

# **"PERACH"**

**A Fairy Tale about a Beautiful Flower**

**Transcript of a lecture given by**

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## PROLOGUE

I didn't win the Israel prize this year – the *PERACH* project did. If the prize would have been given, for that project, to one person, that person would not have been me. It would have been Rony Attar, the person who really started it all, as you will hear in a minute. But Rony has been living in Australia for the past 20 years and he is not here.

If the prize would have been shared between two people, the other one would probably have been Ami Carmeli who is here, and who has been the director of *PERACH* for the last 30 years. He actually did accept the prize on behalf of the *PERACH* organization. If the prize would have been given to three people, I would probably have been included as the third person.

It often happens in science that somebody comes up with a totally crazy and original idea. He is very stubborn, very innovative and extremely original. The idea, like any new idea, is full of holes. He tries to "sell" it to his colleagues. Some of them throw him out of their offices impolitely and some of them listen politely and say "Well, that's very interesting" and that's the end of it.

Until one other person who is not the originator, listens carefully, provides some corrections and modifications and a team is formed, usually between two people who come from different backgrounds, with different and complementary talents, and if they also have a good personal relationship, a beautiful collaboration may emerge. Sometimes the entire project still falls on its face and sometimes it flourishes. And then, after there is a pilot project and a prototype, and the project takes off, a few years later, sometimes yet another person comes and performs very intensive, talented, brilliant, pedantic, efficient work for many, many years and the product ends up influencing the lives of many people, in this case the lives of more than one million citizens of Israel.

I am not here to tell you about science. I am here to tell you a story, or, more precisely, a fairy tale. As you will see, it is a true fairy tale. It is a fairy tale in seven short chapters and I will tell it from my own personal point of view. There may be some inaccuracies but, as you know, when one of the actual participants reports history, it is always a slightly biased history.

Every chapter of the fairy tale has a title. Chapter 1 is about...

## 1. THE PREHISTORY

Rony Attar was born in northern Iraq near the Kurdish area. His father was an educator and a teacher. They immigrated to Israel immediately after the 1948 War of Independence, a family with many children, and lived in one of the tent camps of the Jewish refugees who arrived penniless from Europe or from the Arab countries. The Attar family emerged from it into excellent education. Rony is one year younger than me. In the early 70's he was about 30, a Ph.D. student in computer science at the Weizmann Institute. He was also a Lieutenant-Colonel in the Israeli Army, working on some computer-related topics. He and his wife adopted two children, whom they found, one day, hanging around in the street, not going to school, and being out of the educational institution where they were supposed to have been. The story of these children is long, and will not be told here.

In the official history of the *PERACH* project it used to say "one stormy night Rony Attar went from the Weizmann Institute to his home." Actually, it was not at night, it was in daylight; it was not stormy, it was a sunny morning, but he did find the two kids in the street and he and his wife adopted them and took care of them for a couple of years, brought them home and really changed the lives of these two kids.

And that led Rony, at the end of 1972, to propose a scheme by which university students would be asked, or would be induced, or would be obliged, to serve as a big brother or a big sister to a child from a needy background. The students receive, after all, almost free university education, at the expense of the tax payers. They pay a tuition fee, but the fee is much, much smaller than what it costs to educate them. Rony proposed a scheme by which university students, in return for some reward, not yet defined, would do this and will return something to society. He was running around the Ministry of Education and various other places, proposing the idea. He was very persistent, almost obsessed with the idea, but nobody paid much attention to him.

At the same time, the fall of 1972, Israel Dostrovsky, who was then the President of the Weizmann Institute of Science, called me and asked me to become the Dean of the Feinberg Graduate School of the Institute. I was then almost 32 years old, a Professor of Physics, younger than many graduate students, and he wanted to appoint me as Dean of the Graduate School, quite a brave proposition! I accepted. At the Graduate School, I had a secretary, Mika Ehrenfeld, who was the niece of Chaim Weizmann. Some of the older people of the audience might remember her. She passed away many years ago. Mika was twice my age and she protected me from all the many graduate students who always had something important to say to the Dean. And one day in April 1973, she came to me and said that there was a graduate student who wanted to talk to me. "He wants to ask you for something, but it is not for himself, it is for everybody, and I strongly recommend that you meet him". So Rony walked into my office and that was the beginning.

He came with the idea. I thought that you cannot demand from the students, who are working so hard, to do more. I thought you cannot come to students and say: "You are getting this tuition, a very big reward from the State, and therefore you must do it". But

his idea made sense to me. He emphasized that the world is full of "big brother programs" where adults are helping children from low social-economic backgrounds, but he didn't want such a program, because it is always based on volunteers. With volunteers, the numbers are always small and there is nothing to stop the volunteer from leaving the project after a month or three months, when he is busy, or when there is an examination period, and then the child is essentially abandoned. Rony argued that if we will not give a reward, it is not going to work, and it certainly will not attract large number of students. This was the beginning of a beautiful friendship between two very different people, more-or-less the same age. I took him seriously. I was the first one who accepted the idea and we embarked on a long trip, which brings us to the second chapter of the fairy tale called...

## **2. THE BEGINNING**

Rony wanted to start somewhere and I was Dean of the Graduate School of the Weizmann Institute, so we started at the Weizmann Institute. But, at the Weizmann Institute, we couldn't try the system of fellowships and rewards, because at the Weizmann Institute there was no tuition (and there is still no tuition today) for the graduate students and all of them get fellowships anyhow. But, we were not sure if all the components of this system will work: devoting a fixed number of hours per week to a child, finding the correct children, helping them by unprofessional people (not social workers, but just normal, educated people with a good heart), monitoring what they do, making sure that nothing goes wrong, and verifying that they would do it for the whole year. We had to try a pilot project.

So a letter went out, signed by Joe Gillis, who was then head of the Department of Science Teaching at the Weizmann Institute and by me, as Dean of the Graduate School, to all the faculty, employees and students of the Weizmann Institute, asking them to volunteer. Originally twelve people volunteered and then there were 20 and then 30 and then 40. All of them were members of the Institute: students, professors, technicians and administrative staff. Rony became the volunteer director of the project. His wife Ruti became the coordinator of the volunteers. She was going to the schools, finding the children and the entire plan was tried, for a couple of years, at the Weizmann Institute. But we were already talking at that time, about a nation-wide project with tens of thousands of students. At that time in Israel, there were about Seventy thousand university students, so we had big eyes and big plans.

And then we wanted to try it with students who could receive fellowships, so we crossed the street to the Faculty of Agriculture of Hebrew University, in Rehovot, where undergraduate students paid tuition to Hebrew University. We got a small amount of philanthropic money and found 50 students who were willing to work in Yavne and 50 students who were working in the south part of Rehovot. We offered them fellowships covering about half of their tuition. We enlisted the two mayors, the late Shmuel Rechtman of Rehovot and Meir Sheerit of Yavne (who was later Minister in several

Ministries – Finance, Justice, Interior and Education), and they became excited and joined the group of enthusiasts advocating the project. These 50 students worked beautifully in each place – the teachers were happy, the parents were happy, the children were happy, the students were happy receiving the fellowship and the project was working well. But nobody wanted to give us money to go for a larger number of students and we were stuck with this number of 50 tutors-mentors.

It was at the time that the first breakthrough came, when we convinced the Delek energy company, which was giving student fellowships in various universities, to allocate all their fellowships to us. The late Avraham Agmon, who was then the CEO of Delek, and earlier the Director General of the Ministry of Finance, was very instrumental in this. Rony had the *chutzpah* to force me to call Agmon, whom I did not know at all, and to invite him to my office and demand that whatever fellowships they give, will be offered only to the students who are tutors. Agmon came to meet me, listened, was convinced and agreed to the “deal”. So we could move forward and begin to expand a bit.

It was time to name the project. For weeks we had been trying to invent a good name and played with various suggestions. And then, while driving one day back home from Haifa, and being trained as a physicist who believes in simplicity, I said to myself: "This is about tutoring or mentoring, which is "Chonchut" in Hebrew; this is a project. So the Hebrew name should simply be "Proyekt Chonchut" (a tutoring project). The acronym of "Proyekt Chonchut" in Hebrew is *Peh Resh Chet*, which is pronounced "**PERACH**", and that is the Hebrew word for flower, so who needs a better name"? That is how the simple and beautiful name of the project came about: **PERACH** which, in Hebrew, is both the acronym of “tutoring project” and the word for Flower.

We were also looking for a logo and we didn't have money to pay someone to create a nice logo. Rony with his typical energy said: let us find some professional artist or graphic designer and ask him to volunteer. We decided to approach the wonderful cartoonist Zeev (Farkash), who had a daily caricature in *Haaretz*. I wrote to him, explained what we were doing, and with great *chutzpah* told him that we want him to draw us a picture of a big flower helping a small flower and that will be the logo. He did it immediately, gave us a few sketches, never even dreamed about being paid, and that is how the logo of **PERACH** came about. He actually met Rony and gave him a couple of versions for this logo and we chose one of them, which has been our logo ever since. So now we had a logo, a name, and 50 students but we did not have the money.



By then it was 1976 and the Minister of Education was Aharon Yadlin, the father of the current General Yadlin, the head of military intelligence of the IDF. Aharon Yadlin, who is now over 80, liked the project. He was the first Minister of Education who listened to the idea. I invited to my house, here on the Weizmann Institute campus, Minister Yadlin, Eliezer Shmueli, who was then the Director-General of the Ministry, the Mayor of Rehovot, the Mayor of Yavne, the school principals where the students were helping, the teachers and some of the students who participated in the project. It was Friday evening. Of course, we did not invite the children themselves. We talked till about midnight, telling the Minister and his top people about the project. They were very excited and, before Yadlin left my house, he promised the first million Israeli pounds, which was enough for a few hundred fellowships.

Later, there were stories that I didn't let him out of the house until he promised the million and that we had given him so much whisky that he had no choice. All of these stories are, of course, not true, but to his great credit, Yadlin promised (and delivered) the first million. Incidentally, today this wouldn't work. If the Minister of Education would promise a million to such a project, we would never see the money, because there would be all kinds of controllers and lawyers in the way, who would say that there is a conflict of interest, that you have to go out for bids, that perhaps there are no clear criteria, and that it must be approved by a dozen committees and legal advisors and auditors. The money would never arrive. But Yadlin promised, and in those days it worked, allowing us to move on to hundreds of tutors in the following couple of years, which brings us to Chapter 3 in this story and that was.....

### **3. THE FORMULA**

At that time, we already knew that we were on the right path, but we needed a formula and the great thing about the formula is that everybody wins. In other words, the child wins a tutor, the tutor wins a fellowship and the school wins help for the children, who are behind. But we also needed to identify the children. And the question was: to which children are we aiming the project? The answer was that we are aiming the project at those among the lower part of the achievers, who have a good potential. In other words, not to children who suffer from learning disabilities, and not to children who need professional help, because a normal university student of physics or history cannot provide professional help. But to children who grow up in homes where the parents cannot give them what other parents can give. They may grow up in a home without a book, or without a toy, or with a mother who is on drugs or a father who is in jail, and there were all sorts of terrible cases. It was to these children with potential, with talent, at whom we were aiming. So we were actually defining it as the top half of the bottom one-third, if you wish to have a mathematical definition, but in real life, of course, it doesn't work that way.

It was also important that the fellowship, the stipend, per hour of work, would be big enough to attract the student, but not so large that it would compete with the salary that a

teacher gets for working with a full class for one hour. The last thing we wanted was to have the teachers' unions as enemies of the project. It turned out that between the minimum needed for attracting the students and the maximum allowed by comparing to the teachers, there was very little room with which to play and that really defined the size of the stipend. No matter how we looked it, we could afford about half of the annual university tuition, perhaps one third, perhaps two thirds, but not much less or much more. We had to fight continuously with the attempts of the Minister of Finance to reduce the stipend and with the attempts of good-hearted people who wanted to increase it. We knew that, if we increase it, within one year, we will have all the teachers' unions as the strongest enemies of the project. We also knew that if we decrease it, few students will join.

We did create enemies right and left. But that comes in the next chapter. Rony, who was still the volunteer director of the project, by that time, established a system: every 50 students and their 50 children had one coordinator, who was monitoring them. The coordinator was usually a student who was a *PERACH* tutor in a previous year. He or she paired the child with the student, made sure that the work was done and that the stipend was paid at the end of the year, after the student finished an entire year of helping the child, and not in advance. It was crucial that there would be no cheating and no laziness and no abandoning children in the middle of the year.

It was also at that time that we determined that there are no clear rules about what the student must do with the child. It is not only, or not at all, helping with the child's studies. Yes, the student can help with homework, but the student may also take the child to his university, showing it to a child who has never seen a university, or take the child to a museum or to the theater or for a trip, and groups of students were having parties with the children. Some of these children had never had a birthday party, and the students were helping them to create a birthday party for several of them. And on and on and on, there were many additional activities, and we decided never to define that the purpose was to improve the grades in Mathematics, or in English or in something like this. The purpose was ill-defined and that was the charm of the project.

Our favorite expression for our goal was to see a spark in the eyes of the children, to see a smile and to see some kind of response that you wouldn't see otherwise. We wanted higher self esteem and stronger motivation, for the children. It is very difficult to measure such things, and you will ask, if you are scientific minded like I am, how you measure it. The answer is: you don't. Yes, we did studies and evaluations, but, at the end, you just get a feel for it and you see how many schools and how many teachers and how many social workers are asking you for more students and more students and more students as mentors, which leads us to chapter 4 about.....



#### 4. THE EXPANSION

So we were expanding, but in order to expand we needed to convince the universities to allow us to operate in their campuses. So far, we only had the School of Agriculture of the Hebrew University, across the street from the Weizmann Institute. We went to Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The President of Hebrew University, Abe Harman, possibly the best President ever of that University, did not want to hear about us. Not only that, but many of the professors in the School of Education there, became vicious. "How can a student of physics help a child? You have to be a student of social work or educational psychology." I was furious when I heard such nonsense. Well, how can a student of physics be a parent or an older brother of a child – is that allowed? There were very strong objections from professors of education and professors of social work. They felt that they had a monopoly on helping children. It got to the point that the President of the Hebrew University called the head of the school of education and said: "Can you arrange that a paper be written for me proving that the project is bad?" And you will not believe it, but a paper was written "proving that the project was bad". The paper included a high statistics of four cases. They interviewed four children and four tutors, and two of the children said that the tutor was so good, that they were sorry that he left at the end of the year. The conclusion of the paper was that fifty percent of the children were damaged by the separation from the student. Truly unbelievable, but it happened exactly in that way.

The President of Tel Aviv University refused to even take my phone calls because he knew why I was calling him. He was always busy. It was only when Michael Sela, then President of the Weizmann Institute, gave a dinner party for the 60<sup>th</sup> birthday of Ephraim Katzir, then President of Israel, that I found myself seated next to that President of Tel Aviv University, and I didn't let him leave the dinner table before we fixed an appointment. Tel Aviv University, the largest in Israel, but also with the most affluent student population, has always remained the most problematic in the *PERACH* family.

But the real hero was Joe Tekoa, the man who was earlier Israel's Ambassador to the UN and later the President of Ben Gurion University in the Negev. He embraced us with open arms and, to this day, Ben Gurion University is the strongest participant in *PERACH* and has the largest number of tutors.

By 1978 we had 2000-plus students and we went to the Education Committee of the Knesset, in order to convince them that this should become a bigger project. I made a presentation and the representative of *Vatat*, (the very powerful Planning and Budgeting Committee of the Council of Higher Education) told me and the members of the Knesset Committee that I didn't know what I was talking about. He said that the role of universities is to teach and to perform research and not to help children. His name was Gedalia Yaacobi - he will become, in a minute, one of the heroes of our story.

Gedalia Yaacobi was one of the paratroopers who came from Israel to Europe during the Second World War, in order to link with leftover Jewish groups under the Nazi regime. He was a kibbutznik, a real idealist, a wonderful man. He was then the Director General

of the Council of Higher Education and of *Vatat*. This wonderful man, who never finished high school, but was a very intelligent, self-educated man, told me, the scientist, the Professor, the Dean of the Graduate School, that the role of the universities is not to help children but only to do research and teaching. I was telling him that we can also, on the side, help children.

So that was the end of the meeting at the Knesset. No one listened to me. The other thing that happened that year was that Rony Attar left. Until then, he was spending a substantial fraction of his time as a volunteer director of the project, with no remuneration. I was also a full volunteer, but I devoted less time than Rony to this. Both of us were never paid one penny for this work. Rony finally got his Ph.D. in Computer Science and went to the U.S. for a Post Doctoral period. We appointed Ami Carmeli as the first formal director of **PERACH** and Ami today is still the first and only director of **PERACH** and he carried the project on his shoulders for thirty years. More about him in a minute.

Moshe Rishpon was the leader of what used to be called the Youth Activities section of the Weizmann Institute. He developed numerous extra-curricular science programs for talented children who love science. As his unit was the only one at the Institute dealing directly with children, it was natural that he would become the administrative host for the **PERACH** office. He embraced the project from the very beginning, and in his very tiny office, which some of you may remember, he allocated a portion of the office for the national central headquarters of the project, consisting of two, and later three, people. The whole thing was done in a very pioneering way, without any resources. Michael Sela, as President of the Weizmann Institute allowed us to do all of it here at the Institute, we reached the two thousand students and two thousand children mark and Ami Carmeli became the first official director. The Weizmann Institute took upon itself the full legal responsibility of the project, without anyone else funding this risky angle or covering it in any other way, and it became a full fledged national project, carried out in all other universities, managed from our Institute. Which leads us to chapter 5, describing...

## 5. THE BREAKTHROUGH

Several events, seemingly unrelated to **PERACH**, happened at the same time. In 1979, Zevulun Hammer, the new Minister of Education, asked me to become the Chairman of *Vatat* (the Planning and Budgeting Committee of the Council of Higher Education). This is the body which distributes all Government funding in Israel to all Institutions of higher education and authorizes the creation of new Universities, faculties or professional schools. Now, this appointment had many other consequences, in my own life, to *Vatat*, and to the higher education system, but among other things, it made it very easy for the leaders of **PERACH** to reach the Chairman of *Vatat*. All that was needed was, for one of them, to look in the mirror.

But something equally important happened in those same years. I became the boss of the said Gedalia Yaacobi, the Director General of *Vatat*. In 1979, his daughter, a university

student in Haifa, became a tutor for **PERACH**. She met, as a tutor, a young student from Kiryat Shmoneh, who was also a tutor, they got married, and they had a baby, the first Yaacobi grandson.

Now the situation has changed completely. The Chairman of *Vatat* was one of the originators of **PERACH** and the Director-General under him, was the grandfather of a baby that was born through **PERACH** and he became a total enthusiast for the project. So with these two profound developments, of course, it was much easier to push the project and its budget. But you have to understand that these were the years of hyperinflation and severe budget cuts: In 1980 we had one hundred percent inflation per year, then two hundred percent, and finally, in 1984, four hundred percent annual inflation. The populist Minister of Finance, Yoram Aridor wanted to "give everything to the people", printing money, and essentially doing everything in order to destroy the higher education system. These were the most difficult years in the history of higher education in Israel, the early eighties, and we were struggling in every direction but also in **PERACH**.

And then, in 1982, it was time for a new public commission to decide on the level of the university tuition fees. Now, the universities desperately needed money, the tuition was very low because inflation eroded it, and I believed, as Chairman of *Vatat*, that a tuition increase is an absolute must, for the university system. The students objected to it, as always, and Minister Aridor who wanted "*Leheitiv im Ha'am*" (to make good to the people) also objected to it. The challenge was how to overcome this obstacle. And here came the gimmick that gave the big boost to **PERACH**. It is one of the rare situations in life in which everybody wins.

I came to Mr. Aridor with the strong support of Mr. Hammer, the Minister of Education, and I said that we needed a new commission to determine the tuition level. He smiled at me and actually wanted to reduce the tuition. I said that the commission had to be headed by a politician. This is how the tradition was at that time. I suggested that the politician should be somebody who represents a layer of society that had difficulties in getting higher education and would definitely not do anything to harm people of modest means. And so Aridor said "Whom should we choose?" and I said: "Perhaps Moshe Katzav." Moshe Katzav was then the Deputy Minister of Housing, from the *Likud*, the same party as Aridor. Moshe Katzav himself was a university graduate and came from a modest background and, as you know, he was earlier the Mayor of Kiryat Malachi and later the President of Israel.

I came to Moshe Katzav and I said, "Look, what I really want is to double the tuition, but to offer all the increase back to any student who wants to join **PERACH** and is willing to give his time to these low income children. And those who don't want it, too bad, they will have to pay the higher tuition. If you cannot devote four hours a week to a needy child, it means that you have enough money for paying the higher tuition. It has nothing to do with whether you are rich or poor – if you are willing to help a child, no matter how rich or poor you are, you get this fellowship. In this way, no one who is willing to help will be hurt and we do not have to worry about the others. But the government must guarantee that there would be fellowships for absolutely anyone who wanted to do it."

In this way, I thought, we reach all the objectives in one move: We increase the tuition, we add income to universities, we help many needy children, no student who is willing to volunteer will be harmed at all, and the need for fellowship will convince many more students to join and help. A simple miracle solution.

Katzav accepted. He became the Chairman of the commission on tuition, being the champion of the poor and needy, and to everybody's shock, the commission decided to double the tuition, and to offer a substantial **PERACH** fellowship to whoever wanted it. Within two years, the number of students participating in **PERACH** increased from about 5,000 to 10,000, and later to higher numbers. Only thanks to **PERACH** it was possible to increase the tuition. The student organizations could not oppose it because how can you oppose such a thing? And Aridor could not oppose it – nobody could oppose it, it passed quietly, there were no demonstrations, and we were really on our way, with a very major breakthrough. Yaacobi and Hammer were among the heroes of this story. They helped and pressed and we made it. Katzav collaborated willingly. He was really "the tool" in the plot, and Aridor ended up being the one who was "fooled", to the benefit of the children and of the higher education system and to the detriment of nobody. This was done, of course, not for the benefit of a person, but for the benefit of the entire system. Which leads us to chapter 6 about...

## 6. THE LONG MARCH FORWARD

Twenty Five years have passed since then. The numbers increased, Ami Carmeli has built a wonderful organization. The headquarters have been in the Weizmann Institute of Science all those years. Ami runs the National Headquarters with less than ten people, for a project with tens of thousands of students! An incredible example of efficiency and public service! The system is still as it was: every 50 students and 50 children have a coordinator. Now some of the students, about 25% of them, are not doing one-on-one tutoring or mentorship, but more elaborate projects of teaching special groups or classes or helping in this or that, too many different projects to be described here. There are other sources of income but, by and large, the main source is the government, using a small part of the extra tuition that it receives.

The Weizmann Institute is still the host Institution to the project and to its National Headquarters, and in the last six years **PERACH** is run, within the Weizmann campus, from the Davidson Institute of Science Education, the educational arm of the Weizmann Institute. I am proud to have the central **PERACH** office a few doors down from my own office, and I enjoy walking past our beloved logo, whenever I enter or leave my office.

A couple of years ago we reached 30,000 tutors and about 50,000 children, because some of the assignments of the students have more than one child per tutor. When you count, over the last 35 years, the total number of tutors and the total number of children, it adds up to approximately one million people, in a country of seven million, not counting the school teachers and the parents of the children. If you add those, you may perhaps reach

close to two millions. So **PERACH** really touched the lives of an enormous fraction of the population of Israel, not only helping needy children, but also helping needy students and also exposing certain students, who would never be aware of the problems that exist in society, to these problems. The children and the students are Jews and Arabs, religious and secular, immigrants and Israeli born, in big cities and in small towns, all layers of society. Truly, everybody is winning: the government and the universities won extra tuition; **PERACH** is not an expense, it is a source of income from that point of view. Economically speaking, the only losers are those students who have to pay higher tuition, because they are not willing to devote four hours a week to a child. And these are the only losers of the entire scheme. But even they are not big losers and they do so out of their own will. No one is forcing them.

**PERACH** has a management committee, always headed by the current Director General of *Vatat*, which provides most of the budget, and with representatives of the Ministry of Education, the Universities, the Weizmann Institute and the student associations. This committee is the *de facto* Board of Directors, monitoring the project and supervising its director. We also have a national **PERACH** council, essentially a general assembly of “share holder” Ministries, Institutions and Organizations. Except for my six years as Chair of *Vatat*, I have been serving as the Chair of the **PERACH** council, continuously, for over 30 years.

In Israel, “**PERACH**” has become a word like Xerox, which is used even if it is another copying machine or Frigidaire, often used even if it is GE or Amana refrigerator. Many people are doing all sorts of additional social projects and they say “we are doing **PERACH**”, though they are not connected to us. We all know that success has many parents, while failure is an orphan. **PERACH** must be successful, because many people, who were not at all around, when we started, claim now that they invented **PERACH**. The ultimate chutzpah was a member of the Knesset from the Liberal Party, by the fortunate name of Dr. Yehuda Perach from Netanya, who claimed in public, in the 1980's, that he invented this project and it is named after him... He never had anything to do with starting and building the project and we never heard of him until a decade later! There are several people, who came up, this year, when the Israel prize for **PERACH** was announced, and claimed that they started it or invented it. Some of them were among the first active people in one university or another, and they did help, some more and some less, at some stage. They should all be thanked. Others were just claiming credit for things that never happened. But it all started here at the Weizmann Institute, and you have now heard the full story.

My own greatest personal reward was on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of **PERACH**. We had a big ceremony and party in the Memorial Plaza here on the Weizmann Institute campus. I always waited to see a student **PERACH** tutor, who himself or herself was a child assisted by **PERACH**. A young woman student from Bar-Ilan University came to the microphone and said: "I have been a **PERACH** tutor for the last two years. This year I am a coordinator of 50 tutors. Twenty years ago, as a child, I received a tutor from **PERACH**, and that is what enabled me to reach the university." That, for me, was the greatest moment in my 35 years with this wonderful enterprise. Very few dry eyes

remained among the large gathered audience, at that moment. Which brings us to our seventh and final chapter of the story:

## 7. FLOWERS AND THORNS

In the last few years, Ami Carmeli has been traveling around the world and helping to establish clones of **PERACH** in many different countries, a so-called "**PERACH** international". It is a wonderful export of Israel. There are sister projects from Chile to Singapore and in many other places.

For 15 years, we have been giving annual prizes to the most outstanding twelve tutors, all of whom perform beyond the call of duty in very difficult cases, with incredible devotion. They have very moving personal stories, and it is the most wonderful ceremony of the year. The prizes are named after Avraham Agmon, who gave us the first fellowships, on behalf of the Delek Company.

And now **PERACH** won the Israel Prize: **PERACH**, the organization, the project, not any one of us personally. This is certainly a great distinction for the project, for the idea, for the execution and also for the host Institution, the Weizmann Institute of Science, that went far beyond its normal mandate, and far beyond the call of duty, to help the children and the students.

But the State Comptroller and the lawyers and the bureaucrats don't like us. They want to take out **PERACH** for a bidding process. Perhaps some commercial manpower company can run it cheaper. Weizmann, Schmeizmann, let us do it cheaper. Perhaps we can have a coordinator for every 100 students, not every 50? Perhaps we can run a national project of 30,000 students from a headquarters of less than 10 people? I would like to see the company that would give the project so many resources, attention, quality and love, as the Weizmann institute does.

The lawyers do not understand why **PERACH** is not a separate legal entity. Why is the Weizmann Institute doing it? But, if it would become a separate legal entity, the Ministry of Education and the Council of Higher Education would not be allowed by the same lawyers to guide the policy of **PERACH**, because they fund it and therefore cannot both fund it and receive the funds. Perfect legalistic logic, in direct conflict with any common sense. How can you run such a project without the guidance of the bodies, which are in charge of the universities, on one hand, and the school system, on the other? This distorted logic, typical to Government lawyers and accountants, would have never allowed **PERACH** to exist in the first place.

The state comptroller does not understand why Ami Carmeli is traveling around the world to establish **PERACH** in other countries, even though he is doing it entirely at the expense of the people who invite him. We know that in Israel, traveling abroad is almost a crime against humanity, even if it costs nothing to the taxpayer, and, especially if it

gives excellent international publicity and image to Israeli society. They now say that by going abroad, he is not investing enough time in running **PERACH** here. One can hardly say something more stupid.

So, on one hand, this country is developing an acute case of insanity, with all of these lawyers and auditors, and, on the other hand, **PERACH** won the Israel Prize, and won the prize for the "Council for Quality in Government". **PERACH** is being praised everywhere for being one of the most efficient organizations in Israel, and at the same time, we have endless friction and difficulties with the various ministries and bureaucracies.

That is the sweet and sour end of our story, at this time. Except that I learned something from Ami Carmeli, a few days ago, that I didn't know. I thought that we were three people who did it – Rony Attar, Ami Carmeli and I. But Ami said that **PERACH** is really successful because we followed the advice of three other, more famous, Jews.

The first one is King Solomon who in the Book of Proverbs says in Hebrew:

חנוך לנער על פי דרכו  
Or in English,

***"Educate the child in his own way"***.

The second one was Karl Marx who said:

***"From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs"***

And the third was Milton Friedman who said:

***"There is no free lunch."***

It is the combined wisdom of King Solomon, Karl Marx and Milton Friedman, which has created this project, of which we are extremely proud.

Thank you very much.