of the Israel Defense Forces” Yaakov Goldstein (1994)**

From the spring of 1913, the organization started its retreat and folded back to its base in the Lower Galilee.

In March 1913, Hashomer was forced to leave Hadera, and in October 1913, Rehovot ... The reasons for Hashomer's departure were similar in most of the settlements: Jewish guards were more expensive than Arab ones. The farmers did not take into account what they were saving by preventing theft, but only what they were spending directly from their pockets to pay for the Jewish protection; the farmers were also afraid of increasing tension with surrounding Arabs and tended to blame Hashomer, which behaved with harshness and strictness towards the Arabs. It was difficult for the farmers to accept the almost total control Hashomer had taken upon itself with regard to the movement of Arabs in the settlements and the relations with the neighboring Arab settlements and Bedouin tribes. And the farmers were hurt by the fact that some of the Hashomer members didn't hide their hostility, springing from their socialist-Zionist worldview, toward those that paid their daily bread.

*Source: Forefathers of the Israel Defense Forces: The Bar Giora and HaShomer Underground Associations 1907-1935 (BeDerech el haYa'ad), Yaakov Goldstein, Ministry of Defense, Israel, 1994, p. 30.*



**Document G: “Forefathers of the Israel Defense Forces,” Yaakov Goldstein (1994)**

Jamal Pasha was an extreme Turkish nationalist, hostile to foreigners, an attitude influenced by his religious-Muslim worldview. This, together with the hostility he absorbed from Bahaeddin Bey, whom he met in December 1914, crystallized his negative attitude toward the Yishuv and Zionism.

In December 1914 and January 1915, Jamal Pasha extended Bahaeddin Bey’s policy throughout the land. His decrees included: Abolition of Jewish associations and organizations, the prohibition of the use of Hebrew in the bazaar, the cancellation of the militias, the distribution of weapons collected from Jews to the Arabs.

*Source: Forefathers of the Israel Defense Forces: The Bar Giora and HaShomer Underground Associations 1907-1935 (BeDerech el haYa’ad), Yaakov Goldstein, Ministry of Defense, Israel, 1994, p. 48.*

**Guiding Questions**

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

1. How did Jews handle land disputes before Hashomer came along?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What tactics did Hashomer use to avoid blood feuds?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What factors led to Hashomer's decline?

In the space below answer the following: *What spurred the creation of a Jewish defense force in Palestine?*

