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Ariel Sharon

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Introduction

Ariel Sharon was a man who inspired both deep admiration and fierce condemnation—a figure whose very name is synonymous with controversy in the modern history of Israel. Throughout his life, Sharon embodied the paradoxes of a nation shaped by conflict, struggle, and the search for security. By turns seen as a savior and a villain, a hawk and ultimately a pragmatist, Sharon's story is one that intersects with the critical events and most turbulent decades of the Israeli state.

Born into a world marked by uncertainty and violence, Sharon rose from his modest beginnings in a small agricultural settlement to become one of the most powerful and polarizing leaders Israel has ever known. His early years in the Haganah and later, his exploits on the battlefield—as both a daring commander and sometimes insubordinate strategist—set the stage for a career that would see him leave an indelible mark on Israel's military and political landscape.

As a military leader, Sharon came to represent both the relentless drive for survival and the tragic costs of war. Stories of his courage and ingenuity became legend—none more so than his historic crossing of the Suez Canal in 1973, which turned the tide of the Yom Kippur War. Yet, his legacy was forever complicated by actions that drew international ire and enduring resentment, such as the bloody reprisal raids of the 1950s and accusations of responsibility for civilian suffering during military campaigns.

Sharon's transition to politics heralded a new phase, but not a less contentious one. He became a fervent advocate for Israeli settlements, fundamentally shaping the geography and politics of the region—policies that cemented his status as a hero to some, a roadblock to peace for others. His rise to Prime Minister saw him facing some of the nation's most daunting challenges, including escalating violence, profound national division, and the seismic decision to disengage from Gaza—an act that shocked many of his staunchest supporters and critics alike.

Ultimately, Ariel Sharon's life was cut short by illness at a moment when his influence was perhaps at its zenith. He left behind a legacy that continues to fuel passionate debate, reflecting the unresolved tensions of the Middle East itself. To understand Sharon's journey is to engage with the hard questions facing Israel and its neighbors—questions of identity, security, justice, and the very possibility of peace.

This biography seeks not to pass judgment but to unravel the complexity of Ariel Sharon's path: from the fields of Kfar Malal to the office of Prime Minister, from military heroism to political upheaval, from settlement champion to unexpected architect of

withdrawal. Above all, it explores the making of a man—and a leader—whose life story is inseparable from that of his country, and whose choices continue to echo through the corridors of power and the streets of the Middle East.

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CHAPTER ONE: Origins: Childhood in Kfar Malal

The village of Kfar Malal sits nestled in the central coastal plain of what was then Mandatory Palestine, a patchwork quilt of dusty earth, verdant citrus groves, and eucalyptus trees brought in to drain the swamps. It was here, on February 26, 1928, that Ariel Scheinerman, the future Ariel Sharon, was born into a world rapidly changing and rife with both promise and peril. This was not a city teeming with life, but a small, determined agricultural settlement, a moshav ovdim, founded just a few years prior by pioneers driven by a fervent belief in rebuilding a national homeland through labor on the land.

Kfar Malal was typical of the settlements that dotted the landscape during the Third Aliyah, a wave of Jewish immigration that sought to transform the arid land and establish a self-sufficient economy. Life was undeniably hard. The soil, while potentially fertile, often needed significant work to yield crops. The climate was challenging, the infrastructure basic, and the constant threat of disease or unrest simmered beneath the surface of daily life.

Ariel's parents, Shmuel and Dvora Scheinerman, were among these early pioneers. They had arrived from Russia, drawn by the Zionist ideal and seeking refuge from the pogroms and limitations of their homeland. Shmuel was a man of considerable education and intellect, trained in agriculture and law. Dvora was a strong-willed woman from a background of farming, practical and deeply attached to the land. Their decision to settle in Kfar Malal, to embrace the physical demands of farming, represented a profound commitment to this new life and the Zionist project.

They were not typical farmers in the traditional sense. Shmuel, with his intellectual background, and Dvora, with her independent spirit, stood out somewhat even among the determined residents of the moshav. They brought a blend of European culture and pioneering grit, instilling in their only child a unique combination of intellectual curiosity and a deep-seated connection to the soil and the practicalities of rural life.

Growing up in Kfar Malal meant a childhood deeply connected to the rhythms of nature and the demands of the farm. For young Ariel, the world was defined by the boundaries of the moshav, the changing seasons dictating daily activities, and the constant buzz of agricultural work. The smell of turned earth, the scent of orange blossoms in spring, the sticky juice of fallen fruit – these were the sensory landmarks of his earliest years.

Life in a moshav was a collective endeavor, emphasizing cooperation and mutual aid among the families. While each family worked its own plot and managed its own

household, there was a strong sense of community interdependence. Tools were shared, help was offered during planting and harvest, and community decisions were made together. This environment fostered a sense of shared destiny and responsibility, lessons young Ariel absorbed from his earliest interactions.

The Scheinerman household, like others in Kfar Malal, was characterized by discipline and hard work. Shmuel and Dvora expected their son to understand the value of labor and contribute where he could. While Ariel was just a child, the ethos of diligence and perseverance was ever-present. He would have seen his parents rising before dawn, working tirelessly in the fields, facing setbacks from weather or pests, and pushing through with unwavering determination.

The house itself was likely modest, built for practicality rather than luxury. Survival and building the future were the priorities. Comforts were few, and life demanded resilience. This Spartan environment, where resourcefulness and toughness were necessary virtues, undoubtedly shaped Ariel's early understanding of the world. He learned that things were earned through effort and that challenges were to be met head-on.

Education in the moshav would have been basic but focused. There was likely a small schoolhouse where the children of the community gathered. The curriculum would have included foundational subjects but also a strong emphasis on Zionist values, Hebrew language, history, and the importance of manual labor and connection to the land. Learning was not just academic; it was tied directly to the purpose of their lives in Palestine.

For a child in Kfar Malal during the 1930s, playtime was often intertwined with the natural world and the activities of the moshav. Running through the orchards, playing in the dirt roads, perhaps helping (or pretending to help) with small tasks on the farm – these were his likely pastimes. The concept of a separate, structured "childhood" with abundant toys and leisure activities was a foreign one compared to the realities of pioneer life.

Being an only child in this setting meant that Ariel received focused attention from his parents. This could have fostered a degree of independence and self-reliance, but also perhaps a certain intensity in the parent-child relationship. Shmuel and Dvora, having invested so much of themselves in their new life, likely projected many of their hopes and values onto their son. Their intellectual rigor and demanding standards would have been a constant influence.

The wider political climate of Mandatory Palestine was never far away, even in the relative isolation of a moshav like Kfar Malal. The simmering tensions between the Jewish Yishuv, the Arab population, and the British Mandate authorities occasionally flared into violence. While a young child in the 1930s might not have fully grasped the

complexities of the situation, the atmosphere of uncertainty and the need for vigilance were palpable.

His parents, like other residents of the moshav, would have been acutely aware of the security situation. While Kfar Malal itself might not have been a frequent target, nearby roads or settlements could be vulnerable. The knowledge that they lived on the frontier, relying on their own preparedness and the nascent community defense structures, was an inherent part of daily life. This instilled a sense of being on guard, a necessity that would become a defining characteristic of Sharon's later life.

Stories circulated within the community – tales of previous waves of immigration, of struggles against harsh conditions, and of encounters with adversaries. These narratives, passed down from adults to children, formed a kind of oral history that reinforced the pioneering spirit and the understanding that their presence in the land required strength and determination. Ariel would have absorbed these stories, internalizing the idea that their hold on the land was hard-won and needed to be defended.

The physical landscape of Kfar Malal itself contributed to his formation. The open fields, the sense of space, the clear sky – these elements contrasted with the densely populated areas his parents had left behind. It was a landscape that demanded physical engagement, that rewarded persistence, and that offered a sense of rootedness for those willing to work it. Sharon's lifelong attachment to the land, particularly his later love for his Sycamore Ranch in the Negev, can perhaps be traced back to these early, visceral connections forged in Kfar Malal.

The moshav structure, with its emphasis on collective responsibility and self-governance within the community, also provided a micro-level example of leadership and decision-making. While not involved himself, young Ariel would have witnessed the adults debating issues, solving problems, and organizing community efforts. This early exposure to how a group functions and makes choices, even on a small scale, was part of the backdrop to his childhood.

His parents' home was a place where books were valued and discussions were common. Shmuel, despite the grueling physical labor, maintained his intellectual pursuits. This dual emphasis on practical work and intellectual engagement created a household environment that was perhaps more complex than the simple agricultural setting might suggest. It was a place where the idealism of Zionism met the practical realities of establishing a life from scratch.

Ariel's relationship with his father, Shmuel, was reportedly a complex one. Shmuel was a man of high standards and perhaps not easily satisfied, a trait that might have pushed his son to constantly strive and prove himself. Dvora, on the other hand, was seen as fiercely protective and practical, the grounded force in the family. The

dynamic between these two strong personalities and their only child undoubtedly played a crucial role in shaping the boy's character.

Childhood illnesses were a real threat in this era, and access to sophisticated medical care was limited. The resilience required to simply survive and stay healthy in a challenging environment added another layer to the toughness that characterized the pioneer generation. This constant low-level struggle for health and security was part of the fabric of daily life.

As the 1930s progressed, the political climate grew increasingly volatile. The Arab Revolt of 1936-1939 brought increased attacks on Jewish settlements and transportation. While Kfar Malal might have been spared the worst of the direct violence compared to more isolated locations, the heightened tension and the visible preparations for self-defense would have been impossible for a growing boy to ignore.

He would have seen men in the moshav training, perhaps rudimentary weapons being kept, and heard conversations filled with concern and determination. The innocent world of childhood in the fields began to intersect with the harsher realities of living in a contested land. The need for physical strength, courage, and preparedness moved from abstract concepts discussed by adults to tangible realities shaping the environment.

The Scheinerman family's background also meant they were deeply aware of the history of persecution faced by Jews in Europe. The rising tide of anti-Semitism in the 1930s, culminating in the horrors of the Holocaust unfolding during his adolescence, provided a constant, unspoken context for their lives in Palestine. Building a safe haven, a place where Jews could defend themselves, was not just an abstract ideal; it was a matter of survival.

This confluence of factors – the demanding physical environment, the values of hard work and self-reliance instilled by his parents and community, the unique dynamic of being an only child of intellectual pioneers, and the ever-present backdrop of security concerns in Mandatory Palestine – formed the crucible in which Ariel Scheinerman was shaped during his childhood years in Kfar Malal.

He was a child of the moshav, grounded in the soil and the practicalities of life. He was the son of immigrants who carried the weight of Jewish history and the fervent hope of building a new future. The seeds of his later decisiveness, his toughness, and his complex relationship with both the land and the concept of security were sown in these formative years, long before he donned a military uniform or entered the halls of power. Kfar Malal was more than just his birthplace; it was the foundation upon which the controversial figure of Ariel Sharon would eventually be built.

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