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# A Medical Meccas: Master of Microsurgery

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**Israeli doctor Eyal Gur literally specializes in putting the smile back on patients' faces.**

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Although the west bank town of Jenin is known for its hardened militants and their battles with Israel, Palestinian teenager Ahmed Fakhouri got his wounds in a more conventional way: a near-fatal car accident. A shard from the windshield broke off during a collision and sliced the left side of his face, severing major arteries and paralyzing his facial muscles on one side. "I felt like my life was over," Fakhouri recalled recently. "I hid from people, even my family, because I didn't want them to see me."

Fakhouri wound up on the operating table of Dr. Eyal Gur, a plastic surgeon and head of the Microsurgery Unit at the Sourasky Medical Center in Tel Aviv. Sourasky is one of the leading centers for treatment of patients suffering paralysis of the face as a result of neurological disorders, which often leave the corners of the mouth frozen. After complicated surgery, Fakhouri regained enough control over his facial muscles to do something he hadn't done since the accident: crack a smile.

As a surgeon, Gur navigates some of the toughest of surgical terrain--the human face has more nerve endings and muscles than any other animal's. First, he transplants a sensory nerve from the patient's calf to the non-paralyzed side of the face, connecting it like an extension cord to an active motor nerve. He waits, typically for nine months, while the new nerve grows along a conduit and reaches the paralyzed side of the face. Then he takes a muscle from the patient's inner thigh and attaches it to the intricate web of facial arteries and veins. Nerve fibers reach the implanted muscle within six months, at which time the patient can grin. "It's a celebration when the child comes to the clinic and smiles for the first time," says Gur. "This is why I do what I do."

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