

# DREAMS OF A NATION

Elias Cohen

Translated from the Spanish by Beatriz Fernández-Gamboa Montgomery

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*To my people*



*Shall we end by having a theocracy?*

*Theodor Herzl*

*The Jewish State (1896)*



## *I. The Body*

Ashdod, 25<sup>th</sup> of July 2060

They had been waiting for Detective Konigsberg for over ten minutes at the scene of the crime.

The two young officers who made up the patrol unit were the first ones to attend the call and warn of a potential homicide. They were sweating it out at the door of the *Or Hatora* Yeshiva<sup>1</sup>.

Konigsberg pulled over in his one-seater car, climbed out, and as he walked away, gave it the signal to park. It was nine in the morning and the city was hot, humid and suffocating.

The officers greeted Konigsberg. Rabbi Moshe Benhamu, headmaster of the school, was standing with them.

‘Where’s the body?’ Konigsberg got straight to the point, as usual.

‘Inside, but the religious autho...’

Konigsberg didn’t let the officer finish the warning and was already on his way into the building. Rabbi Benhamu gave him a look of disdain. He trailed after Konigsberg, following him inside with the hope of stopping him from seeing the body before the religious authorities got there.

‘Detective, I wouldn’t want us to get off on the wrong foot. You know very well that you are not to start your investigation until the *hebra kadisha*<sup>2</sup> give you the green light,’ the Rabbi warned Konigsberg, walking behind him.

The detective stopped short, turned to face Benhamu, and stared scornfully into his eyes, then at his densely populated beard, ‘Rabbi, I’ll be in charge of the procedures. That said, you can come with me if it makes you feel better.’

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<sup>1</sup> Centre for the study of the Talmud and Torah.

<sup>2</sup> Burial society.

Rabbi Benhamu took on his offer and waddled after the detective through the school's entrance hall, not quite as swiftly as Konigsberg.

There was nobody inside the building. Teachers and students alike had been sent home. The detective and the rabbi made their way down a corridor with classrooms on either side, sunlight streaming through the half-opened doors. At the end of the hallway, shone a blinking light similar to those old fluorescent tubes that go off when the starters falter.

'It's in there, right?' Konigsberg said as he pointed with his finger.

'Yes, Room 26, the classroom where the light's not working,' Benhamu's said.

The detective stopped in front of the door. He turned sideways, as if he were eavesdropping on someone else's conversation, and went in, pushing the door with the tip of his shoe. Desks were scattered around, the walls were lined with bookshelves full of printed books, and at the end, crowning the room, a white touchscreen the size of a blackboard cluttered with sentences in different colours.

The body lay sprawled on the floor facing up at the foot of the screen next to what must have been his desk. He seemed to have toppled over. There was no indication that there had been use of violence. And yet, a closer look would reveal a different truth.

Indeed, as Konigsberg approached the body, he observed that the victim's shirt was torn and that several buttons were strewn across the floor. The man's hair was dishevelled, some strands had been pulled out and were lying on the ground. His nose was broken, but there were no signs of swelling.

Konigsberg did not touch the body. Instead, he took several three-dimensional photos of the scene with his *saucer*. The machine captured it all: fingerprints, hair samples, bodily fluids and any other biological remains that were in this supposed crime scene. The *saucer* cross-referenced the information with the scientific police database providing a detailed report including a list of possible causes of death; who had been there, possible suspects in the case of murder, and suggestions on how to best go forward with the investigation. The whole process took under three minutes.



Shortly after, the *saucer* projected a notice in a rectangular, shiny, clean and opaque hologram confirming that the victim was Rabbi Yochanan Kaplan, born on the 6<sup>th</sup> of October 1973, 87 years old and a resident of Ashdod. He had died 11 hours 54 minutes ago, at 22:05 as a result of a cardiac arrest. The fingerprints present at the scene of the crime were those of students and school staff, but dated back to over twelve hours ago, save those belonging to Rabbi Benhamu, who had discovered the body and called the police.

The service robots, surveillance cameras inside and outside of the building confirmed all the victim's voice conversations and movements as well as those of the school staff in previous days.

The data pointed to a possible aggravated robbery and as such, advised Detective Konigsberg to investigate all economic variables.

There were no potential suspects. There was a 1.83% chance that Rabbi Benhamu had been the perpetrator, but only because he had been the first to find Rabbi Kaplan's body. It was too small a percentage to be conclusive to the inspectors analysing the information. Among other things, Rabbi Benhamu's psychological and social profile elaborated by the saucer did not detect homicidal instinct or intent towards Rabbi Yochanan Kaplan.

Konigsberg was not satisfied.

'Were the security cameras switched on during the Sabbath?' he asked, knowing the answer.

'Detective, even though it is not forbidden to have them on for security reasons, we usually turn them off because we do not believe the threat to be such as to have reason to violate the holy day of rest. Cameras were not switched on until this morning.' Benhamu replied.

'When did you find the body?'

'I found it this morning. I stayed with him for a while, praying, before making the call. I guess he came here to study last night...'  
Benhamu said as he looked down at the floor, like a shy boy.

'Nobody else was here? The report shows he came straight here from home, perhaps he was with somebody...'

'The yeshiva is a day centre for studies. There are no residents. We also come to study on the Sabbath, but at night everyone goes home.'

Rabbi Kaplan was not seen by anyone during the entire day, and what's more, he told me he would be spending the holy day of rest at home. This is the classroom where he taught and worked, that is why I assume he was here studying.'

'Interesting,' Konigsberg muttered, stroking his greying hair with his fingers.

'What is, Detective?'

'There's no sign of there being a weapon or object that might have been used as such at the time of death. There also aren't any human or robot prints on the body. Still, it's clear that there was physical violence. Somebody or something with sophisticated tools interfered here... Not even the first murder in history was weapon-less,' Konigsberg was thinking out loud, a somewhat ruinous pursuit in Israel.

'Cain killed Abel with...'

'Rabbi, I wasn't talking about that murder... if it ever actually happened,' Konigsberg interrupted, looking up from the body to fix his gaze on Benhamu. 'Have you checked if anything has gone missing? That is, if the motive of this crime might have been a robbery.'

'Everything is where it should be. Nothing has been taken out of this place since Friday midday.'

The pieces did not fit together. Konigsberg looked at the body again and asked, 'Who was the subject?'

Benhamu's eyes opened wide and he replied, taken aback, with the obvious fact, 'Rabbi Yochanan Kaplan!'

'I know that. I mean what did he do, or had he done for a living,' Konigsberg specified.

'I'm surprised you don't know him, Detective. He was the leader of the Committee that adapted all the secular laws to our sacred Torah after the war. In fact, it was called the Kaplan Committee. You could say he is the creator of the current legal system which today rules over us. Many streets and squares have been named after him.'

'Ah, now that you mention it, it does sound familiar... And he worked here, at a yeshiva like this one?' Konigsberg asked whilst he looked once more at Benhamu.

‘Detective, Rabbi Kaplan was not an ambitious man, he only wanted to study the Torah and serve the Jewish people.’

Konigsberg arched his eyebrows, pressed his lips, and said, through his teeth, ‘Pious.’

Benhamu was not amused. ‘Not only have you skipped the protocol for the inspection of a corpse, but I could also report you for the ironic comment you’ve made about a just person, may he rest in peace. You wouldn’t want your words to bring you problems at work, would you Detective?’ Benhamu looked stern, like a teacher punishing a student, and emboldened like someone who knows that the weight of law is on his side, even if he was face to face with a policeman.

‘If only, then I would have an excuse to stop wearing the *kippa* or the *tzitzit katan*<sup>3</sup>, which is even more uncomfortable... especially in this sweltering heat.’ Konigsberg didn’t feel intimidated and spoke as though he could go unpunished for his infractions.

‘Honestly, Detective, I feel sorry for you. You’re a self-hating Jew. Don’t you like what we are now?’ Benhamu toned down.

‘I didn’t move to this country to live in a kosher caliphate.’

Benhamu fell silent. He gave the room a fleeting glance as he fingered the ends of his beard, as though he wanted to change the subject. Konigsberg carried on. He looked at the saucer’s report once more.

‘It appears he widowed six years ago and that two of his older brothers have passed away. Anything unusual about his relatives?’

‘All three of his daughters live in the United States, if you think it convenient, I can break the news.’

Konigsberg nodded.

‘His sisters-in-law and nephews live in Jerusalem. I don’t know them and Rabbi Kaplan didn’t talk much about them.’

‘Tell me, were there any students or members of staff that hated him?’

‘Detective, there is no room for hate under this roof.’

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<sup>3</sup> Undergarment with tassels on the four corners, worn by men in accordance with the commandments in Numbers 15:38-39.

‘He was an important man, he must have had an adversary or enemy.’

‘I find it unlikely. Perhaps this was the work of an Arab trying to steal his bank code.’

‘Rabbi, pending confirmation of any bank transactions, of which I would have been notified were that the case; or if the body had amputated thumbs, or if they had been burnt by a fingerprint copy machine, expensive and not easily available, less so for the purchasing power of Arabs living around here, there are no security videos or a murder weapon around, not even a suspect. So please, don’t use the typical wildcard,’ Konigsberg kept his voice down and continued, ‘Whilst we wait for the *hebra kadisha* to take care of the body, if it hasn’t petrified at this rate, would you mind coming along with me to the station so we can have a chat? You are an authority figure and it seems to me that taking your statement here is lacking in formality and Rabbi, you deserve a more, let’s say, personal treatment.’

‘I’m available with anything that might help with the case, Detective. We are worried, although I’m not sure how much I can contribute to shedding light on this terrible matter.’

‘Thank you, Rabbi. Sorry for insisting but, have you considered that he might actually have quarrelled with someone here?’ Once again, Konigsberg questioned the fraternity of the yeshiva.

‘As I’ve already told you, this is a house of peace.’ Benhamu was irate, almost furious. He was an affable man, in line with his physique. He was stout and it had been a long time since anyone had seen what was happening behind his ashy beard.

Konigsberg, on the other hand, was tall and slim. Although he tended to stoop as he walked, he instilled respect. He had a thin, vertical scar on his brow, a war wound. He always looked shabby, and his apparent apathy towards others created a distance which few people dared to bridge. Not even the offended Rabbi Benhamu.

‘Relax Rabbi,’ Konigsberg said, quickly moving his hand up and down, ‘My job here is to find out what happened and to catch the culprit. I need to cast doubt on everyone. We’ll be more comfortable at

the police station. Just one thing, promise you won't make a complaint about me,' Konigsberg said, winking at Benhamu.

'God will be the one to judge, Detective.'

*Well what's he waiting for?* Konigsberg thought.

Benhamu turned to leave, but Konigsberg was not finished with his inquiries. 'Rabbi, before we leave, would you mind if I had a look at Rabbi Kaplan's desk? I won't touch anything, of course. I just want to take some pictures with the saucer.'

In the past, Konigsberg's question would have been unnecessary, but at present, any notes and belongings of a well-known Rabbi enjoyed certain inviolability.

'As I said, if it helps in the process of the investigation... by all means.' Benhamu's tone was softer and showed his willingness to collaborate.

Kaplan's desk, following the struggle that had presumably taken place a few hours beforehand, was chaotic. A hotchpotch of books, sheets with written notes, notebooks, post-its, fountain pens, tweezers, rulers, protractors, were all mixed and spread out over the table and floor. It became clear at first sight that Rabbi Kaplan was a man who was devoted to his books, and above all, a nostalgic with little or no room for new technologies.

With the saucer tied to his left wrist, Konigsberg took snapshots of everything on the projected screen.

One of Rabbi Kaplan's notebooks was on the edge of the table, about to fall, as though it had been left there by an abrupt movement. The notebook was open on a double page full of scribbles and crossed-out words, loose ideas in different colours. He stopped to read the inscriptions. One stood out, in red and underlined several times. It was meant to be seen:

**"The book no longer preserves us."**

Konigsberg read the sentence carefully and made a mental note.

After capturing images of everything he was interested in, he and Benhamu made their way to the station.

They left the building the same way they came in. Konigsberg led the way, Benhamu followed behind. Outside, the two officers had taken

refuge in the police car, away from the heat. Before they could respond to Konigsberg's requests, the detective and the rabbi got into the back of the car, each one through a different door. The policemen looked over at them, surprised and looking for answers.

'OK guys, take us to the station. Rabbi Benhamu will be making his statement,' Konigsberg commanded as he rolled his sleeve up.

'Sir, according to the procedures...'

'Don't be so stiff, officers, rules are a human invention,' Konigsberg said impassively as he played with his saucer and ordered his one-seater vehicle to go to the station.

The officers looked at each other and shrugged. Rabbi Benhamu was quiet, he looked up and sighed in what seemed to be a prayer of salvation for the detective.

'Don't worry Rabbi, nobody will mistake you for a criminal, the windows are tinted.'

'Detective, I'm more worried about Rabbi Kaplan's death.'

'We're on it, Rabbi,' Konigsberg replied without looking up from the screens that popped out of his device.

Twenty minutes later, as Rabbi Benhamu gave his statement to the official on call, that is, in front of a camera that registered his blood pressure, heart rate, sweating, facial and body expressions, and attitude, Konigsberg was being reprimanded once again by his superior, South District Superintendent, Yossi Pinto. Pinto was a methodical man, obedient and had crafted patience for everything, and one weakness: Detective Abraham "Avi" Konigsberg.

Konigsberg had an established routine for these cases: pretend he was listening to Pinto, nod at the end of every sentence, and when he was finished, say sorry and leave. But Pinto was aware of that strategy.

'Avi, listen to me! Fuck... if you weren't his son you'd already be out on the streets, begging,' Pinto moved around his office, scolding Konigsberg standing in front of the desk.

'Excuse me?' Konigsberg was taken aback, surprised, moved, shaken out of his usual state of indifference.

Pinto moved closer, placing his right hand on Konigsberg's shoulder in a friendly gesture.

‘Avi look, I’m sorry. I know you’re here out of your own merit. You’re a good policeman. But you know your surname helps cover up your bawdy remarks, the way you overstep procedural lines, and what’s worse still, your utmost disrespect of the law and the ruling regime. You could be suspended and put in jail... and you know it.’

Konigsberg nudged his left shoulder to make Pinto’s hand fall off, and took a deep breath. Both stood, looking at each other.

‘Yossi, this case goes beyond established procedures. A rabbi, who’s living history according to Benhamu, has died, and there are signs of violence.’

‘Rabbi Benhamu,’ Pinto rectified.

‘Everything surrounding this case feels strange. Kaplan’s accounts are untouched and nothing was taken from the yeshiva. It’s clear there was violence and that due to his age he died during the struggle. Yet there are no signs of a person or a robot that could have done it. I checked on the way here, the man wasn’t exactly a millionaire, which *a priori* rules out his heirs.’

Pinto perched on his desk and held his face with his right hand, curious about what Konigsberg had to say.

‘What are you suggesting, Avi? Given the information we have, the only motive that occurs to me is an economic one.’

‘Discarded. I insist, there are no biological or cybernetic traces on the corpse. Also, even though Rabbi Kaplan said he’d spend Shabbat at home, his movements indicate that he went to the yeshiva at night. Even so, nobody saw him come in, and the security cameras were off. The patrol has told me that nobody has been to his house since we discovered the body. My intention is to go there as soon as you allow it. We’ll be needing an autopsy too. There’s something else here.’

Pinto crossed his arms.

‘Avi, what you’re saying makes sense. I have to call the city’s Head Rabbi to let him know, if he doesn’t already know by now. People are talking about it, although without the details. The Chief Commissioner has also asked me not to give any official statements until we know what happened. If we sound the alarm I’ll be called to account with theories like yours. As you know, the victim was an institution... they’ll want

this to be resolved as soon as possible. The hebra kadisha has asked us to provide them with the death certificate,' Pinto paused, then continued, 'His house is cordoned off at the moment, give me some time so we can go and investigate. For now, I'm sorry, but I'll have to postpone the autopsy, you know the rabbinate has to give their O.K to this and only if we have enough reasons to deem it necessary.'

Konigsberg nodded and started to leave the room, but Pinto stopped him, 'Avi, I hope I don't get any more complaints about how you skipped the inspection procedures this morning.'

Konigsberg reached the door, and holding the handle with his back towards Pinto, he turned his head and said, 'I'll stick to my job, Yossi.'