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Without Bounds

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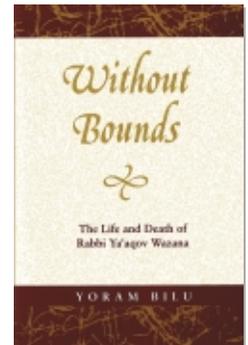
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11

“He Was Our Great Healer”



Wazana was surrounded by an aura of magic and mystery that was created by a combination of his performance of miracles, the unique nature of his personality, and his multifaceted identity. But we must look to his healing for the primary source of this aura, since that was the wellspring of Wazana’s greatest fame, and it was toward this role that he had directed himself out of a clear sense of destiny and calling. In fact, every unusual aspect of his behavior and appearance was a by-product of his single-minded wish to become an all-powerful healer.

Wazana’s healing techniques provide clear testimony to the Muslim roots of his training. There was indeed a great resemblance between Jewish and Muslim healing traditions in Morocco, which made it natural for those who sought relief from their troubles in either group to cross the ethnic boundaries between the faiths. As we have seen, even rabbi-healers did not disdain acquiring supplementary skills from local Arab sheikhs. Both groups believed that powerful words, capable of attacking the source of the problem, lay at the heart of healing. In fact, both had their own set of “holy” and “impure” names.¹ Holy names in the widest sense—names of God and of angels, and biblical verses (passages from the Koran for Muslims)—annulled curses and cured disease. “Impure” names, on the other hand, inflicted as well as neutralized mischief. Strictly speaking, the “impure” category contained names of demons, evil spirits, and other powers of the evil kingdom. Due to the religious tensions between Jews and Muslims, many Jews classified all Muslim healing formulae, regardless of their source, as “impure.” This patronizing, ethnocentric stance, which needless to say had its analogy within the Muslim community, did

“He Was Our Great Healer”

not signify contempt or ridicule of Muslim names, but rather a specific moral position.

In discussing the demonic world, we learned that impurity was capable of accessing immense powers, which could be harnessed to healing. Essentially, in both the Jewish and the Muslim worlds the writing itself lay at the core of symbolic healing. The “complete” traditional treatment meant healing by eliminating the cause of the problem, and, equally important, by ensuring no recurrence of the problem (immunization). Two types of writing were therefore used. The first, to produce active healing, involved erasing the writing either by immersing the paper in water, or by burning it.² The second (immunization) involved hanging the writing (designated *qame'a*—amulet—in Hebrew) on the body, or wearing it as a defense against the forces responsible for the affliction. These techniques were sometimes supplemented with substances or incense comprised of healing herbs or minerals such as *harmel*, *rota*, *casbur*, *pasokh*, *seb*, and *jawi*,³ believed to keep demons and sorcery at bay. The various writing techniques and healing materials shared a single purpose: namely actual physical contact between the healing medium (holy or impure words, or incense), and the affected body part. Thus, depending on the problem, sufferers were required to wear an amulet next to their bodies, under their clothes, to protect them against demons or evil spirits. Alternatively, they might be required to rub the painful area with the solution containing the erased writing. Cases involving internal organs, or mental and emotional functions, required the patient to swallow the potion, or inhale the smoke produced by burning the writing. Sometimes the healing substance was thrown out in a particular place, or buried there to achieve a direct effect on the evil agent who resided there. For believers in this community, placing the healing substance next to the injured body part, or near the external source of the problem represented the highway to recovery.

Even though the origin of Wazana’s interest in healing lay in his exposure to his father’s book of names, it seems that he avoided Jewish healing traditions (based on kabbala) throughout his long career. In this he departed significantly from most rabbi-healers in Morocco and Israel. While a fair number of the latter used, and continue to use, Muslim names, none, as far as I know, base their expertise exclusively on these methods. For most of these healers, Muslim-based techniques were largely disregarded in favor of Jewish healing formulae. A good number of informants claimed that Wazana exclusively utilized “impure names” (Muslim names) for healing. It seems that he amassed these names during his training period in Sous, and later augmented them with others he discovered in Muslim healing books—much to the dismay of the local sheikhs. The sheikhs took great pains to force him to return the books to their owners, and threatened him repeatedly when he refused. However, Wazana’s courage and boundless faith in his own powers usually enabled

him to ignore these threats, though some acquaintances contended that the move from Agouim to Assarag, after his mother's death, was in fact a flight from the sheikhs' menace. Informants refer to the power held in Wazana's books with reverential awe. They are convinced that the books hold secret healing prescriptions for curing any affliction, cancer included.

Jointly, the power of the books and Wazana's covenant with the demons, which guaranteed their immediate assistance, transformed Wazana into the greatest healer in the mountains of southern Morocco. From Telouet to Ouarzazate, and from Tazenakht to the outskirts of Taroudant, Jews and Muslims swarmed to his door, staunch in their belief that only he could save them. Even the local rulers—French as well as Moroccan—occasionally used his services, thereby adding considerably to his prestige. The powerful Glaoui clan which governed vast tracts of southern Morocco,⁴ and in particular Ḥaj Tehami, the autocratic pasha of Marrakech, and his kinsman, *kaid* Ibrahim of Telouet, took advantage of Wazana's skills in healing and clairvoyance.

Which ailments and problems did Wazana treat? According to the informants, his healing activities were those of any healer, and hardly seem to differ from those of the Jewish Moroccan healers operating in Israel today. What sets Wazana apart, however, from the others is the high percentage of witchcraft cases he treated. The most significant number of cases in this category involved pregnancy, childbirth, and fertility—primarily female infertility⁵—but also chronic miscarriages, difficult childbirth, and male impotence. The second largest group of cases were those related to interpersonal and romantic conflict, mainly in the marital context, but also problems that arose between engaged couples. In the third group were demonically caused afflictions (various manifestations of *tsira* and *aslai*), and children's diseases. Another main area of specialization, which other healers tended to avoid, was identifying thieves and retrieval of stolen property.

To appreciate the reason for Wazana's reputation in particular as an expert in sorcery, we need to be aware of the way *skhur* (witchcraft and sorcery) was perceived in traditional Moroccan society. Like demons, sorcery was often held responsible for ailments and adversity. However, as opposed to demons, which are supernatural beings existing outside normal existence, sorcery involved a human being who harnesses supernatural forces in order to inflict harm on another. *Skhur* is usually wrought by a kinsman or neighbor inflamed by envy, or motivated by a desire to avenge an old injury. To execute their malice, they commission a "writer" to create a formula of impure names, or, alternatively, they turn to a "wise woman" who concocts malevolent spells comprised of bones, bodily secretions, and dead animals. The use of articles of the victim's clothing, and, moreover, body parts (such as hair or fingernails), which are considered especially effective raw materials in the preparation of *skhur*,

“He Was Our Great Healer”

relies on the universal principle of contagious magic. Demons and sorcery alike are active either externally or within the victim's body. In the external case, the written formula or physical concoction is secretly buried in a desecrated spot such as a Muslim cemetery, while in the second instance—working inside the body—the *skhur* is introduced into the victim's food.

Tkaf is an important subdivision of *skhur* manifestation, and means binding, inhibiting, or preventing. Such magic is usually based on the principle of similarity.⁶ Thus, it is believed that a woman may be prevented from conceiving by turning a key in a lock and hiding the key where it cannot be found. Alternatively, a needle can be heated and bent into a circle, the point inserted into the eye and the circle thus sealed. Such procedures are founded on the belief that a ritual act can produce a parallel outcome in reality due to the resemblance between the procedure and the desired outcome. Like produces like. Apart from infertility, impotence, and ensuring that someone never marries, which are believed to be typical *tkaf* effects, *skhur* can cause insanity, force a husband to become obedient and submissive, stir up conflict and dissent between close friends, cause divorce, or arouse uncontrollable love or hate.

The fact that removing spells was Wazana's primary specialization attests to his reputation as an expert in solving the hardest, most socially complex problems. Spells were believed to be a particularly serious matter because of the dual challenge they posed to the practitioner. The first challenge was that in order to terminate the *skhur*'s damaging effect, it was required to expose the spell physically and destroy its magical components. The second difficulty involved the delicate matter of accurately identifying the spell's perpetrator. Besides being a daunting challenge to the practitioner's skills, the second task was extremely delicate in terms of its social implications. As noted before, *skhur* was popularly believed to be commissioned by someone close to the victim. This meant that positive identification would in all likelihood lead to immense bitterness and animosity among kin or friends. Most healers I spoke to scrupulously avoided identifying the perpetrator for their clients on the grounds of not wishing to incite conflict and strife. Instead they were prepared to offer the victim a general but noncommittal account of the *skhur*'s origin.

From a skeptical point of view, it could be argued that this commitment to social harmony probably conceals a fear of identifying the source and suffering possibly embarrassing or far-reaching consequences. Compared with the vague indictment of a “demon” as the agent responsible for the crisis, resolving a *skhur* case meant accusing a specific, usually close-by, individual of a serious offense. The latter would naturally deny the accusation and would try to disprove it. If successful, the healer's reputation would be seriously damaged; if not, he ran the risk of the accused becoming a sworn enemy and of his own embroilment in a bitter quarrel.

Chapter 11

Wazana's readiness to deal with problems resulting from sorcery and spells stemmed from his advantages over other healers, first in terms of the healing techniques at his disposal, and second owing to his standing within the community. The need to locate and destroy the *skhur* materials was fulfilled with the assistance of demons that hurried to his bidding. Instantly, the demons would deliver the spell, which in most cases they found in a remote non-Jewish cemetery. While other healers refused to perform the second aspect of *skhur* healing, in order to avoid bloodshed or recrimination, Wazana fearlessly named the spell perpetrator, being liberated from the constraints of social mores and obligations that bound others. His handling of *skhur* cases was typically to "go all the way," that is, he identified the sorcery and its origin without fearing the disruption of the delicate social fabric.

Another field in which Wazana gained renown was the identification of thieves. Both here and for exposing sorcerers he often employed *istinzal*, a distinctive ritual involving demonic collaboration that was considered both difficult and complicated (Bilu 1982). In this technique, the healer uses a boy or girl below the age of nine to mediate between him and the demons. The child is placed close to a source of light, in front of the healer, and a drop of oil or ink is poured into the palm of his hand. Substances enjoyed by demons are burned all around the child to attract them. The child is instructed to gaze into the liquid as the healer utters special invocations, enjoining the spirits to appear. The flickering light casts shadowy shapes on the burnished liquid pool in which the child sees the demons and communicates with them. Once the child indicates that figures are present in his palm, the healer issues a list of instructions to be transmitted to the demons. This is meant to summon as many demonic legions as possible, one after the other, until finally an individual or group of demons appears that can disclose the thief's identity, or help locate the source of the problem presented to the healer.

To induce large numbers of demons to show themselves, they were invited to feast in the child's palm. Usually the child could describe this in detail: the demons slaughtering the beef, cooking couscous, what they ate and drank. As soon as the demon able to solve the problem came into view, it was asked to make the perpetrator's image—whether a demon (in the case of demonic ailments), or a human (in the case of sorcery or theft)—materialize in the child's palm. At this juncture, the healer either negotiated with the demonic perpetrator to obtain the victim's release from the affliction, or enlisted the demons' cooperation in identifying the thief or sorcerer. With the conclusion of the ceremony, the child was instructed to dismiss the demons, and the oil or ink was wiped away.

The *istinzal* ceremony is a Moroccan variation of a common group of augury and divination techniques stretching back to the ritual practices

“He Was Our Great Healer”

of the Assyro-Babylonian world of the second or third millennium B.C. (Bilu 1982). The name given in the Talmud and other traditional Jewish sources for this type of technique is *sarei shemen* (princes of the oil).⁷ In terms of the psychological experience, it appears that the common factor underlying techniques of this type is the ability to induce a state of altered consciousness in a “medium,” the gazing child in this case, akin to a hypnotic trance. Such mental states are fertile ground for prediction and clairvoyance, which explains their widespread use and preservation over the years.

Istinzal was not perceived as a hypnotic technique in traditional Morocco. Nonetheless, the fact that during the ceremony the child-medium entered an unusual state of highly concentrated focus and total dissociation did not go unnoticed by witnesses. Several informants recalled occasions involving drastic resorts, such as slapping the child’s face, or sprinkling him or her with water to restore normal consciousness. It is hardly surprising therefore that many parents were reluctant to allow their children to be used. Most healers were unhappy about the technique: in addition to the requirements of instructing the children and ensuring their emergence unscathed from the experience, they were expected to name the thief, with all the entailed social unpleasantness.

Wazana, we know, was indifferent to the social constraints that inhibited other healers. Moreover, *istinzal* was tailor-made for his capabilities, both due to his intimacy with the demonic world and control over its inhabitants, and his special way with children of all ages. It is therefore no surprise that *istinzal* became his apparent “trademark.” He usually worked with Muslim children as most Jewish parents were averse to allowing their children to be exploited in this way. Given this, I was therefore fortunate to meet informants who had served as an *istinzal* medium for Wazana as a child. Yitzhak Elmaliakh clearly recalls the time his brother fell ill on returning from the local spring. Wishing to disclose the source of the affliction, Wazana used Yitzhak as his medium. In this case the procedure proved abortive: Yitzhak failed to see any images in the liquid, no matter how hard he tried. Despite the fact that Yitzhak’s young brother was extremely sick with a life-threatening septic abscess in his throat, Wazana remained calm and joked with the redheaded boy. “Those from under the ground don’t like you because you’re a redhead,” Elmaliakh recalls Wazana saying, “he just kept laughing and laughing, fit to split his sides.... He sat down, said to me ‘I want some tea.’ I replied, ‘But my brother is dying,’ to which he replied, ‘I am in charge.’ He drank the tea and picked up his books.” In the end Wazana repeated the ceremony with another young boy who named the demon in the spring as the one responsible for the assault. Yitzhak’s brother recovered his health when a fitting prize—food enjoyed by demons—was cast into the spring.

Chapter 11

Several times as a boy, Rabbi Shalom, Wazana's former disciple, acted as an *istinzal* medium for him. This is how he described his "initiation":

There was a woman who had an expensive silver teapot which disappeared one day. So Wazana made a fire of coals and charcoal and kept adding *kusbar*, *jawi*, some *kusbar*, some *jawi*, onto the fire; and the fire jumped and smoke rose up like from a cigarette. Then he put ink into my hand. The first time I was scared. He asked me: "What can you see?" I said, "My nose" [reflected in the ink]. He did this three times, on the fourth time he asked, "Do you see anything?" I replied, "I see a man in a chair." He said, "Tell him, we haven't feasted for a long time; it is time to bring a sheep and slaughter it and make couscous and share it with the others." Straightaway the man did what I said. When the meal was prepared they celebrated and feasted and their king appeared and they brought him here and started dancing. I saw it all in my hand—just like watching television.

Finally Wazana asked, "Have they finished eating?" I replied, "Yes." They were divided into groups on the beach, some wore red hats, some wore blue, there were different kinds of them. Then Wazana said, "Tell them to bring the Torah Scroll." They did and then he said, "Tell them they must solemnly swear to tell the truth." I did this and they swore. It was like a film. But no voices. I just saw what they were doing.

Wazana said, "Tell them to fetch whoever stole the teapot—now!" They brought a woman. I knew her! It wasn't one of their women. They brought her into the ink, it was one of us, a neighbor. I said, "Mother, mother, it's so and so." Wazana said to me, "Shut up," and he laughed. Then he said, "Tell them to beat her until she gives back the teapot." Before he said this he asked me where she had hidden the teapot. I said, "She has hidden it in the oven, and covered it with ashes and coals." Then Wazana said, "Tell them to go in peace." I said good-bye to them and everything vanished. After that, Wazana went like this ... and took the dye away. That's all.

Both ceremonies reflect Wazana's unique personal style. In the first, he is calm and self-assured, unruffled despite the gravity of the child's illness; in the second, he has no qualms when faced with the unpleasant task of naming a member of the community as the thief. From the story, he seems to have found the situation entertaining, his ebullience reflecting this enjoyment. The richness of the detail in Rabbi Shalom's narrative is

“He Was Our Great Healer”

quite rare. The experiences of most of the informants who had served as mediums were expunged from their memories upon resumption of their normal state of consciousness. This amnesia reinforces the hypothesis that the children were induced into hypnotic trance.

Perhaps the most famous of the many *istinzal* rituals Wazana conducted was the one which resulted in the restoration of the mighty sheikh's stolen dagger. This event “hit the headlines,” due both to the sheikh's preeminence and the enormous value of the ornate silver-and-gem-studded dagger. On this occasion, Wazana summoned the demonic cohorts into the palm of a young Muslim girl, and making them swear on “Sidna Suleiman's [King Solomon's] Book,” successfully brought about the thief's capture and the dagger's recovery.⁸

Another time, Makhluḥ Ben-Hayim, Wazana's longstanding host from Agouim, asked the healer to treat Aisha, his wife, who persistently gave birth to stillborn children. By means of *istinzal*, Wazana raised the she-demon responsible for the deaths of the couple's offspring. The she-demon, it transpired, was Aisha's demonic double who had punished Aisha for (unwittingly) injuring her demonic children. Through the medium—again a young Muslim girl—Wazana negotiated with the demon over the compensation Aisha must pay to end the deadly pattern. The demon demanded that two white female camels be sacrificed, and their blood mixed with Aisha's. After protracted haggling, the demon conceded to moderating her terms, and accepted an alternative white sacrifice of lesser value—two decorated eggs. In return for the eggs, Wazana made her solemnly swear never to harm Aisha's children again. When the ink was wiped from medium's hand, she, like the others, lost all memory of her experience. Wazana then ordered the girl to be paid twenty rials and sent her home. From that time on, Aisha gave birth to live, healthy babies.

Ḥana Buskila, Wazana's kinswoman, was the only female informant Wazana repeatedly used as a medium. “When I was young, before I married into his family, he did things in my hand and read things over me, with his hand on my head; then I saw them [the demons] in the palm of my hand.” Like Rabbi Shalom, Ḥana Buskila can recall the ceremonies she participated in, enacted for locating sorcery. She claims that during *istinzal*, the demons unearthed the spell object and delivered it, moist and muddy, into her left hand (her free hand; the other contained the liquid), to be destroyed, and its force terminated. Only once were the demons unable to reveal the source of the spell. On that occasion, the case involved Ḥana's kinswoman, a woman whose fourteen-year marriage had been childless. The demons told Ḥana, who was six at the time, “There is no cure, she shouldn't waste her money, she will never have children; an Arab grave has been used so that she won't bear children.” This case is very interesting since, upon learning the demonic verdict from Ḥana, the man divorced

his wife. He remarried some years later and his new wife successfully bore him children. The new wife was none other than Ḥana!

Although an important and central technique in Wazana's repertoire, *istinjal* was not the only technique he employed to reveal secrets. Even in robbery cases other techniques were applied; for example, the Muslim book of secrets, which he successfully employed to expose the guilty. The next case, a story told by Yosef Knafo, the former goldsmith from Ouarzazate, is one such example.

One day, the town was abuzz with the news that 270,000 rials had disappeared from the French administration vault (Ouarzazate was one of the administration's centers in the south of Morocco). The acting governor, a French officer, was inconsolable. In his distress, he asked the goldsmith, his friend Yosef Knafo, for assistance. Knafo suggested that they drive to Agouim and find Wazana. In Agouim, the governor remained hidden in the car while the goldsmith went to look for Wazana. Knafo explained, "He [the governor] was so well known, he was afraid someone would recognize him." Wazana's reaction was typically understated: "Is that all?" he queried dismissively on learning how much money had been stolen, and promised to return the money forthwith. The distraught governor promised Wazana the earth if he succeeded: "If you find the money, you will be mayor, and you will be able to do whatever you like."

The three drove back to Ouarzazate. In the "bureau," the governor's office, Wazana consulted the book he had with him, and told the governor to follow the goldsmith. "He will give you the money." Wazana gave his friend certain signs that would lead him to the money: "Go to the tree by the roadside, there you will find a white mark. I will mark it for you. Just dig in the earth and remove the sack." The goldsmith did as instructed, and easily found the hidden loot. Now much calmer, the governor insisted that Wazana identify the thief. This time, the fearless healer, who usually had no qualms about naming culprits, seemed bothered by this request. The reason became transparent once he named the thief. The culprit, it transpired, belonged to an exceedingly distinguished Arab family in the employ of the administration. Under torture, the Arab confessed to the crime, whereupon Wazana was instructed to pass sentence on him. This climactic twist wherein Wazana is cast in the role of sentencing judge seems like wishful thinking on the informant's part. In fact, by ascribing the upper hand to the usually powerless Jew, the story completely reverses the traditional Jewish-Muslim roles: "The officer asked him, 'What is the sentence of this Arab?' Wazana answered, 'Burn him! Tell all the inhabitants of the town to come and stand while this Arab burns.' That was his decision. Forty or fifty thousand people came. They piled up the wood, bound the Arab, set it on fire and threw him onto the pyre. They all stood watching ... Arabs and Jews, children, even girls, until he had gone up in smoke." Even if the story is no more than wishful

“He Was Our Great Healer”

thinking prompted by the circumstances of Jewish inferiority enforced by the Muslims, the fact is that the narrator chose Wazana, as the Jews’ omnipotent representative, to seal the fate of a high status Arab. Not for the first time we find testimony to the endless power ascribed to Wazana by his fellows. According to this narrator, the event carried far-reaching consequences concerning the community’s confidence and security: “After that, in our town, you could leave your gold on the sidewalk and no one took it. They didn’t dare touch it—didn’t even dream of it—because of what happened.” Even though Wazana’s special expertise lay in catching thieves, he was most famous for his acts of healing. Through several personal stories related by former clients let us examine his healing activities, special style, and the powers imputed to him. Between the lines of the various narratives emerges the powerful emotions underlying the memories of these grateful people.

Aaron Biton of Ouarzazate sought Wazana’s help when a problem of some intimacy threatened to destroy his marriage. Beginning with his wedding night, and for four years after, Aaron Biton had been tormented by impotence. Hoping that Wazana would be able to restore his virility, he hiked for three days through the mountains and up the steep banks of the Tifnoute River in order to reach Assarag, home of the great healer. Wazana, radiating his typical air of confidence, confirmed Aaron’s suspicions that “they had closed him up,” that is, that he was victim to a *tkaf* spell. To discover the perpetrator, Wazana lit a fire and handed the informant a blank sheet of paper, ordering him to cast it into the flames. To Aaron’s astonishment, instead of burning, an inscription appeared on the page and was immediately deciphered by the healer. The writing blamed a vindictive woman called Ḥana for the attack, confirming Aaron’s suspicions. Ḥana was his neighbor in Ouarzazate, who bore him a grudge for refusing to marry her daughter.

Not content with merely naming the source of the spell, Wazana proposed transporting the woman to them: “Do you want her to come? She will be here in ten minutes, straight from her house, no, five minutes.” Shaking with fright, his young client adamantly refused to countenance this, begging the healer to destroy the spell and be done. Wazana shrugged and read something, whereupon a gust of wind dropped a bundle wrapped in rough thread directly into Aaron’s hand. Inside, Aaron discovered bones, black stones, clumps of hair matted with blood, and several seeds. He dropped the package, aghast, but Wazana soothed him: “Look what she did to you, this is from an Arab grave; we will get rid of it and it will all be over.” This was indeed so and Aaron went home to his wife, and the couple lived “happily ever after.”

This story exemplifies Wazana’s uniqueness as a healer, both by his confident manner and his willingness to “go all the way.” Not only is he prepared—in contrast to other healers—to identify the spell’s originator,

but he shows readiness (declined by the client) to transport the woman in a flash from Ouarzazate to Assarag to face her victim. Although never explicitly said, informants believe that Wazana's demonic servants made it possible for him to spirit people from place to place, or materialize spells out of nowhere.

A further case involving *skhur* was reported by Eliyahu Tubul, like Wazana, from Assarag. At the age of nineteen, Eliyahu fell in love with a young kinswoman from Casablanca and obtained her parents' permission to marry her. The engagement proceeded despite the fact that the girl had another boyfriend at the time. At the time of the engagement, Eliyahu lived in Rabat, and visited his beloved in Casablanca at every opportunity, eagerly counting the days to his wedding. However, as the happy day drew closer, the young man's joy turned to perplexity. While begging him to visit, his beloved treated him with indifference once he arrived, offering strange excuses to avoid spending time with him. Two years passed, and Eliyahu, spurned, grew desperate and lovesick, losing twenty kilos in weight. Finally, his errant fiancée informed him that she now loved her former boyfriend. On hearing this, Eliyahu knew that Wazana was the only one capable of restoring his beloved to him. Fortunately for him, Wazana was in Casablanca at the time, and despite the obstacles involved in gaining access to the healer, who was living underground, the two finally met. Wazana sympathized with his young friend's sorrow, insisting on going to see the girl immediately. The two went to see her in the afternoon, and were told she was working and would only be home in several hours. Wazana, who disliked being kept waiting, used his powers to transport her home directly. He then proceeded to account for her puzzlingly evasive behavior. The couple were the victims of an Arab sorcerer, who had been commissioned by her first boyfriend to create a spell. Wazana described the spell used in detail: "He [the sorcerer] wrote seven charms, each time using the blood of a different impure animal: a mouse, a snake, a lizard, etc. The inscriptions were affixed to a Muslim grave, and the girl could not marry until the corpse rose from the dead. When would this occur? On the ninth day of Av" [in other words, never].⁹ Wazana sent Eliyahu to the Muslim cemetery to remove the spell from the grave. He provided him with explicit instructions regarding the tomb's location. However, the informant was afraid that Arabs would discover and punish him, and was reluctant to go. Wazana accepted this, and agreed to nullify the spell without its removal from the grave. He compiled a list of forty-three kinds of *tabkhar* (incense ingredients in whose smoke the client immerses his body), and told Eliyahu to purchase them in a particular store. On reading the list, the storekeeper was amazed, and implored Eliyahu to reveal its origins. Eliyahu refused, worried that this might lead to Wazana's discovery and prosecution by the Muslims. The storekeeper then declared that "whoever asked for these items must be a Jew and an Arab (at the

“He Was Our Great Healer”

same time). The *skhur* masters of Casablanca do not know these things.” Finally, Eliyahu admitted that Wazana was the source. The storekeeper’s reaction testifies to the fame Wazana had attained while in Casablanca: “The man was stunned, he stood up, and sat down again [in agitation]. ‘How do you know Wazana? How have you got the money to pay him? Everyone knows Wazana costs a fortune.’”

Among the substances Eliyahu delivered to Wazana were *seb*, *pasokh*, *harmel*, a rat’s tail, and parts of a lizard, which Wazana threw onto a pan of live coals. He instructed the couple to stand one on either side of the pan, and covered them with a cloth. The smoke enveloped the pair completely, and when it dispersed, the girl gazed at the informant, her husband-to-be, and after that never sought to avoid him. The last service Wazana performed was to write an amulet guaranteeing Eliyahu protection from sorcery in the future. Moreover, he promised his young friend that the long-awaited marriage would take place within days—during the ten days separating Rosh Hashana (New Year) and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). And so it was. Before the week had ended, Eliyahu and his beloved were married in Casablanca.

Wazana not only treated adults. His success with children’s diseases was particularly important in view of traditional Morocco’s high infant mortality rate. Rabbi Shmuel Suissa, Rabbi Ya’aqov’s kinsman, described how Wazana saved both his sister and niece. His stories are as follows:

One day, my father, may he rest in peace, came home to find my three-year-old sister completely paralyzed. One moment she was fine, walking and talking, the next she was completely paralyzed. She couldn’t even sit down. I was five or six at the time but I’ve got an excellent memory. My father wanted Wazana to see her, so he went and brought him because we are kinsmen. Wazana was in Assarag, we lived in Idirghan, almost in Sous. It is more than a day’s walk. I remember Wazana [very emotional], I can still see him coming up the stairs. He wrote something on a plate and said to my father: “By Sunday she will sit, on Monday she will stand, on Tuesday she will speak. One hand will always be paralyzed.” And so it is, still paralyzed. He cured her, she spoke, it all happened just as he promised. She is still alive and lives in Ashdod.

In Casablanca he also did amazing things which seem completely illogical. My sister’s little daughter was sick with typhus. The doctors all said she wouldn’t live, that there was nothing they could do. They called Wazana again. For family he did a lot, he came especially, all the way to Casablanca. When he came he wrote something for her. He said, “I will put this cup next to her. If the cup jumps up and spins around

Chapter 11

the room and nothing happens to it, she will rise tomorrow. If it smashes, there is no hope.” The moment he finished writing [on the cup], it started to spin around the room, and then went back to its place. Then next day she felt better, as if nothing had been wrong. She is still alive and lives in Rishon le-Zion.

In both instances the treatment involved writing on a utensil. This was a popular technique that entailed writing names inside a plate or cup, then filling the vessel with water to erase the names. The patient either drank the solution or it was smeared over the afflicted body part. The technique described in the second story is highly unusual since the names Wazana wrote on the cup were supposed to work directly on the patient without being drunk or smeared on the body, the only condition being that the cup did not smash as it flew around the room. This case not only provides an outstanding demonstration of the powers ascribed to Wazana, but clearly depicts the dramatic quality of his treatment. This tale also reflects his kind devotion toward members of his family. Masouda Buskila, whose late husband had been Rabbi Ya’aqov’s nephew, describes this aspect of Wazana’s behavior very emotionally. Her poor language skills do not detract from her description of the climactic event in which Wazana’s dogged determination rescued her from the jaws of death.

I was staying in his house in Assarag and I was sick. They give me poison [this presumably means she fell victim to sorcery]. When I was so ill I had two children. A woman threw something into my food.... Rabbi Ya’aqov was in France [Casablanca] and I lay on the floor [not functioning because of her illness] for three years. Nobody would take me, my parents were very far away [in Tamzersht]. Don’t remember a thing. Others took my children. No medicine, no doctors.

Then he came back from France and stayed in a place called Tidili. My husband went there at night. “My wife is a lot sick, going to die.” Then he came, of blessed memory.... [here began a lengthy digression concerning how Wazana sent large numbers of patients home so that he could be at her side].

Then he did what he did. Held my hand, and read and read. And me, twins in my belly, seven months [pregnant]. He gave me medicine from France. They told him, “Maybe she will die because of this medicine.” He said, “No, she won’t die, she has much time left, but she will be sick, even die [may seem to die] in the next twenty-four hours. Do not take her to the cemetery.” And the woman that did it to me [the spell] was near me! [a relative], jealous. He said, “What’s got in her belly died three days ago, that’s why the woman [herself]

“He Was Our Great Healer”

is nearly dead.” He gave me medicine, may he rest in peace, and what was in me, was going out [reference apparently to a miscarriage]. Afterwards the poison fell out [left her]. It was like a big yellow flower. This is what my mother told me. I don’t remember.

Then the Jews said the Shema, and I was going into another world. And people went and dug a grave ready for me. I just remember that they got a bucket of water and some soap [they ritually washed her body] and sewed [her shroud]. Then two Jews said to the *tsaddiq*, “Give us the woman so we can take her to the cemetery, if you don’t we will bring the police.” Then a policeman came, and said to Wazana, “Give them the Jewish woman who died yesterday so the people can go home.” But Wazana cannot be pressured. He answered, “I will not let them take her. They will not take her. She is my nephew’s wife. Tell the people to go home. Tomorrow she may be dead, then I will take her to the cemetery alone.” He didn’t let them [take her body away].

But one of the Jews did things against him [accused him of wrongdoing], he said to him, “put her down” [leave her alone] so her soul can depart.” And what did he do? He put on his *jellaba*, it was winter. Then all the dirt that was inside me came up inside him as well—it reached him up to here [pointing to her throat] and he didn’t eat or drink for twenty-four hours. Just prayed. That is a saint [she sobbed]. Then somebody came in and Wazana said, “Go and get a small chicken, a chick.” I don’t remember that, my mother told it to me. They did all his things [everything he asked], they made food, and he gave me three drops in my mouth [of chicken soup]. At four in the afternoon I opened my eye, only one, not the other. [I was ill after that] maybe for a month. Then everyone was happy, and the man who said the saint did wrongdoing didn’t go out for a month, then he died. He was walking along, met what he met, and fell down. That’s why every year I make his feast.

On the one hand, the dramatic force of this story arises from the critically ill condition of the woman who is believed to have died, and on the other, from Wazana’s devotion and his resolute determination to restore her to life. The healing story is literally a struggle between life and death, which ends positively despite the initially hopeless prognosis. Not only does Wazana battle the illness that brings the young woman to her deathbed, but also the people surrounding her, who treat her as though she were dead, and try to force him with combined threats and appeals,

to hand over her body for burial. Wazana's determination, his courage and absolute commitment to the dying woman, to the point of physically identifying with her ("Then all the dirt inside me came up inside him as well—it reached him up to here [pointing to her throat] and he did not eat or drink for twenty-four hours") could hardly be more explicit. Wazana actually restores his young kinswoman's life, and it is therefore no surprise that, to her, Wazana is indisputably a saint. Later we see in detail that Masouda is utterly certain that Wazana continues to guard and protect her, in Israel, even in death. In the stories pertaining to the deaths of Wazana's parents we already touched on the problematic matter of attempting to restore life to the dead. This issue recurs once more in the story of Rabbi Ya'aqov's own death. Wazana's tremendous healing power seems at its zenith in the story cited above: he successfully revives someone believed to be dead, whose body has even been prepared for burial.

The fact that Wazana was sought out by the great and the grand of Moroccan society further testifies to his potency as a healer: "Great ones came to him for help, governors, el-Pasha Glaoui, Haj Tehami from Marrakech, and his kinsman, *kaid* Ibrahim of Telouet. Who didn't know him?" queried David Ben-Hamo of Agouim, but also hastened to add, "not in Casablanca, or in the North." In other words, Ben-Hamo wishes it to be quite clear that Wazana was nevertheless a distinctly local hero. The stories of several informants recount how Wazana saved Haj Tehami, the most powerful man in southern Morocco prior to independence, from death by poisoning.¹⁰ As a reward, this ruler, who was renowned for his brutality, honored Wazana by granting him an audience whenever he desired, "like one of the family." Another version states that the pasha was doomed to die of a serious illness but Wazana cured him and extended his life span several more years. We referred earlier to how Wazana assisted representatives of the Muslim and French law-and-order establishment, capturing thieves and recovering stolen property on their behalf.

Although the dominant note in the healing stories is Wazana's boundless omnipotence, a few let slip here and there that Wazana's powers were not unlimited. One example of this involves the story of a woman on the verge of death "owing to a snake in her belly." Upon turning to the healer, Wazana's unequivocal response was: "Sell your cow and go somewhere where there are doctors. I cannot get it out." Rabbi Ya'aqov's candid answer, acknowledging the limitations of his power as compared with conventional doctors, was exceptional among the body of stories. Instances where Wazana failed to prevent death are slightly more common, but on the whole, their negativity is mitigated by the fact that he could either accurately predict the time of death, or else postpone it.

Alu Yifrakh, formerly of Timjdut, reported that once her uncle asked Wazana to treat his sick wife. Wazana consulted the demons in an *istinzal* ceremony and was told that the woman's fate had been sealed: "They will

“He Was Our Great Healer”

bear her away on a stretcher.” Rabbi Ya’aqov appealed, pleading: “Can anything be done?” but the demons replied, “Nothing can be done. It is over. Maybe today, maybe tomorrow [she will die].” Rabbi Ya’aqov had no recourse left but to beg an extension of three days to enable the dying woman’s family to travel from Marrakech. This petition was granted. The family assembled round the patient’s bed, and there was time for her to divide her property and state her last requests.

Shlomo Gabai of Amassine recounted that his mother had been taken to “an American doctor” in Marrakech who informed her that she was carrying twins, “one alive, the other dead.” The doctor assessed her chance of not surviving cesarean surgery as “99 percent.” According to Gabai, when the family heard the terrible odds they carried the woman to her father’s house in Tidili and called Wazana to come. Wazana performed *istinzal* with a six-year-old Arab boy who was instructed to ask, “What lies in store for this girl? Is she for this world or the next?” The child medium described the activities of the demons in his palm: “They feasted, they slaughtered sheep and a calf and they said blessings.” Suddenly, the boy reported seeing a white cloth in the picture. “It’s over,” announced Wazana, realizing that the cloth symbolized a shroud. Indeed, shortly after that the woman died. The fact that Wazana could not save his patient’s life was in this case mitigated by his ability to predict her fate through *istinzal*, and by his affirmation of the doctor’s dire prognosis for her condition.

Besides *istinzal*, there were other techniques at Wazana’s disposal for determining whether a patient would live or die. When the infant daughter of his friend David Ben-Hamo of Agouim fell sick, Wazana took two eggs of equal size, wrote names on them and placed them in a scale. When one of the eggs came to rest lower than the other, he delivered the verdict: “It’s over, you can forget the child.” That day, the little girl died.

The few stories which refer to Wazana’s inability to save desperate cases are dwarfed by the larger, overall portrait of a successful, self-confident healer who never balked at challenge or danger. “Wazana healed the serious cases,” stated his pupil, Rabbi Shalom. “He did not need to write very much; just like antibiotics, the sickness went in no time at all.” The depiction of effortless efficiency was reiterated by informants who recalled that Wazana tended to dismiss problems presented to him lightly: “Is that all?” he quipped derisively when asked by the governor of Ouarzazate to help find the 270,000 rials stolen from his office. “Only children?” he bantered when someone considered divorce after seven years of childless marriage. “Fear not. Do as I say and you will have so many children you won’t know what to do.”

If we do not strain to hear, we risk missing the rare but important mention of his failures amidst the loud fanfare of his many successes over the decades. As we see, great though Wazana’s power was, it was not boundless. In a rare display of candor, Rabbi Ya’aqov explained to Yamna

Chapter 11

Gabai of Amassine his inability to cure her mother of the illness that killed her. "I must do everything my friends down there tell me." In the case of Gabai's mother, the demons had forbidden his intervention, forcing him to obey for fear of losing his own life. Once again we witness the limits of Wazana's powers. With respect to the demons, Wazana appears to have been as subordinate to them as they were to him. Although in the clear majority of cases Wazana's demonic covenant granted him vast powers of divination and healing, a forbidden area beyond his grasp was always present. The few illustrations of the limits of his reach define this area clearly. Even Rabbi Ya'aqov was forbidden to rescue someone sentenced to die. An intimation of this limit may already be present in the stories of his parents' disinterment which, as we have said, possibly reflect his frustrated wish to bring them back to life. In Masouda Buskila's tale in which Rabbi Ya'aqov saved her from the burial party following ritual purification and preparation in shrouds, we reach the extreme edge of Wazana's healing abilities. In the story of restoring the life of the sheikh's daughter, which caused his death, he crossed this "red line."