

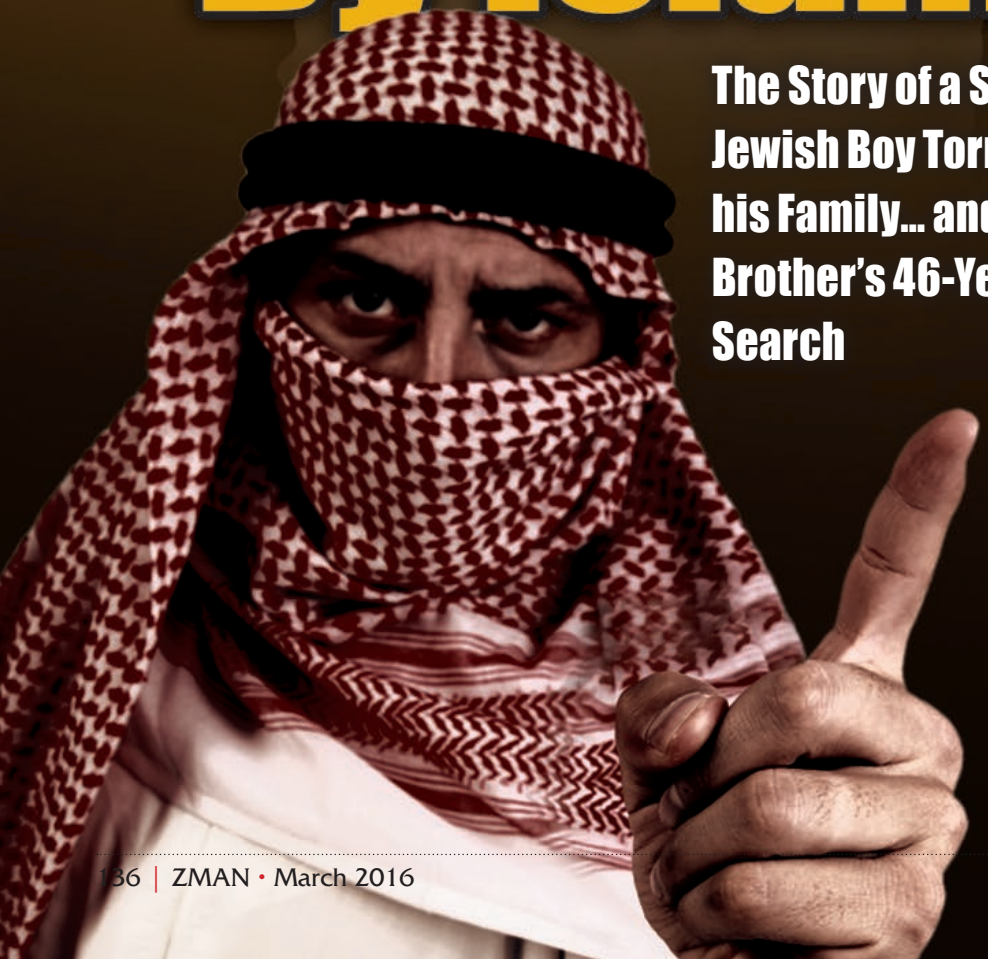


Read the dramatic, heart-wrenching and heartwarming story of brothers divided and reunited. Raised in pre-1948 poverty-stricken Yemen, their situation became so dire that they left home to seek food in a faraway Arab village. There they experienced Arab hospitality... and treachery, when six-year-old Pinchas was forcibly converted and taken away. Though the older brother left for Eretz Yisrael with most of Yemen's Jews in 1949, he never gave up the dream of finding his little brother and being reunited. His dream came true 46 years later. Read their incredible-but-true story.

Snatched By Islam

- Moshe Holender
- Yitzchok Wagschal

The Story of a Small Jewish Boy Torn from his Family... and a Brother's 46-Year Search



Yefet Ben-Tovim sat in the living room of his sister Malka, in their home not far from Tel Aviv. Next to him, the telephone sat on a table. His son Raanan looked at him encouragingly. His nieces and nephews went about their business, but Ben-Tovim was tense with anticipation. Until the call came, it was almost impossible to imagine this was really happening....

It was a Monday night, November 23, 1992. As Ben-Tovim sat waiting for the call, his thoughts brought him back 43 years to another night, when he had first gone to visit his mother in the immigrant absorption camp. He had made aliyah four years earlier, and hadn't seen his mother for almost five years. Bubbling with anticipation, he told the immigration counselor that he would take the bus the very next day to see his family. Along with his mother, the young man expected to find his brother and sister who had also remained behind in Yemen.

To his shock, his little brother was not there.

"Pinchas.... Where is Pinchas?" he demanded to know. His mother and married sister Leah looked at each other with pained expressions. His mother let out a groan of anguish and buried her face in her hands. She could say nothing. Leah took aside her brother Yefet and explained softly that they had not been able to convince the Yemeni authorities to let Pinchas leave the country.

From that moment and until tonight, Ben-Tovim had a singular focus in his life, a mission that his mother charged him with—finding his brother. The words of the *Navi* Yeshaya (58:7) echoed in his head day by day: "*Umi-b'sarcha lo tis'alam—Do not ignore your flesh and blood.*"

At 9:00 PM, the phone rang. Suddenly, everyone in the room snapped to attention and focused their eyes on Ben-Tovim. Taking a deep breath, he picked up the phone and put the receiver to his ear.

"Hello?"

It was his contact in America, Moshe. Moshe told him that in just a moment, he would connect him with his brother Pinchas, who was living in the city of

Ta'izz, Yemen. The brother he had not spoken to for almost half a century....

"*Ahlan wa sahlán, marhaba,*" came the voice over the line in the traditional Arabic greeting of welcome. "*Kayf halak, ya achi?*" How are you, my brother?

Ben-Tovim's pulse began racing. His hands started to shake. But he had to know if this was really his brother.

"What village did we grow up in?" he asked the voice on the telephone, so close and yet so far away.

"Al Wa'rah," answered the man.

"And where did we part?"

"In Jabal Alahtub."

Ben-Tovim began to feel dizzy. He tried to stand, but his legs failed him. Thankfully, his son Raanan was there to catch him as he fainted....

Yefet Ben-Tovim

Yefet Ben-Tovim is a retired schoolteacher from Rosh Ha-Ayin, Israel, but he was born in the small village of Al Akamah, Yemen. After a difficult and turbulent childhood, he came to *Eretz Yisrael* during Operation "*Al Kanfei Nesharim,*" also known as Magic Carpet, at the beginning of 1949.

Ben-Tovim has carried a huge burden with him throughout his life, something few friends and acquaintances knew about. When he was in Yemen, his little brother Pinchas was snatched from his family and forcibly converted to Islam. When his family fled Yemen, there was no choice but to leave Pinchas behind.

Ben-Tovim made it his life's work to find his lost brother, still living in Yemen today, and reunite with him. When *Zman* contacted Ben-Tovim about his dramatic life story, he made a special effort to travel to Yerushalayim to meet with us. During the interview, he shared his story in detail, along with exclusive insights into the quest for his brother that has spanned more than half a century and is still not complete.

A short time ago he published the story of his tragic childhood, as well as his epic search, in the book *Za'akat Ach* [*A Brother's*

Cry]. The book generated a lot of interest in his city. There was a book signing event, and even the mayor attended.

"People came in throngs because it's an authentic story," Ben-Tovim explained to *Zman*. "And it's not just telling a tale—I want to do something. I want to teach *Klal Yisrael* not to abandon your relatives. If even one person is inspired by this story, it will be enough reward for me."

Here, then, we present to you a story the likes of which you've never heard before.

Al Wa'rah, Yemen

1943

Yefet opened his eyes. He saw that the light of dawn had just begun to cast its pale glow into the house, but Ima was already up, stoking the fire and preparing a meager breakfast.

The 10-year-old boy sat up on his thin straw mat, swiftly washed his hands, rubbed his eyes and smoothed out his *payos*, while quietly reciting *Modeh Ani*. Then a sudden, loud and unexpected noise made him jump up in a fright.

Bwa-a-a-ah!

Yefet looked toward the source of the commotion, by the doorway.

"Shoo, get out of here!" his mother hissed, waving a broomstick at the unwelcome intruder. A stray goat, smelling food, had wandered into the home through the open doorway. In fact, the dilapidated building that Yefet's family called home had no doors, only doorways; no windows, but several openings in the wall. It was totally unprotected, open to the wind, sun, rain, heat, cold... as well as any wandering visitors, animal or human, that cared to enter.

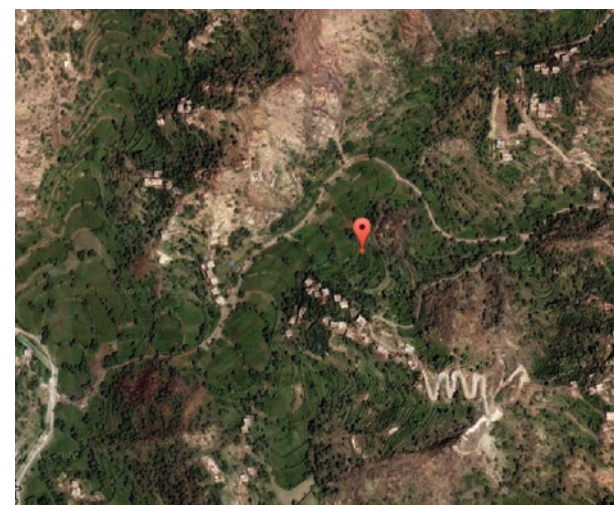
It hadn't always been like this.

Beginnings

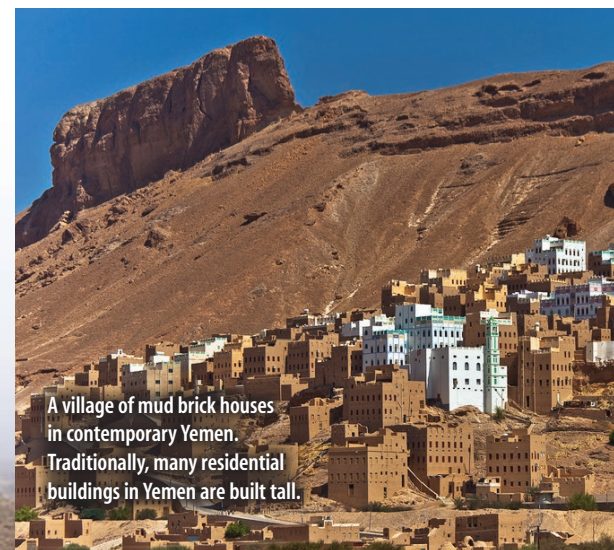
Yefet ben Tovim Brahim was born sometime around 1933-34. There were no official records then, and he did not know his birthday. He grew up in the village of Al Akamah, in the famous Shar'ab region of



View of the remote mountain village of Al Akamah, in the Maqbana region of Yemen, today.



Satellite imagery of Al Wa'rah, Yemen.



A village of mud brick houses in contemporary Yemen. Traditionally, many residential buildings in Yemen are built tall.