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The Jerusalem Report®

FEBRUARY 10, 2020

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Portrait of a sculptor

Varda Yoran's storied journey took her from China to the US via Israel



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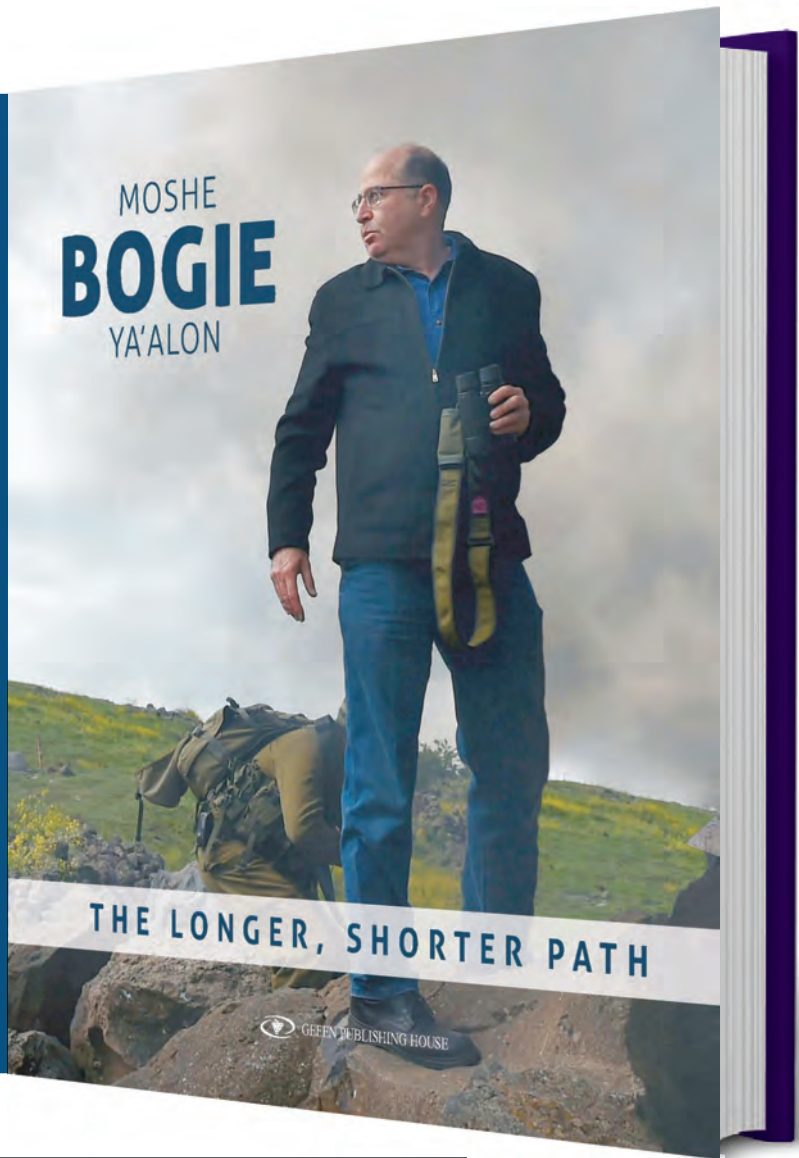
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Published By:

THE JERUSALEM REPORT
PUBLICATIONS LTD. 2008

P.O. Box 1805, Jerusalem 91017
Tel. (972-2) 531-5660

Editorial: jerusalemreport@gmail.com

Subscriptions: subs@jpost.com

Website: www.jpost.com/Jerusalem-Report

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Steve Linde

SENIOR EDITORS: Amotz Asa-El (News),

Eric Mandel (Security), Linda Gradstein (Features),
Shlomo Maital (Economics),

Mordechai Beck (Arts), Ralph Amelan (Books)

SENIOR CORRESPONDENTS: Judith Sudilovsky,
Patricia Golan

CORRESPONDENTS: Bangkok: Tibor Krausz

New York: Mark Banschick Paris: Bernard Edinger

London: Monte Jacobson Moscow: Julie Masis

CONTRIBUTORS: Mark Weiss, Robert Horenstein,
Greer Fay Cashman, Benita Levin,

Avraham Avi-hai, Amiel Ungar, Neville Teller,

Shula Kopf, Paul Alster, David Geffen,

Robert Hersowitz, Françoise Ouzan

COPY EDITOR: Avraham Gold

GRAPHIC DESIGNER: Daniela Michal Gleiser

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT: Frieda Jacobowitz

ILLUSTRATOR: Pepe Fainberg

CEO JERUSALEM POST GROUP:

Inbar Ashkenazi

ADVERTISING

COMMERCIAL MANAGER: Yehuda Weiss

Tel. (972-3) 761-9000, (972-50) 554-3779

Email: yehudaw@jpost.com

15 He'achim Mi'slavita, Tel Aviv 67010

Fax (972-3) 561-0777

North America

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CUSTOMER SERVICE

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Israel: *2421 or 1-800-574574

Elsewhere: +972-3-7619056

All correspondence outside the U.S. should be sent to The Jerusalem Report, P.O. Box 57598, Tel Aviv 61575 Israel.

Printing: Hadfus Hehadash Ltd., Israel

The Jerusalem Report (USPS # 006-871) publishes 24 issues a year for \$109 per annum by The Jerusalem Report publications Ltd, P.O. Box 1805, Jerusalem, Israel and distributed in the USA by The Jerusalem Post (U.S) Inc, 86-90 188th Street, Jamaica, NY 11423-1110. Periodical postage paid at Jamaica, NY and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: send address changes to The Jerusalem Post, 86-90 188th Street, Jamaica, NY 11423-1110.

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FROM THE EDITOR

Sharansky on antisemitism

RISING ANTISEMITISM should not be seen as a primarily Jewish problem but one that needs to be tackled by every country experiencing it, according to former Soviet dissident and Jewish Agency chairman Natan Sharansky.

“Of course, Jews – as the target of this most ancient hatred – had to develop ways to protect themselves,” Sharansky told me while sipping cider at a Jerusalem café. “The establishment of the State of Israel turned tables on the situation, when Jews finally reclaimed an opportunity to shape own future.”

Sharansky warned that an antisemitic situation can quickly deteriorate out of control, especially in Europe. “Whenever I go to a Holocaust museum, I always see how rich Jewish life was a natural integral part of Europe in the 1930s, whether it be France, Belgium, Italy, Poland or Ukraine. But the ease with which these communities were destroyed and killed shows how thin the layer of culture and humanity is in liberal Europe.”

After the Holocaust, he said, antisemitism morphed from targeting Jews to targeting Israel.

“In the days of the Soviet Union, it was clear that every time you attack Jews, you are attacking Israel, and when you attack Israel, you are attacking Jews. The official cartoons about Israel looked like classic caricatures of Jews from Nazi propaganda.”

After he made aliyah, he said, “I found out that demonization, delegitimization and double standards towards Israel exist also in the West. Yet here any attempts to compare criticism towards Israel with antisemitism were energetically denied and discarded both by politicians and public figures, who claimed: ‘You cannot limit our right to criticize Israeli politics by calling us antisemites.’”

In order to define a clear line between criticism of Israel and the new antisemitism, Sharansky said, “I proposed 20 years ago my 3D Test of Antisemitism – demonization, delegitimization and double standards.”

Explaining the criteria of the test, he said, “You may disagree with Israel as much as you wish, but the moment you deny Israel’s right to exist, the moment you connect its leaders with the most awful antisemitic libels – like in the



Natan Sharansky

cartoon that pictures Ariel Sharon eating Arab children with their blood all over his face – or the moment you apply to Israel the standards that don’t apply to anybody else – like when Israel is denounced for violating human rights more than all the world dictators together – then it’s antisemitism.”

As a result of his 3D Test, Sharansky said, there is now an international definition of antisemitism that includes the principle that some forms of criticism of Israel are clearly antisemitic. “Today the core element of the self-identity of every Jew is the connection to Israel. Therefore antisemites attack Israel,” he said. “Comparing Israel to Auschwitz or apartheid is antisemitic.”

Sharansky, who now chairs the Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy (ISGAP), recommended that there should be a global alliance against antisemitism similar to the Soviet Jewry struggle that preceded the collapse of communism.

“The true fight against antisemitism requires the unity of Left and Right, religious and secular, just as it was in the global fight in support of Soviet Jews. And here we should have zero tolerance for those who claim they love Jews and yet demonize Israel or claim they love Israel and yet demonize Jews.”

Sharansky’s approach to antisemitism is a result of his lifelong dedication to promoting human rights, equality and freedom. In recognition of his commitment to political freedom and his service to the Jewish people and the State of Israel, he will be presented with the prestigious Genesis Prize at a ceremony in Jerusalem on June 18, 2020.

Steve Linde

Send letters by email to: jrepleters@jreport.co.il Please include your full postal address. The editor reserves the right to edit letters as appropriate. Priority will be given to brief letters that relate to articles in the magazine.

Opening shot

LENINGRAD MEMORIAL Russian President Vladimir Putin on January 23 dedicates a monument in Jerusalem's Sacher Park in memory of the estimated one million people who died – including Putin's baby brother – in the nearly 900-day Nazi siege of Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) during World War II

MARC ISRAEL SELLEM



Crossword #3

by Yakir Feldman

Title: January birthday boy

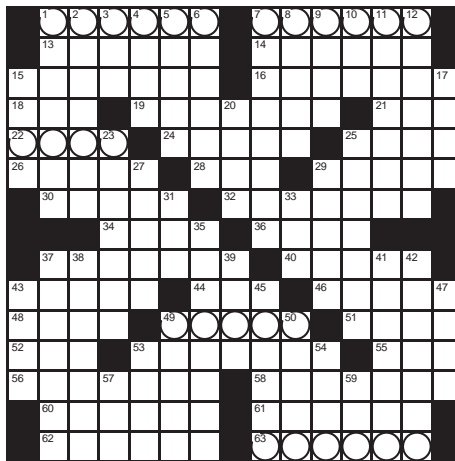
Across

- 1. Rowan's *Laugh-In* partner
- 7. German monk who initiated the Protestant Reformation
- 13. Each
- 14. Baltimore baseball player
- 15. Untamed canine (2 words)
- 16. Crude construction? (2 words)
- 18. Yeasty brew
- 19. Reacts sharply and verbally (2 words)
- 21. U.S. auditing agcy.
- 22. ___ David Hotel in Jerusalem
- 24. Pigpens
- 25. Jackson 5 brother
- 26. Go in
- 28. Dir.opposite WNW
- 29. Liability's opposite
- 30. Lamb sandwiches in pitas
- 32. "___ Girl" -- 1965 Beatle song
- 34. Othello, for one
- 36. Surrealist Salvador
- 37. Metric units (1,000 of them in a kg. -- expanded British spelling)
- 40. "___ Chameleon" -- 1983 Boy George hit
- 43. Wry literary twist
- 44. Resort feature
- 46. Hurt by a bee
- 48. ___-store novel
- 49. "May ___ a word with you?" (2 words)
- 51. Zips down a snowy hill
- 52. Traveler's info: Abbr.
- 53. Glossy paints (and tooth covering)

- 55. Rock concert sound booster
- 56. Riles, agitates (2 words)
- 58. Doubter (var)
- 60. Word shouted during applause
- 61. Beauty pageant crowns
- 62. What they did some time after they sowed
- 63. What you may have when you sleep (2 words)

Down

- 1. Sending a letter
- 2. With lots to spare
- 3. Get ___ of (discard)
- 4. Kennedy, Koppel and Danson
- 5. PC and handset symbols
- 6. Cancel, nullify
- 7. Unsettled detail (2 words)
- 8. Luis ___: Current pitcher for the LA Dodgers (US AIR anagram)
- 9. ___ at windmills (or pinball machines)
- 10. ___ now brown cow
- 11. Mourn poetically, speak for the dead (var)
- 12. One who tells a tale
- 15. "___ Up Little Susie" -- 1957 Everly Brothers song
- 17. Ill-gotten gains
- 20. Where a tower leans
- 23. Relevant
- 25. Wearable souvenirs (2 words)
- 27. Word in a car or apartment ad
- 29. ___ *Shrugged* -- 1957 Ayn Rand novel
- 31. Neighbor of Eth.
- 33. Acorn 20 years from now?
- 35. Refashioned, gave it a new form
- 37. Vehicle spreading



Answers to Crossword #2



The answers will appear in the next issue of *The Jerusalem Report*

Editor's correction

The photograph of Meijer De Haan's "The Hidden Master" (*The Jerusalem Report*, January 27) should have been credited to the Joodse Historische Museum in Amsterdam. We apologize for the error.

75 YEARS SINCE LIBERATION

Poland's President Andrzej Duda, museum director Piotr Cywinski accompanied by Holocaust survivors arrive at Auschwitz on January 27 to attend a ceremony marking the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the concentration camp and International Holocaust Remembrance Day



KACPER PEMPEL / REUTERS



ABIR SULTAN/POOL/REUTERS

HOLOCAUST FORUM Dr. Moshe Kantor, the president of the World Holocaust Forum and the European Jewish Congress (bottom, second from the right), poses for a group photo with Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, President Reuven Rivlin, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and visiting world leaders at Yad Vashem on January 23, 75 years after the liberation of Auschwitz. The Fifth World Holocaust Forum, under the slogan, “Remembering the Holocaust, Fighting Antisemitism,” was attended by some 50 world leaders, including Russian President Vladimir Putin, US Vice President Mike Pence, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, French President Emmanuel Macron and Britain’s Prince Charles. “We are together today, united in our words and in our belief for a future free from antisemitism, racism and xenophobia,” Kantor said.

TRUMP’S PLAN US President Donald Trump said he was “looking forward” to welcoming Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Blue and White leader Benny Gantz in late January in Washington to discuss the administration’s Mideast peace plan, dubbed the “Deal of the Century.” “It’s a great plan. It’s a plan that really would work,” Trump told reporters en route to Florida. “Look, Israel wants peace, Palestinians want peace. They all want peace. Not everyone wants to say it.” Trump was set to meet Gantz on January 27, and Netanyahu the day after. The Palestinian Authority warned that the Trump plan would spark a new wave of mass protests.

BENNETT’S ORDER Defense Minister Naftali Bennett ordered security forces on January 19 to issue restraining orders barring members of a left-wing group called Anarchists Against the Wall, from the West Bank, accusing them of instigating “violent provocations” in Palestinian villages during their weekly protests against the security barrier. Bennett said, according to information he had obtained, the activists aimed to rile up local residents, hurt IDF soldiers, damage property and cause pub-

lic relations harm to Israel. Joint List MK Ofer Cassif tweeted his angry response to Bennett’s order, urging activists to continue their “nonviolent and just struggle.”

NEW MINISTERS Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced on January 20 the appointment of three ministers from the Likud to three portfolios he was forced to give up after being indicted on corruption charges. Tzipi Hotovely will take on the Diaspora Affairs Ministry, Tzachi Hanegbi, in addition to his duties as regional cooperation minister, will head the Agriculture Ministry; and Ofir Akunis will take on the welfare ministry in addition to his science portfolio.

SECRET RIVER A six-mile-long, previously unknown river has been discovered flowing through the desert canyons near the Dead Sea, Kan News reported on January 19. According to the report, the river lies within the concession area of the Dead Sea Works, a potash plant in Sodom, and contains unique geological phenomena. But it warned potential visitors to stay away because there are dangerous minefields in the area.



MANDELA’S INSPIRATION A new painting by Dutch-born British artist Michael Italiaander, commissioned by the Anne Frank Trust UK ahead of International Holocaust Remembrance Day, depicts how the iconic South African leader Nelson Mandela was inspired by the diary of Anne Frank, which he read while imprisoned on Robben Island. “The design of the painting is based on the effect Anne’s words have on Mandela,” says Italiaander. “He reads her diary and sees how the tragedy that was hers was also his – racism, that horrible curse that so many people have.” Italiaander turned 97 on January 8, 2020, the day on which he and his wife Doris also celebrated their 73rd wedding anniversary.

MICHAEL ITALIAANDER



Concrete canyons or creative urban design:

Planning for a (much) more crowded Israel

AS RECENTLY as 30 years ago orange groves and agricultural settlements still dominated much of Israel’s landscape, true even in the areas surrounding what was already the densely populated center of the country. Inevitably, fields, groves, and orchards gave way to housing and commercial use as the country’s population grew dramatically.

Israel’s population standing now at more than nine million is expected to increase to 15 million by 2048, within the lifetime of most people alive today. This nearly 20-fold growth in 100 years is both an astonishing achievement and an immense challenge.

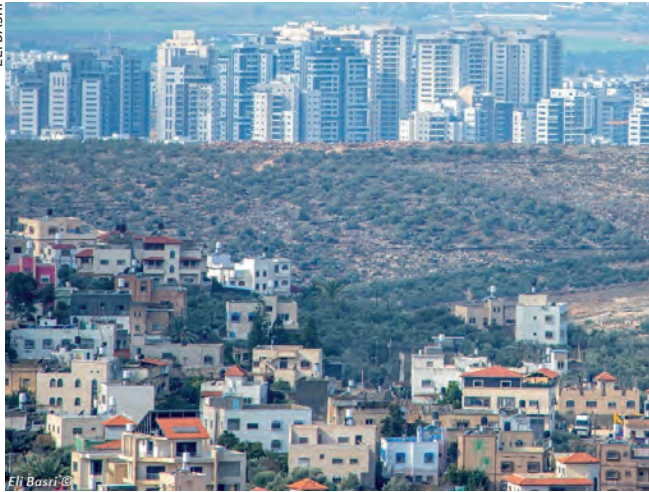
Crowding is inevitable and a landscape that not so long ago was still largely rural will, of necessity, become a mainly urban landscape. However, in spite of the great pressure for housing to meet current and future demand, a key public policy goal must be that the increasingly dense urban environments be pleasant to live in and complement the landscape rather than destroy what little remains.

While the clutter and chaos of the concrete “canyons” constructed in recent decades help to meet housing demand, they have done so at a high price to the physical and visual environment and hence the quality of life.

Providing for a larger population does not have to mean only tall towers, and especially not towers which totally ignore one another as these clusters of concrete canyons often do. Residential buildings can be planned to be in dialogue with one another and with their surroundings and be designed to provide an attractive landscape and a pleasant human-scale living environment.

Consider for a moment Paris, acclaimed as one of the most beautiful cities in the world. With a comparable total land area, Paris is home to three times the population of Jerusalem. The beauty of Paris is not in nature, though there are large and beautiful parks within its municipal boundaries and, of course, the River Seine. Its beauty is in its architecture and its symmetry; its stately buildings lining the streets and its grand boulevards that march in straight lines through the city. Paris is one of the most striking examples of what was called rational urban planning. Its current design was established during the “Second Empire” of Napoleon III in the middle of the 19th century, to ease congestion in the dense

ELI BASRI



A view towards the dense, chaotic skyline of Gush Dan

network of medieval streets.

It’s true that Paris and many other classical European cities are today surrounded by rings of ugly residential high-rises, but these are examples of failed planning, not something to emulate. Aside from these infamous *banlieues*, Paris apartment buildings rarely exceed six or eight stories.

Israel’s policy goals must be to preserve something of the beauty of its landscape and topography, and to build in a way that maintains a dialogue with nature. With careful planning on a national scale, much of Israel’s remaining green space – our agricultural lands,

forests, coastal areas and our ecologically unique deserts – can be spared.

Belgium and the Netherlands, for example, have approximately the same population density as does Israel and yet much of their rural landscapes have been preserved. In the coming 30 years, however, Israel’s population will increase far more rapidly than either of these countries and planning must take place now to preserve what little remains of our own natural beauty.

While there will be fewer pastures and groves, fewer pristine hills and valleys, cities, towns, and neighborhoods can be designed and expanded in adaptation to differing topographies and environments rather than by simply paving farmland, leveling hills and ignoring nature. These developments can be as pleasing in their own way as was the natural landscape that they will have overtaken. Think of the view of the long elegant avenues that line Central Park in Manhattan.

It’s true that we will continue to suffer from what has already been built, but there is still time to substitute imaginative urban design for the chaotic anarchy that typifies most development in recent decades. There is time to preserve something of our natural legacy from being paved over with massive shopping centers and acres of above-ground heat-trapping parking lots. And there is still time to design future residential and commercial areas in ways that contribute to rather than detract from quality of life. There is still time, but precious little. ■

The author is head of planning at the Mandel Foundation, vice president of Atid EDI and has a masters in Urban and Regional Planning



The Wagner Syndrome

A RECENT visit to the Gauguin Portraits exhibition at the National Gallery in London brought to mind a question in one of my English literature exams when I was an undergraduate at Liverpool University: “Can the work be greater than the man?”

In other words, is it possible to admire a work of art at the same time as deploring what one knows about its creator? I believe my examiners at the time had in mind John Milton or Charles Dickens, but in the National Gallery I was thinking about Paul Gauguin.

He was not a nice man. By all the evidence, he was an alpha narcissist, putting himself at the center of his work as testified by the exhaustive number of self-portraits he produced, perhaps forgivable as this absorption is shared by many prominent artists. More reprehensible was his personal lifestyle. He fathered many children with underage girls while he was enjoying the brilliant colors of Tahiti or Hiva Oa. This was exploitation long before the #MeToo age, and there is no evidence of anything approaching love being involved.

Yet does all this detract from his art? In my case, it does cause me to view his paintings with a slightly caustic eye. But it does not lead me to deny the beauty of the best of them, nor to ignore the skill of the artist. Knowing that Charles Dickens was a disaster as a husband and stereotypically portrayed Fagin, the corrupter of little children, as “the Jew,” does not prevent me from enjoying *Oliver Twist*.

What about Roald Dahl, the creator of *Matilda* and a host of hugely popular children’s books, who was a thoroughly unpleasant man and an unashamed antisemite? Interviewed by the *New Statesman* in 1983, he suggested that Hitler’s reasons for exterminating the Jews were based on “a trait in the Jewish character that does provoke animosity... even a stinker like Hitler didn’t just pick on them for no reason.” So should one put that aside and give in to demands to read to one’s child *Charlie in the Chocolate Factory*?

Which brings me to the Wagner question. Many Israelis have a problem with Richard Wagner. I know why and I don’t blame them. As a result, many will not listen to his music. I am not one of them. This unlikeable man, with his despicable views, a user and betrayer of women, wrote some of the world’s most divine music. Some of it, such as *Ride of the Valkyries*, is recognized by everyone.

Most importantly, as a composer of music, he had an immense effect on its later development and so many 20th century composers



FRANZ HANFSTAENGL/WIKIPEDIA

Richard Wagner (1813-83) in 1871

owe a good deal to his tonal innovations.

He died in 1883, six years before Hitler was born. So he could not have been a Nazi, as many have claimed. But there is absolutely no doubt that he was virulently antisemitic. His infamous article, “Jewishness in Music,” first published under a pseudonym in a German magazine but later proudly republished under his own name, included, among many others, a sentence which translates as “Jewish musicians are only capable of producing music that is shallow and artificial because they have no connection with the genuine spirit of the German people.”

His other writings show clear resentment and disparagement of his contemporary musicians, Felix Mendelssohn and Giacomo Meyerbeer, both of course Jewish, possibly because he was jealous of their success at a time when he was struggling. And there are scholars who maintain that the operas, particularly *Parsifal*, include ugly Jewish characters, though

none is specifically identified as such.

On top of Wagner’s open antisemitism comes Hitler’s worship of him and the Nazis’ use of his work to promote their ideology. No wonder, then, that Wagner’s work is rarely included in orchestral concerts in Israel. Occasional attempts to break the taboo have resulted in vigorous protests. Daniel Barenboim, a devoted Wagner practitioner, has twice included excerpts from one of the operas as an encore in a concert, hoping to retain most of the audience but still receiving catcalls and exits from some. And a Wagner concert scheduled in Tel Aviv in 2012 had to be canceled following a barrage of complaints.

So is it possible to listen to Wagner’s music and forget the kind of man he was? Theodor Herzl did, and he was the founder of Zionism. It is a tougher question than whether one can enjoy Dickens or admire Gauguin’s work. Perhaps it is easier all round to know nothing about an artist’s biography but simply to read, look, listen and appreciate.

My own answer to that question, put to me in different words all those years ago, is the same now as it was then. I want to be open to and to experience what great artists have left to the world at the same time as remembering what that artist actually believed and how they behaved to those around them. ■

Jane Biran is an author, former journalist and former head of the British Desk at the Jerusalem Foundation

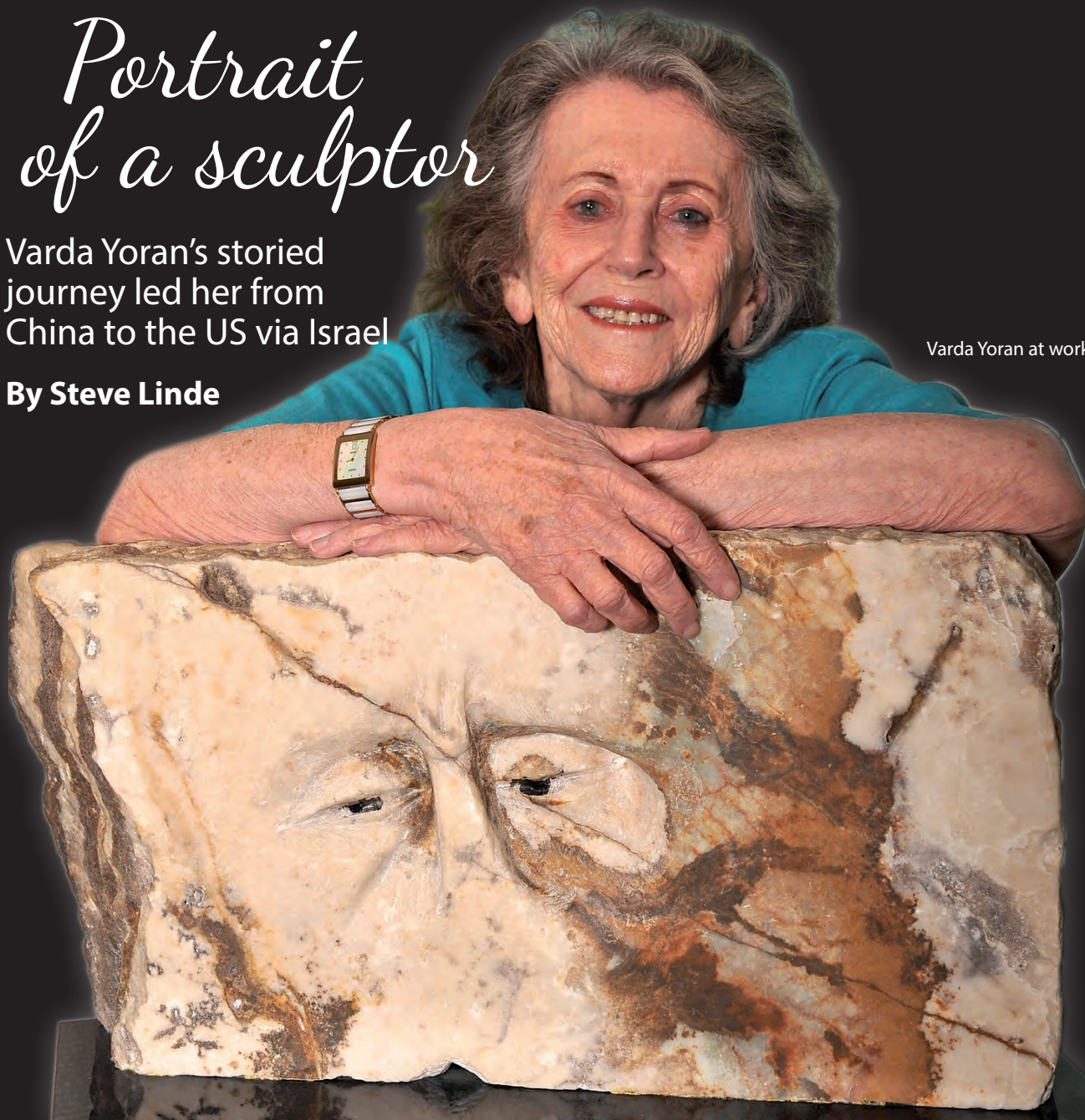
Cover Story

Portrait of a sculptor

Varda Yoran's storied journey led her from China to the US via Israel

By Steve Linde

Varda Yoran at work



WHEN I meet Varda Yoran in New York, where she now lives, she exudes a graceful elegance, a quality that shines through in her art, especially her sculptures, as well as in her writing.

Having led a fascinating life that began in China more than 90 years ago and took her to Israel, Britain and the United States, Yoran is a delight to interview. As the Agora

Gallery in New York, which has exhibited her work, puts it, her “compelling story has informed her equally compelling sculptures.”

As we sit down over tea, the first thing she tells me – knowing that I was once editor of *The Jerusalem Post* – is that her first job in Israel was at the newspaper. But like any good storyteller, she goes back to the begin-

ning, keeping me in suspense.

“I was born in China, together with my twin sister, on June 6, 1929, in a place named Mukden [Manchuria],” she says. “My parents came from Russia and they were escaping famine and pogroms. They met in a city called Harbin where the people working on the Trans-Siberian railroad were stationed.”



An untitled work typical of Yoran's style

Her birth name was Rose Granevsky, and her sister was named Gissia.

She has fond memories of her youth, attending an American school in Dairen (now Dalien) from the age of eight, and a Jewish school in Tientsin, where she learned basic Hebrew, took piano lessons and began to draw at the age of 10.

"My father struggled in the restaurant business, and my parents did not have a good marriage," she says. "My life was my sister and friends, my mother [more than my father], our dog, Huffy, going to school and experimenting with art."

"It wasn't all bad, though, not by a long shot," she recalls in her autobiography, titled *Me – Because of You*. "For one thing, we survived World War II and the Holocaust unharmed. There was no antisemitism in China."

She elaborates: "We did not leave China under duress. My memories of life in China are not laced with pain. On the contrary, I think of China with nostalgia and warmth, gratitude for their hospitality, and tremendous admiration for their love of beauty, their skill, patience, wisdom and gentleness. My memories surface in my own art and retain a mixture of East and West."

Rose and Gissia decided to leave China, she says, "because Mao Tse Tung decided he wanted China for the Chinese and all foreigners out. Though I was born in China, I became a foreigner, no longer welcome

there. We went to Israel because the UN voted that the Jews had a right to our own homeland."

She vividly remembers the excitement of David Ben-Gurion declaring the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, after which she and her sister applied for exit visas from China.

"There were delays," she recalls. "After the regime in China switched to Communism in 1948, we had to apply all over again. So, by the time we got the visa, it was 1949."

By then, her parents had divorced, her mother remarried and her father returned to Russia. On June 5, 1949, when she and her sister were 20, they traveled to Israel with the assistance of the Joint Distribution Committee, taking a barge to the Yellow Sea, a ship to Hong Kong and flights via Ceylon and Saudi Arabia.

Leaving home, she says, was traumatic. "One of my stone sculptures, which I called "Exit," deals with leaving. It depicts a person, shown from the back, carrying a heavy load, which is a part of the body, facing a black door. The load is the person's past – the hopes, pain, memories, experiences, joys, traditions and values which the person is carrying out through the black door into the unknown. I tried to express the thought that one doesn't usually choose to leave a situation, relationship or place if it's good.

"In faraway China, we grew up in a con-

glomerate of cultures – Russian, Jewish, English, Chinese and Japanese, and were influenced by them all."

The journey to Israel was difficult, but exciting.

"We landed at Lod airport, which was very small," she says. "We were welcomed with orange juice. Gissia and I, dressed identically, with large Chinese straw hats, were approached by a young man. He spoke no English and we spoke no Hebrew. He mimicked a camera with his hands and said, 'Picture?' We said, 'OK, picture.'"

They became "cover girls" in a weekly magazine named *Dvar Hashavua* – "Our claim to fame!" They were taken to an immigrant camp near Netanya, "a beautiful beach town."

She took the entrance exams to the Bezalel Art Academy, and when she was accepted, she and her sister moved to Jerusalem, where they stayed at Beit Halutzot, a women's hostel.

And that's when she started working at the *Post*.

"Gissia got a job in an office, using her English, shorthand and typing skills," she says. "I was accepted to the art school, with classes from 8 a.m.-2 p.m., so I needed an evening job. I knew very little Hebrew because, even though we had Hebrew lessons at the Tientsin school, the teacher was a disaster. I got a night job at the English language newspaper, *The Palestine Post*.

COURTESY



Shalom and Varda Yoran

While I was working there, the name was changed to *The Jerusalem Post*.

“My job was typing out the news from abroad, which arrived on a teletype machine, on a ribbon that piled up on the floor. My shift was from 4-9 p.m. If I filled in for the second shift, it was from 9 p.m.-1 a.m. as well. I honed my typing skills and speed in order to keep up with the flow of material. There were classes on Friday, but no work. On Saturday I worked in the morning from 9 a.m.-1 p.m. and in the evening from 4.”

She enjoyed her job at the paper, even though she knew deep down that she still wanted to be an artist.

“When I started working at the newspaper, on the first night of Hanukkah, we were all called into the editorial room. They lit the candles and sang all of my songs. The whole country was celebrating *my* holiday. I suddenly felt I knew where I belonged. I am at home. I am an Israeli. It was a very powerful feeling.

“My routine was very rigid. Art school every day from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. except Saturday. Work every evening except Friday, from 4 p.m. until 9, or if I took the second shift, until 1 a.m. I worked Saturday morning and evening. Living at the hostel in a room with three others, I didn’t have the space, or the time, to complete anything I didn’t finish in class. I couldn’t attend lectures, exhibits or even parties, because I

went to work.

“At the end of the semester, the principal of the school called me into his office and told me that I wasn’t a serious student. I didn’t attend lectures, I didn’t attend exhibits, my file was almost empty, I was so anti-social, I didn’t even attend parties. He knew I was an immigrant, but he didn’t bother to ask why I wasn’t keeping up with my artwork and how I lived. I was too meek to speak up. If that’s the rule, that’s what it is. I was devastated. I quit. I kept my job at *The Jerusalem Post*.”

Although the beginning of her life in Israel was tough, she and her sister worked hard, and decided to Hebraicize their names.

“We wanted to feel like Israelis. I didn’t want people to ask, ‘Oh, your name is Rose? So where are you from?’ Everybody came from somewhere and were Israelis, and we came from somewhere and were Israelis. I wanted an Israeli name. Varda is an interpretation of Rose. My sister changed her name to Galia.”

Two years after Varda and Galia moved to Israel, they were joined by their mother and her husband. Varda began teaching Hebrew at an immigrant camp in Hartuv, near Jerusalem, and later moved to a school in Jerusalem.

Galia, who went to a military camp near Tel Aviv, and was introduced by a young man from Poland in an Israel Air Force officers’ training course named Shalom Yoran

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Varda and her sister on the cover of ‘Dvar Hashavua’ in 1949

to his friend, Avraham. Galia and Avraham married in 1952, and had three children.

“For a wedding gift, I made them a sculpture of the Laughing Buddha for good luck,” Varda says. “This was the first sculpture I made, except for a little one I did during my studies in Bezalel.”

Galia and Avraham invited Shalom on a double date with Varda. “I immediately liked Shalom’s honesty and his views,” she says. “He was pleasant and easy to talk to. He was so genuine, so reliable. He was a decent guy. I respected him. I admired him. I enjoyed his company.”

Varda enlisted in the air force herself, became a social worker at a pilots’ training camp near Petah Tikva and began to paint posters for the officers’ dining room.

“The only one that I have in my home shows a soldier on his way to a court martial,” she says. “I drew him from the back, in his uniform, which is too big and hanging on him and he’s carrying a bucket and broom and brushes, anticipating his punishment – cleaning the latrines.”

Varda and Shalom Yoran got married in 1954.

“Since Shalom and I were both in the air force, we couldn’t afford to get married in a hall,” she says. “Shalom’s aunt Sarna suggested that the wedding should be at her house, in a village outside Tel Aviv. She had a very nice garden where the ceremony could be held.”

Shalom Yoran, who was born Selim Sznycer in 1925, was a Partisan hero during the Holocaust. When the Germans invaded his family's Polish hometown of Raciaz in 1942, he and his older brother, aged 14 and 18, escaped into the woods.

Their parents ran away and were murdered by the Nazis in Kurzeniec, together with more than 1,000 other Jews, on the eve of Yom Kippur. After surviving the winter in an underground shelter they built, the two brothers joined the Partisans fighting against the Nazis, a heroic struggle documented in Yoran's 1996 memoir titled *The Defiant: A True Story of Jewish Vengeance and Survival*.

Following the war, he worked for an organization smuggling Jewish refugees into British Mandate Palestine and assumed several identities on his own journey there, including that of a British soldier and later a dead cousin, Shalom Yoran, in 1946.

When Yoran moved to Palestine, he began writing about his life. Decades later, while he and Varda were clearing out their apartment near Tel Aviv, he found his writings in a suitcase, and worked with Varda translating the notes from Polish.

"When I finally became a 'legal' citizen of Palestine, I bore my mother's maiden name and my cousin's date of birth," he wrote.

Yoran helped build Israel's first two planes from scraps the British left in their camps. He joined the Air Service, the precursor of the Israel Air Force, ahead of the 1948 War of Independence, learned aircraft maintenance in Oklahoma, and later became an executive with Israel Aircraft Industries (the precursor of Israel Aerospace Industries). The Yorans had two daughters, Dafna and Yaelle, who would later have two sons, Kori and Neo. Shalom's work took them to London for two years and then in 1978 to New York, where he became chairman of a small but successful aircraft manufacturing company called ATASCO (Aircraft Trading and Servicing Co.).

In the meantime, Varda Yoran developed her career in art, becoming a well-known sculptor in Israel, which she still loves and misses. "The best thing in the world that we did is go to Israel, because I wouldn't have felt at home in any other country. When you come to a new country, you have to fit in. When you come to Israel, you have to contribute in some way. In Israel, we made it happen. That's how we all felt, my husband in a very large way, me to a lesser extent,

but still I contributed, growing and developing with Israel and doing all I could. We were all very proud of what it was and what it is today!"

Varda Yoran's contemporary figural sculpture has been described as "an exercise in grace." The hallmark of her work, made from bronze, wood, flexiglass, wax and stone, is her simple use of shape, avoiding superfluous detail while capturing the power of the composition.

"To me, art is a language, non-verbal communication. My voice is sculpture," she says. "What I try to do is tell a story or express an emotion or thought as clearly as possible, and most of my work is oriented toward people.

"If I'm doing people I do it in a way that is more abstract or minimalized, so that you get the feeling through the movement rather than putting in faces and details like that. Because I want to make it all so very universal, if I'm making a person in any kind of emotional state, it doesn't have to be a man or a woman. That's what's common throughout my work."

Her work, reflecting her multiple cultures from China to the US, has been exhibited in Israel, North America and Europe. She has large outdoor sculptures on the campus of Tel Aviv University, the Rabin Medical Center, the Israel Air Force Center, and the Ghetto Fighters' Museum.

In 2003, she recalls receiving a call from Tel Aviv University president, Prof. Itamar Rabinovich, saying that a successful Holocaust survivor named Felix Zandman had



COURTESY

Yoran with Steve Linde in New York

been impressed by her work, including one titled "Tai Chi," displayed on campus and wanted her to do a sculpture to represent his donation of a graduate school of engineering.

The result was a superb sculpture named "Shoah and Revival." She describes it as follows: "I made a six-foot tall person crossing over a pile of rubble, looking back and pushing forward. The rubble represents destruction. An open book, a piece of countertop, a roof tile, a part of a tombstone with Hebrew letters, and more, all stones, all beautifully finished, all smashed."



TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY

Shoah and Revival

VARDA YORAN



Yoran's Buddha, her first statue

Her whole family flew to Israel for the inauguration in July, 2004 and she was awarded an honorary fellowship by the university a year later.

Sadly, her sister died four months before. Shalom brother, Maurice Sznycer, who moved to Paris after the war and became a professor of antiquities and West Semitic languages at the Sorbonne, died in 2010.

When Shalom died in 2013, Varda created a small bronze sculpture for his grave called "The Lives He Touched," and made copies with 3-D printing for their daughters.

"My daughters are such a major part of my life, as are their spouses, and my grandsons, each one a success story in their own right," she says. "Yaellie's husband, Bernard, is French Catholic; Dafna's partner, Ana, is Peruvian; Kori's wife, Vanessa, is Chinese/Japanese. We're international!" She and Shalom took their family on a visit to China in 2000.

"What a trip that was! I can't let this opportunity go by without praising the incredible contribution of our designated photographer Kori," she writes in her autobiography, which was created from in-depth oral history interviews by Los Angeles-based oral historian and writer, Ellie Kahn, of Living Legacies Family Histories. "My 13-year-old grandson was using the brand-new video camera that we had bought the previous day. He captured the unique flavor of Kaifeng, the beauty of the city, the people, the stories, and the character of a truly ancient Chinese place."

VARDA YORAN lives in Brooklyn, a happy mother and grandmother and an accom-

COURTESY



Capoeira, a recent work reflecting the movement of the Afro-Brazilian martial art

plished artist. "When I look back at my life, what stands out in my mind is Meir, the course of whose life I changed, and the Rose Art Foundation," she says.

She established the Rose Art Foundation, which donates Geri-recliners to immobile patients at nonprofit nursing homes across the US. "We've distributed over 750 since 2013," she says.

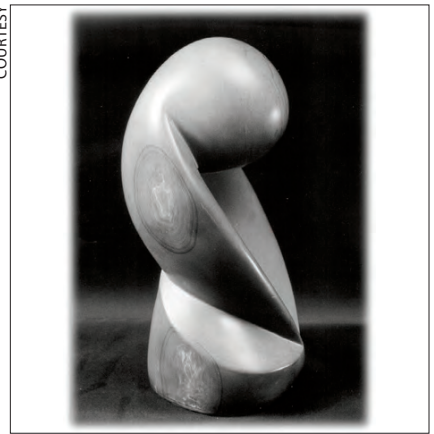
Varda met Meir, then a two-and-a-half-year-old boy who was born without arms, when she volunteered as a social worker in Tel Aviv in 1974. She visited him and his family regularly, helping him get prostheses for both arms – until she and Shalom moved to London two years later.

"By then, there were many things Meir could do on his own, using his prostheses," she says. "I got another volunteer to take over for me before I left. Several years later, I was told that he had appeared on a TV show that was collecting money for equipment for handicapped children. Meir was attending regular school, and his hobby was wrestling."

In 2019, she published a book together with Rina Schwimmer on one of her husband's friends, the legendary Al Schwimmer, a New York-born World War II veteran who smuggled war planes to Israel during the War of Independence and later founded IAI. It is titled, *Al, The Israeli Prometheus*.

"Sometimes the right thing to do isn't always legal. Sometimes standing up for your convictions can lead to a criminal conviction," she writes. "Much like Prometheus, the Greek Titan who defied the gods, Al's crimes created history; they helped turn the tide of Israel's War of Independence and

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Depleted

gave the nation a fighting chance."

Varda is forever thankful to her late husband. Shalom Yoran's book, *The Defiant*, has been translated into English, Hebrew, Chinese and Russian. "The English version is also available on audio-book, and our younger grandson Neo reads several excerpts from it, the experiences and emotions of his grandfather," she notes, proudly.

"Shalom's tenacity, integrity, decency, honesty and love enable me now, even after he passed away, to continue living in comfort and security, surrounded by my incredible family," she writes with gratitude in her autobiography. "Because of others, because of you." ■

COURTESY



A portrait of Varda Yoran



AVNEI TZION PROJECT — THE PROJECT FOR PRESERVATION AND RESCUING OF HISTORIC HOMES IN JERUSALEM

Jerusalem 2019. An entire beautiful historical area that holds bits of history and stories of life, is in a state of constant neglect and the disappearance of the old, sinking into abyss of severe neglect, and no one has an interest in preserving it because there is no economic advantage to do so.

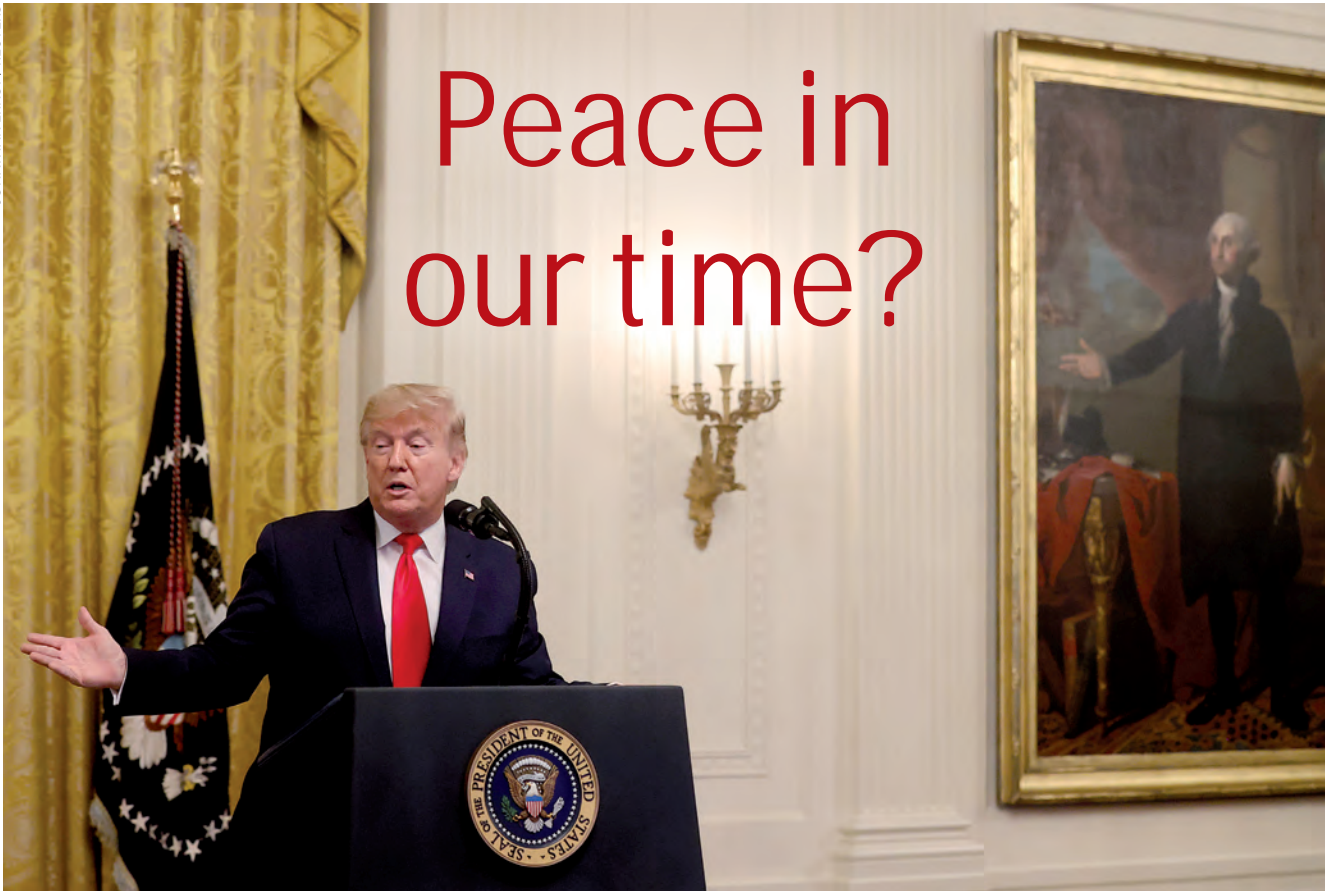
The disappearance of architectural structures and historical ones from our view – This will be a huge loss to Jerusalem in particular, and to those who fancy world heritage in general.

Give us the power to stop it.



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Avnei Tzion - We rescue today, for tomorrow!



US President Donald Trump addresses a gathering of mayors in the East Room of the White House on January 24

Trump’s Deal of the Century is presented to Netanyahu and Gantz

By Mark Weiss

THE IMPACT of President Donald Trump’s dramatic decision in late January to unveil the US Middle East peace plan remains to be seen, but it succeeded overnight in changing the focus of the Israeli election campaign.

Out went the incessant talk surrounding Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s bid to receive Knesset immunity ahead of his corruption trial, replaced by analysis of the US plan and the possibility of Netanyahu’s outgoing caretaker government extending sovereignty to West Bank settlements and annexation of the Jordan Valley.

Both the prime minister and Blue and White leader Benny Gantz flew to Washington for separate talks with Trump before the details of the long-awaited peace plan, dubbed the Deal of the Century, were released.

A US official quoted by Reuters said Trump wanted to know that both Netanyahu and Gantz were on board with the plan before announcing it.

Trump’s message to both: “You have six weeks to get this [plan] going, if you want it,” the official told Reuters.

Before departing for Washington, Netanyahu declared his intention to make history, declaring that the peace plan was a historic opportunity that Israel cannot miss.

“We have the best friend Israel has ever had in the White House, and therefore, we have the best opportunity we ever had,” Netanyahu said.

The prime minister said he had been talking about the plan for three years with members of the US team who had drafted the document, stressing Israel’s vital secu-

rity needs that should be taken into account.

“I found that the White House was willing to listen to those needs. Therefore, I am full of hope that we are before a historic moment in the history of our country,” he stated.

Such an opportunity “to secure Israel’s future” will not come again, Netanyahu warned.

A US official said the decision to hold discussions with both Netanyahu and Gantz was aimed at defusing any suggestion that Trump might be favoring one Israeli candidate over another ahead of Israel’s March 2 elections.

For his part, Gantz welcomed the outlines of the peace plan but warned of difficulties ahead.

“The proposal is destined to create large

and painful internal disagreements among us. I pledge to reduce the disagreement to the minimum, but to act so that the plan can be the basis for progress towards an agreed-to arrangement with the Palestinians and with countries in the region, along with continued and deeper strategic partnership with Jordan, Egypt and other countries in the region,” Gantz said. “I can say that the Deal of the Century that was conceived of by President Trump will be recorded in the annals of history as a significant milestone that defines the path down which the various parties to the conflict in the Middle East can walk to an historic regional agreement.”

Gantz stressed that immediately after the Washington meeting, he would “return to Israel in order to lead, from up close, the discussions on removing Benjamin Netanyahu’s immunity.”

The peace plan was drawn up by Donald Trump’s former special envoy Jason Greenblatt, Jared Kushner, the president’s son-in-law and US Ambassador to Israel, David Friedman.

Ahead of the release of details of the plan, Israeli media called it “the most generous offer” ever made to Israel. It will reportedly allow Israel to extend sovereignty to Jewish settlements and to annex the strategically important Jordan Valley and northern Dead Sea, comprising about 30 percent of the entire West Bank.

Yisrael Beytenu leader Avigdor Liberman said, sardonically, that the prime minister wasn’t traveling to the US but was “running away.” He noted that the day the plan was due to be unveiled was the same day scheduled for the start of Knesset deliberations on removing Netanyahu’s immunity, and the timing was no coincidence.

“To unveil such a plan five weeks before an election is very suspicious,” Liberman said. “The very timing of it will prevent any serious, in-depth discussion of the proposal.” And in a peace plan, he added, “every word and every line counts.”

Defense Minister Naftali Bennett urged the interim government to act quickly and approve in early February a plan to extend Israeli sovereignty to settlements in the West Bank.

“The most important mission is to apply sovereignty,” Bennett told a press conference held in the West Bank settlement of Ariel. “Annex, we’ll support. Don’t annex — we’ll oppose. If this whole event ends



NIR ELIAS, AMIR COHEN / REUTERS

On their way to Washington: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Blue and White party leader Benny Gantz

without applying sovereignty now, before the elections, with the American tailwind, then this won’t be the Deal of the Century, but the missed opportunity of the century.”

The Palestinians made it clear that the Trump administration proposals were a non-starter as far as they are concerned. Relations between the Palestinians and Washington hit rock bottom when Trump recognized Jerusalem as Israel’s capital at the end of 2017 and moved the US Embassy to Jerusalem the following year.

Senior Palestinian Authority officials said that European and Arab states have pledged not to support the US plan. The Palestinian officials stressed that the US peace initiative had no value without international recognition and was an invalid agreement between two friends – the United States and Israel.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas warned Israel and the US not to cross any “red lines.” Abbas’s spokesman, Nabil Abu Rudeineh, suggested the Palestinians could dissolve the PA.

“The leadership will hold a series of meetings on all levels – including the factions and organizations – to announce its total rejection of conceding Jerusalem,” he said.

Calling for a series of protests to foil the “Zionist-American conspiracy,” Palestinian officials warned that the peace plan would spark a new wave of mass protests in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

PLO Secretary-General Saeb Erekat said what the Trump administration has done so far and the full partnership with Netanyahu will enter history as the ‘fraud of the century’ against international law, UN resolutions, and the terms of reference of the peace process.”

Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum denounced the plan as a “Zionist-American plot to liquidate the Palestinian issue.” He called on the Palestinian Authority leadership to respond with a series of measures, including halting security coordination with Israel in the West Bank.

Jordan also made clear its opposition to the plan. “Our position regarding the plan is very clear: We are opposed to it,” said Jordan’s King Abdullah II.

Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi warned that Israeli annexation of the Jordan Valley would spell the death of the two-state solution and terminate all opportunities to achieve peace with the Palestinians.

Despite the fanfare surrounding the launch of the peace plan it was clear, in the short term at least, that a genuine dialogue between Israel and the Palestinians aimed at ending the conflict remains a pipedream.

According to Israeli sources, the Trump administration will not allow the sides to pick and choose elements of the peace plan – it’s all or nothing. Washington will support and encourage a side that endorses the plan in full. The side that refuses to do so is liable to pay a high price. ■

Leaps of faith

Although Bennett stood up to Netanyahu, his larger quest – placing religious Zionism at Israel’s helm – has never been more elusive

By Amotz Asa-El

“THE OLD will be renewed and the novel will be sanctified,” wrote Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook (1865-1935) in what would become the motto of religious Zionism.

Now the old is at a loss to seize the new, as religious Zionism’s reinstalled leader, Defense Minister Naftali Bennett, targets the secular voters that his illiberal and quarrelsome colleagues are in no position to seize.

Religious Zionism was never in a position to lead the Zionist enterprise, though it was part of it since 1902, when the Mizrahi movement that backed Theodor Herzl was established.

Kook’s statement encapsulated a voluminous theology that defied the ultra-Orthodoxy by embracing the Zionist movement despite the secularism of most of its leaders and followers.

It was a religious revolution, arguably on the scale of Christianity’s Reformation, as it challenged the rabbinical consensus that the Jews’ redemption would be delivered by God rather than by man, and miraculously rather than politically.

Down in the field, this theology inspired religious Zionism’s establishment last century of some 150 villages and kibbutzim, thousands of religious Zionist schools, kindergartens, seminaries and yeshivas, and hundreds of religious councils that to this day build and administer synagogues, cemeteries, and ritual baths throughout the Jewish state.

Politically, however, though it participated in 30 of Israel’s 34 governments so far, more than any other Israeli movement, religious Zionism was never in a position to lead the Jewish state.

Bennett has been out to change this for the past seven years, and a political cockfight he just won may create the impression he has just inched closer to his goal. He hasn’t. He hasn’t, and if anything, his goal has never been more elusive.

Bennett’s strategic inclusiveness generated crisis when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pressured him to reunite his New Right Party, which fields a mixture of secular and religious candidates, with Bayit Yehudi, the party that is the nominal successor of the historic Mizrahi movement, and which Bennett

headed until breaking from it in 2018.

In what inverted Bennett’s wooing of the mainstream public, Bayit Yehudi’s current leader, Education Minister Rafi Peretz, had struck an alliance with Otzma Yehudit, whose followers include Rabbi Meir Kahane’s disciples.

Kahane, assassinated in 1990 by an Egyptian-American in New York, had a platform that was ruled as racist by the Knesset, which barred him from running in 1988, a move that the High Court of Justice then approved, in response to an appeal.

Peretz thought that Otzma’s following, an estimated 90,000 voters, would be an important addition to his faction, and argued that its leader, provocative lawyer Itamar Ben-Gvir who regularly represents in court far-right troublemakers and terrorists, has become more moderate.

Bennett dismissed this impression vehemently.

Referring to Ben-Gvir’s priding himself on hanging in his living room the picture of Baruch Goldstein, the physician who in 1994 slew 29 Muslims worshipers in the mosque atop Hebron’s Cave of the Patriarchs – Bennett said: “Imagine an American congressman hanging in his living room the picture of a man who killed Jews while praying in a synagogue: Does it sound logical?”

Bennett’s attitude did not dissuade Netanyahu from attempting to push all the parties that sprawl to Likud’s Right, including Ben-Gvir’s, into one ticket, hoping to prevent in this way the depletion of far-right votes which might be stranded under the electoral threshold if Ben-Gvir were to run independently.

Netanyahu thus summoned Peretz and Bennett to his office hours before the Central Election Committee’s deadline for the parties’ submissions of their lists of candidates for the March 2 election.

To Netanyahu’s chagrin, Bennett put his foot down, and to Netanyahu’s embarrassment, Peretz surrendered to Bennett, betraying Ben-Gvir with an announcement that he will run without him.

For the 47-year-old Bennett it was an impressive victory, but one that is tactical rather than strategic.

For one thing, the consequent alliance – Yamina – is a hodgepodge of rival factions and personalities. More deeply, Bennett’s religious conduct, social background and strategic aims are very different from those of his colleagues, both Peretz and this formation’s third partner, Transportation Minister Bezael Smotrich, who heads the National Union faction.

In his religiosity, Bennett is an entirely different species from his two allies. Peretz, 64, and Smotrich, 39, are products of the nationalist yeshivas that see territorial compromise as a religious sin and at the same time emulate ultra-Orthodoxy’s halachic rigidity. Bennett never attended a yeshiva, has no pretensions to be a Talmudic scholar and does not share his colleagues’ rigid observance.

For instance, Bennett shakes women’s hands and hired a lesbian spokeswoman. His wife does not cover her hair, and he had no compunctions attending a memorial service in Pittsburgh’s non-Orthodox Tree of Life synagogue.

These gaps became glaring the week of his showdown with Peretz, when the latter implied, in an interview with *Yedioth Ahronoth*, that homosexuality was unnatural. Smotrich had previously gone even farther than Peretz, organizing a counter-gay parade that compared gays to animals.

Bennett and his colleagues also disagree on issues like women’s military service.

Peretz is opposed to observant women’s enlistment, and even more so to their service alongside men as combat soldiers. Smotrich is even more extreme on this issue, having called on observant men to avoid enlistment as long as the IDF does not cancel its mixed-service programs.

Bennett, by contrast, supports women’s service, is married to a former IDF soldier, and said he is “proud” of the women who serve in the IDF.

Bennett and Peretz do have much in common in terms of their own military service. Peretz, a

helicopter pilot and squadron commander who later served as the IDF's chief rabbi with the rank of Brig.-Gen., represents the post-1973 generation of Orthodox officers who produced the IDF's first observant generals. Bennett also spent long years as a combat officer, in his case in the elite Sayeret Matkal commando unit.

Smotrich, however, deferred his service for a full decade and then enlisted for a shortened, non-combat military service which he then cut even shorter by obtaining a three-month leave to promote his candidacy to the Knesset.

All this is in addition to Smotrich's having used his long years in yeshiva to obtain a law degree, in contravention of the law's intention that those deferring service for religious study will dedicate their entire time to religious study.

Smotrich, in short, represents the part of religious Zionism which is closest to ultra-Orthodoxy, and is therefore even less of a natural partner than Peretz for the liberal and patriotic Bennett.

Even so, Bennett now finds himself once again atop religious Zionism's reassembled confederation of antagonists. This is not where he had planned to be back when he entered the political fray in 2013.

Bringing with him the commando officer's aura, the successful self-made hi-tech millionaire's prestige, and his American childhood's impeccable English, Bennett breathed new life into religious-Zionist politics, which had been seen as gray, dated and even ossified.

Accompanied by the secular and glamorous Ayelet Shaked, his design was evidently to add diversity, youth, and color to a marginal political party, and gradually reinvent it as a springboard from which to storm the premiership.

It was a design that none of religious Zionism's previous eight leaders dared entertain. It also transcended religious Zionism's sociology and theology.

Bennett's implication, in challenging Peretz's pact with Kahane's disciples, was that their mentor's theology was not just disagreeable to him, but abominable.

Kahane's theology was that the Jewish state should be purely Jewish, and that its Arabs should be transported to Arab lands, whether voluntarily or forcibly. It was, to be sure, a perversion of religious Zionism's two founding theologies: that of Rabbi Kook and Mizrahi founder Rabbi Yitzhak Yaakov Reines (1839-1915).

Though seen as two links in one chain, the two versions of Zionism were entirely different.

Reines thought that Zionism was a good



Naftali Bennett and Rafi Peretz – allies in the right-wing party Yamina

political plan, but his thinking was purely instrumental. He did not claim the Messiah was around the corner, and much less that Zionism is Redemption's harbinger or that the Jewish state will carry religious value. In fact, he even backed Herzl's acceptance of a British offer to settle Jews in Western Africa.

Kook, by contrast, thought Zionism was part of the Divine plan for the Jewish people's redemption, and that its ultimate state should be Divine.

Moreover, asked how he justified cooperation with Zionism's secularists, Kook replied that they were like builders building a palace, who while building it roam its interiors noisily, uncleanly, and freely, but once through building it will enter that palace quietly, respectfully, and wearing their best clothes.

The moral was that secularism was but a by-product of the Jewish people's return to their land, and that it is part of the turbulence that the Divinely engineered transition from exile to redemption entails.

Back in today's political fray, Peretz and Smotrich – though devout believers in Kook's messianic Zionism – in one sense actually represent Reines's legacy, because they too take observant Zionism's marginality as a given, and make do with serving their narrow, sectarian constituency.

Electurally, this formula has been abandoned by much of its intended constituency.

Hundreds of thousands of observant Israelis vote for secular parties, thus implying that the combination of Judaism and Zionism no longer needs a political party's sponsorship.

That is clearly the feeling of the many religious politicians who dot the two main secular parties, like Blue and White's Chili Troper and Maj.-Gen. (res.) Elazar Stern, who was a class-

mate of Rabbi Peretz's in Jerusalem's Netiv Meir high school.

Likud's religious Zionists are even more prominent, including Environment Minister Ze'ev Elkin, Knesset Speaker Yuli Edelstein, and newly appointed Diaspora Affairs Minister Tzipi Hotovely, who is the first religious Zionist woman to become a minister in Israel's history.

This integration is part of a broader trend, whereby religious Zionists have reached positions that once were unthinkable for observant Israelis, from head of the Shin-Bet, commissioner of Israel Police and president of the Hebrew University to ambassadors in Washington, London and the UN.

Still, no observant politician has ever been in a position to become Israel's prime minister. That is what Naftali Bennett set out to do, first by reinventing Bayit Yehudi in 2013, and then by leaving it and establishing the New Right in 2018.

The New Right's subsequent failure to cross the electoral threshold crushed Bennett's design. His political resurrection following last spring's premature election did not change this failure, despite his impressive comeback, first as defense minister, and now as head of religious Zionism's rejoined ticket. Historians will debate whether Bennett's refusal to accept religious Zionism's political marginality represented an extension of, or departure from, Rabbi Kook's theology.

There will be no debating that Bennett's attempted leap beyond religious Zionism's confines has failed; for rather than morph into the religious leader of the secular majority, he returned to his original position as a liberal prisoner shackled to his fundamentalist captors' electoral trap. ■

The Mahdi Doctrine

Soleimani and the rising prince of Persia

By Brian Schrauger

WHEN HE left Damascus for Baghdad late Thursday evening January 2, Qasem Soleimani was flying high. As the military leader, chief strategist and charismatic face of what he knew to be the world's emerging and greatest empire, he had it all: prestige, power, presence. Not only did he command that rising empire's independent military force, he was nothing less than the voice of Allah to leaders in nations soon to be absorbed: Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon; Yemen and the Sinai.

Although no one ever said so in quite these terms, he was, in fact, a rising prince of Persia.

And the arms at his disposal! In addition to an immeasurable arsenal of conventional weapons, there was a growing repository of guided missiles; a world-class brigade of ruthless cyber geeks; even submarines; and soon, very soon, nuclear warheads.

From the north and the south of the world's most despicable usurper, if not so

much to its east and to its west, Soleimani was slowly squeezing the Zionist entity, needling its psyche (and military focus) by jihadists within its pretentious boundaries, waiting for the perfect moment – when it was distracted – to strike at its heart from the north with a massive arsenal of at least 100,000 rockets. When the time came, rockets without sophisticated technology would draw the defensive shield of the Zionists' interceptors. That shield would stop a lot of them, but not all. Not all.

Then, at just the right time, hi-tech guided missiles would be launched, programmed to hit key military sites and, best of all, high-density population centers. Maybe, just maybe, *inshallah*, one of those missiles would carry a nuclear warhead. As Zionists died in a mushroom cloud of agony, all hell would break out throughout the region, even the world. It would be a tragic upheaval but a necessary evil because then, as prophesied, the long awaited savior of

the world would emerge from centuries of withdrawal. The Imam Mahdi would return, establishing a worldwide caliphate of perfect peace; Islamic peace, of course.

On the evening of the second day of what the West calls its New Year, Soleimani was fresh from meeting in Beirut, Lebanon, with one of his nation's most important vassals, Hassan Nasrallah, the uncontested head of the pretentious "party of Allah," Hezbollah. In that encounter, duly photographed, Soleimani had accepted, once again, the "General Secretary's" obsequious hospitality. It was likely gratifying to the Islamic Republic's major general of Tehran's notably redundant Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the IRGC.

The flight from Damascus was only one hour and five minutes, but it had been delayed. The Middle East Eye reports that his flight landed at 12:32 a.m. Baghdad time. Anticipating a comfortable weekend inside Baghdad's Green Zone, Soleimani was met by the head of the Iraqi paramilitary force, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, said to be "a long-standing ally and a close friend."

Just over an hour later, less than two hours into the third day of January, Soleimani, Muhandis and their entourage left Baghdad International Airport in two vehicles, a Hyundai Starex minivan and a Toyota Avalon four-door sedan. As they reached the airport's outer access road, both vehicles were almost evaporated by missiles fired by an American Reaper drone, a large remote controlled aircraft regarded by the US military as a "hunter killer." Death was instantaneous for all inside both cars. Remains were so badly shredded, Soleimani's death was confirmed by a still intact hand bearing his still intact silver ring embedded with a large oval carnelian stone.

To Western eyes, events in Iran in the aftermath of Soleimani's execution tend to look like a low-budget circus with all its performances gone bad.

"Let's put all of this together," opines YouTube commentator David Wood. "On January 3, Major-General Soleimani was killed



KHAMENEI WEBSITE VIA REUTERS

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei gestures as he delivers a Friday prayer sermon in Tehran on January 17

in a drone strike. On January 7, 56 Iranians were killed and more than 200 more were injured in a stampede at Soleimani's funeral. On January 8, Iranian leaders responded to the killing of Soleimani with a missile attack on two Iraqi bases where US soldiers were housed, but... no one was killed. Also on January 8, the Iranian military shot down a Ukrainian passenger plane as it took off from Tehran Imam Khomeini International Airport, killing 176 people. On January 11, after three days of denying it had shot down the plane ... Iran admitted it had shot down the passenger plane.

"So, in response to the US government killing one man, Iranians killed, by a stampede and surface-to-air missile attack, 138 Iranians and 94 others – none of them Americans.

"I don't know about you, but I'm beginning to think that Iranians might not be the best at war. [Mimicking Iranian leaders.] 'Ah! They [the US] killed a general. Let's start trampling each other to death in the streets and shooting down random planes.'

"I'm making fun of them," says Wood, "because if the Iranian establishment is this incompetent, there's hope for the protesters who want to overthrow the establishment. The days of the ayatollahs may be numbered."

Iranian leaders as toothless buffoons is a gratifying narrative, but it is also wrong. If anything, the Islamic Republic is more dangerous than ever.

As evidenced by Soleimani's accomplishments in building a regional network of proxy terrorists, by the nation's weapons-grade nuclear fuel technology, by hi-tech guided missile systems and a world-class cyber warfare unit, Iran retains all of these things, losing none of them with Soleimani's death.

Wounded by Soleimani's execution and US President Donald Trump's economic sanctions, the threat Iran poses to the Middle East and the world is not lessened, it is magnified. Indeed, notes Israeli journalist and geopolitical analyst Jonathan Spyer, it "can be expected to do all in their power to preserve the regime by all possible means."

Why? Three main reasons: the Mahdi and necessary upheaval; the Mahdi and Iran as the facilitator for his reappearance; the Mahdi and Tehran's visceral hatred of Israel.

On the day Soleimani was killed, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei,

tweeted, "We congratulate Imam Mahdi [aj] and Soleimani's pure soul and condole the Iranian nation on this great martyrdom."

Who is Imam Mahdi and why was Khamenei congratulating him on the day of Soleimani's death? In short, he is Islam's messiah, the 12th of 12 Imams who are successors to Mohammed. Said to have been born in 879 CE, the Imam Mahdi is believed by Shi'a Muslims to still be alive, but hidden from mankind in "occultation" until a time of such upheaval on the earth that only his reappearance will rescue mankind and, in fact, usher in an age of global peace; Islamic peace, that is; a kind of peace in which all mankind is living in submission to the Allah of the Koran.

CRAZY TO Western ears, this messianic creed is the *raison d'être* for the Islamic Republic of Iran according to its founders and leaders. It is also the basis of Tehran's foreign and military policies; and it is impossible to overemphasize the Iran regime's visceral commitment to it. The Imam Mahdi is invoked in every public gathering, both civil and military; he is the singular inspiration for every policy, every tactic, every mission; indeed, he is nothing less than the regime's reason for its existence and, as such, its singular and unwavering motivation for the future.

This reality does not bode well for those who see recent stumbles as indicative of an imminent fall of the mullahs in Tehran.

Khamenei's official website is full of teachings about Imam Mahdi, including one that states the Supreme Leader's conviction that his reappearance is very near. "Reappearance of Imam Mahdi [aj] is near, because minds are ready," Khamenei writes. The "aj" in parenthesis is shorthand for, "May Allah hasten his appearance."

"The mind of humankind is ready to understand, to learn, and to know, undoubtedly, that a lofty human will come to save them from the burden of oppression and tyranny," Khamenei explains. "The Iranian nation, enjoys a great privilege today: the atmosphere of the country is an atmosphere of Imam Mahdi [aj]," he continues, adding that "many of our great scholars have personally met with this beloved [Imam] of hearts of the admirers during his occultation; many have made a pledge to him in person; many have heard from him some heartwarming words; many have been caressed by him and many others have re-

ceived his kindness, care, and love."

How is this unwrapped in terms of Iran's foreign and military policies today?

Global upheaval is a prerequisite for the Mahdi's reappearance. This means that inasmuch as Iran stirs up a global hornet's nest, it advances the Mahdi's return, a return that is imminent. The regime's primary agenda is to strategically provoke the world to chaos; this is how it wins. Chaos brings the Mahdi who brings global peace. Call it "The Mahdi Doctrine."

The Iranian regime believes it has created an "atmosphere" that embodies the spirit of the Mahdi. Its religious, military and civil leaders have had personal encounters with him. In essence, then, today's Iran is the womb from which the Mahdi will be reborn. Accordingly, the regime will go to any lengths to preserve itself. Accordingly, we should expect internal rebellion to be ruthlessly squashed. Protesters, especially organizers, will disappear. All external and internal opposition to the regime will be demonized.

Israel must be destroyed. Tehran's unrelenting objective is resurrection of the ancient Persian empire in the form of an Islamic caliphate. The primary impediment to that objective is Israel, the "Zionist Entity," the very embodiment of evil in the world today. Notably, Khamenei's Twitter feed is full of vitriol about Israel.

"The Zionist regime is the epitome of evil," he tweeted on Valentine's Day in 2016. It is a "racist, usurping, lying, vicious, apartheid regime," he added on February 5, 2019.

What then must be done? "Once people in the West realize their problems stem from Zionist domination over governments, great social movements will give birth to a new world," he explained on 2 March 2015. Accordingly, the "barbaric, wolflike and infanticidal regime of Israel which spares no crime but to be annihilated."

Translation: When the world finishes the job that Hitler started, the Mahdi will come, bringing heaven on earth; Islamic heaven, that is.

Wounded by economic sanctions, embarrassed by internal protesters, Iran is more dangerous today than ever.

Why did Khamenei congratulate Imam Mahdi on the day of Soleimani's death? Because the real Prince of Persia is undeterred. He is still coming, and Iran will do anything to pave his way. ■

The Jewish journey to Hebron

By Bradley Martin

"I WOULD describe it as 'Woodstock meets the Bible,'" said Rabbi Yishai Fleisher, international spokesperson for the Jewish community of Hebron, when describing one of the busiest days of the year in the city of Hebron. "It was an amazing celebration of something holistic, that the Jewish people are an ancient indigenous people back in their land celebrating our ancestral connection to this place."

Considering how an estimated 40,000-50,000 Jews converged on the small Jewish neighborhood in Hebron, such an analogy seems quite accurate. Thousands of pilgrims came equipped with tents and trailers, crammed together in the roughly 20% of the city under Israeli administration, as well as in the neighboring Israeli suburb of Kiryat Arba.

Tents and trailers could be seen parked all alongside the main road leading up to the Cave of the Patriarchs (believed to be the burial ground of the biblical patriarchs and matriarchs of the Jewish people). Spontaneous dancing erupted throughout the day before Shabbat. More and more people arrived in the already overcrowded neighborhood, while the noticeable presence of IDF soldiers and army vehicles secured the event.

"This is truly special!" exclaimed a Satmar Hasid who attended. "I am so happy to be here for *Sarah Imeinu*. When asked whether his visiting Israel or the city of Hebron with IDF protection went against the teachings of the anti-Zionist Satmar Rebbe – who incidentally had arrived in the country earlier that week for a 10-day visit – he briskly dismissed the supposed contradiction as not being problematic.

Chayei Sarah is the fifth weekly portion in the annual Jewish cycle of Torah reading, which tells the story of Abraham's purchase of the cave and adjoining field as a burial place for his wife Sarah. This is also one of the 10 days of the year where the entire complex is open for Jewish prayer services, which would otherwise be off limits, while for another 10 days, the Jewish area is open to Muslims based on Islamic holy days. Normally, the *Waqf* (Islamic religious en-

dowment) has control of most of the complex that includes the whole southeastern section containing the cenotaphs of Isaac and Rebecca.

"Keep in mind also that the site has been closed to [Jews] for 700 years under Muslim rule," said David Wilder, longtime community leader and resident. "Today, we have close to a million visitors every year. The present Jewish community represents a link in that chain going back not only to Abraham, but to King David who established the first capital of Israel here in Hebron." Wilder went on to say that attendance for this year's event was "higher than it's ever been."

Tours of the Jewish section were organized throughout Friday morning, leading up to the evening. By the foot of the en-

sure built centuries ago by Herod the Great, several national religious boys gathered in a circle and sang while one of their friends played the guitar. Crowds of visitors erupted into spontaneous celebration and dancing throughout the day.

Many guests slept in separate quarters for men and women in the classrooms of two schools in Kiryat Arba. Visitors brought their sleeping bags and mattresses to claim a few meters of floor as their own, with barely any space left unused. Some particularly creative youngsters even found a way to sleep on top of makeshift beds made of desks and chairs.

"This is my second time in Hebron. It is a special time to be here," said Yaron, a father of four from Ashdod who came with

MARC ISRAEL SELLEM

The Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron



his eldest son and nephew. His family had previously made aliyah almost a decade ago. “There is nothing like being here and I will certainly come again with my other children.”

During *Kabbalat Shabbat* prayers, excitement built up while the crowd of men pushed and shoved to reach the section of the complex that would usually be barred to Jews. As worshipers reached the Isaac Hall, some could not help but break down in tears. Many even tried to inhale the scent of fragrant spices emanating from the sealed passage of the caves. According to the Midrash, this passage is, in fact, the threshold to the Garden of Eden.

Many high-ranking Israeli officials arrived to take part in the event and sat togeth-



From inside the Jewish area of the Tomb of the Patriarchs, as tours were being held for Jewish and Christian visitors

er, including Transportation Minister Beza-
lel Smotrich and Jerusalem Affairs Minister
Ze’ev Elkin. Chief Rabbi of Safed Shmuel
Eliyahu and Chief Rabbi of Beersheba Ye-
huda Deri were also in attendance for a par-
ticularly moving Friday evening service that
consisted of prayers as well as Torah lessons
highlighting the significance of the location
and date. Throughout the service, Education
Minister – and former chief rabbi of the IDF
– Rafi Peretz was noticeably moved, choos-
ing to silently absorb his surroundings while
his colleagues engaged in conversation.

This year’s *Chayei Sarah* event came in
the midst of several important geopolitical
shifts, the first of which came on Novem-
ber 18, when US Secretary of State Mike
Pompeo reversed longstanding State De-
partment policy by declaring Israeli settle-
ments not to be “inconsistent with interna-
tional law.” One week after the event, De-
fense Minister Naftali Bennett approved the
construction of a new Jewish neighborhood
in Hebron that will include several apart-
ment blocks on the site of what is known as
the wholesale market. This announcement
was met with strong praise by the Jewish
community in Hebron.

“We’re very happy about that,” said
Fleisher, when asked to comment on the de-
cision. “There’s a very important thing that
has to be said. Naftali Bennett’s decision to
allow planning for the wholesale market is
really following a decision made by Attor-



Three religious boys singing and playing a guitar at the foot of the Herodian structure

ney General Avichai Mandelblit a year ago
saying that this pathway ... is good and le-
gal.” Fleisher highlighted how the land in
question was owned by Jews and deeded as
such in 1807, which only became a center
for Arab commerce when Hebron came un-
der Jordanian rule in 1948.

“[Mandleblit’s] decision was that the mar-
ket stalls that are there would be protect-
ed one way or another, but that we would
be able to build under and above it,” said
Fleisher. “You would think Jews building in
Hebron would be the most natural thing in
the world.” This view was shared by Wild-
er, saying that the project would double the
size of Hebron’s Jewish population. Though
he also attributed a degree of Divine signifi-
cance to these recent political developments.

“I think what we are seeing coming out
of the Trump administration, without try-
ing to be overly metaphysical, is part of the
process of redemption,” said Wilder. “That
the nations of the world start to recognize
the fact that we have a right to live in our
homeland. We don’t need their recognition
for us to have our own legitimacy. But of
course we’re very happy about the fact that
others are starting to recognize our right to
live here as well.” ■

*Bradley Martin is a Senior Fellow with the
News and Public Policy Group Haym Salo-
mon Center and Deputy Editor for the Cana-
dian Institute for Jewish Research*

Operation Embrace: NGOs help Israelis living near Gaza

By Linda Gradstein

YAFFA AGADI will never forget the day last May when Palestinian gunmen in Gaza fired dozens of Qassam rockets at southern Israel. The “red alert” siren blared over and over near her home in Ashkelon, sending all of them running into the safe room. Yaffa’s husband Moshe went outside to smoke a quick cigarette in what he thought was a break between rocket attacks. As he was standing outside, a rocket landed very close to him, and shrapnel hit him, killing him instantly.

“I have no life, I can’t sleep, I saw my husband die in front of me,” his widow Yaffa said in a scratchy voice on the edge of tears. “I picked him up and tried to save

him, but he died.”

I met Yaffa at a fundraiser for Operation Embrace, an organization that provides services for Israelis and their families who were killed and wounded in terror attacks. These include paying for psychological counseling, tutoring, equine therapy and twice-yearly weekends in hotels for family members.

Yaffa told me that her 13-year-old daughter, the youngest of four, has been depressed since her father died. It was the first funeral her daughter attended. Every time there is the noise of a rocket attack or even a car backfiring, she starts crying and yelling, “a rocket, a rocket.” These are classic symp-

toms of post-traumatic stress disorder, says Michal Feldstein, the social worker for Operation Embrace.

Yaffa says that immediately after the rocket attack government representatives came to visit her and said they would help her any way they could. But those promises were empty.

“I feel like everyone has forgotten me,” she said. “The only one who has supported us is Michal.” She was referring to Feldstein.

Feldstein says that a large proportion of children near Gaza who have lived with rocket attacks for years show symptoms of PTSD. These include sleep problems,

COURTESY



Israeli children living near Gaza show solidarity with the victims of the Pittsburgh Tree of Life shooting



Schoolchildren learn ways of calming themselves during rocket attacks

Operation Embrace social worker Michal Feldstein visits a victim in the hospital

always feeling they need to be ready for an attack, nightmares, bed-wetting and angry outbursts.

While physical trauma will heal, she said, emotional trauma needs to be treated or it will fester. She herself lives on Kibbutz Mefalsim just a few kilometers from Gaza, so she knows what her clients are going through.

Operation Embrace was started by Rabbi Joel and Aviva Tessler in 2001 in Potomac, Maryland, where Joel was a rabbi for many years. Aviva recently organized a benefit to raise money for the organization. A surprise guest was US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman.

“The goal of the evening is to bring greater awareness to the real people who have endured so much suffering and trauma and yet cling to life,” she said. “Part of PTSD is this feeling of not wanting to leave your home and not trusting anything anymore. The hope is we can continue to grow the awareness within Israel.”

The annual budget is \$350,000 and over the 18 years they have raised \$3.5 million. She estimates they’ve helped about 10,000 people.

One, she said, was a young girl who was severely injured in a rocket attack and spent

several weeks in a coma. She recovered but had permanent hearing loss. The National Insurance Institute (NII) offered her hearing aids, but she wanted to become a lawyer and needed very expensive hearing aids that would filter out all of the background noise to help her understand her lectures in class. Operation Embrace provided the hearing aids and today the young woman is a lawyer.

Another organization helping the younger crowd in southern Israel is Connections and Links: From Trauma to Resilience. The organization aims to train teachers in a combination of movement therapy, somatic experience and mind-body therapy. Co-founder Judith Spanglet says it is a focused way of treating trauma and building resilience.

“Somatic experience is a combination of therapies that uses neuropsychology to work with different parts of the brain,” Spanglet said. “For example, there is a part of the brain which reacts to a threat and automatically goes into flight or fight response. At the time of a threat, the part of the brain in charge of emotions has less energy.”

Most people, she said, can return to normal after repeated stressful events like rocket attacks. But about one-third will require therapy, which many Israelis are afraid to admit they need.

In addition, she said, many of the therapists making house calls in the middle of a war live in the affected areas, and are themselves worried about their own families as they are trying to treat others.

They have published a children’s book called *Treasures of the Winning Couple*, featuring Mr. Body and Ms. Awareness who together find a way to increase resilience. They also have a new emergency kit with a series of cards and equipment.

On one side of each card is a picture that relaxes a part of the brain. On the other is a suggested activity using equipment provided such as a rubber ball or a scarf with activities that promote relaxation. The kit is meant to help teachers or even parents dealing with frequent rocket attacks.

Israelis living closest to Gaza have just 15 seconds to get themselves and their families to a safe room. Doing this repeatedly increases stress levels among almost everyone living there.

“Children have learned that when I am outside my comfort zone there are tools I can use to get back in,” she said. “It doesn’t matter whether it’s a rocket attack or another kid taking a ball. Children learn how to understand their own nervous system and help themselves. ■

Yocheved Sidof, founder of Lamplighters Yeshivah in Brooklyn

By Joseph Scutts

AN ORTHODOX Jewish mother of five, Yocheved Sidof is an inspiration to many, knowing no boundaries or limitations to what she wants to achieve. A pioneering woman of many talents, Sidof founded Lamplighters Yeshivah in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, where she held the role of CEO for nearly a decade. Lamplighters is an internationally recognized school that has cultivated a unique model of personalized education. Before starting Lamplighters (a Jewish Montessori day school), she was a photographer, filmmaker and educator, always with a passion to connect people and uplift communities. I recently had the opportunity to speak to Sidof to discover where her drive and unique love for education originated.

COURTESY



What was the main source of inspiration that made you want to create such a groundbreaking Jewish school in Brooklyn?

I was raised with a deep knowledge and awareness that every person is an individual, charged with a unique mission in this world. Over the years, I met so many people – from all types of Jewish communities! – that became disillusioned through their Jewish schooling. I was struck, again and again, with a sort of cognitive dissonance: if God creates each one of us unique, why do our schools mostly offer one-size-fits-all solutions? I believe we can do better. We need to do better.

Where did the idea for the name Lamplighters come from and do you think it symbolizes a source of light and hope with everything that is happening to the Jewish community these days?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe taught that every Hasid is a lamplighter – our mission is to bring light to the darkest places. Before you can share light you need to be “lit” as they say – a whole person, in touch with your deepest self. That’s the true purpose of Jewish education. Even though we are a relatively small school in Brooklyn (150

Yocheved Sidof: Lamplighters represents the power of the individual, of challenging the status quo

students and counting), we have fulfilled a hope for so many people across so many communities. Lamplighters represents the power of the individual, of challenging the status quo. I’m just one mother who gathered a group of courageous people and committed to provide our children with someone better. Change is possible.

What does education mean to you when it comes to building the Jewish leaders of tomorrow?

We live in a world where we are constantly inundated, forced to make hard choices of where to place our attention. Becoming a whole person and Jew is not just about learning facts, Jewish history and content. It’s not about passing tests. We need to build the mental, emotional and spiritual capacity of our children to be resilient, make hard choices and stand for something that bigger than ourselves. To build the Jewish leaders of tomorrow and the next generation is to build people who think deeply, with curiosity, about the world and feel empowered make a difference.

Lastly, what is your vision of the school five, 10, 20 years down the road as Lamplighters continues to grow, fueled by your vision as the founder?

Thank God, over the last decade, our lab school has become a place of learning and sharing with Jewish educators across the world, from diverse communities, who are curious about our responsive, personalized model of education. The forward vision is to take our proof-of-concept and share it out more widely, through deeper, continued teacher training, consulting and model development. We are seeking fellow innovative educators, school leaders and visionary funders to partner with us to harness the learning of our school community and create ripples of change throughout Jewish schools of all kinds. The world is ready. Our children are waiting. ■

Joseph Scutts is a financial adviser who resides in New York City and involved in more than 10 Israel-based and Jewish advocacy organizations



All roads lead to Jerusalem

“MUCH HAVE I traveled in the realms of gold,” John Keats wrote. “And many goodly states and kingdoms seen.”

Growing up in Israel, studying in Europe and working in the US gave me a unique perspective on life.

After graduating high school in Israel, I left for England to explore new educational horizons. I then went on to study for my MA at the University of Cologne in Germany. Despite the sheer size of the student body, the quality of this free education was outstanding.

Eventually, I traded the eternally gray skyline of Cologne for sunny Dallas.

Somehow, the energy in Dallas was conducive for business and enterprise. Applying my language skills, I was transformed from an academic to a business woman.

My workout regiment in Cologne, which consisted of walking to the university and back, was replaced by a state-of-the-art gym in Dallas.

The physical vibrations in Dallas are remarkable and it’s a city that is constantly growing. It was not by chance that Dr. Kenneth Cooper started his famed Aerobic Center and clinic there.

Ten years in Dallas were followed by 10 years in Washington DC, where the pendulum has swung yet again to intellectual pursuits. The human landscape could not be more different. DC – home to government and the National Institutes of Health – was fertile ground for my lecture series.

Yet, it seemed as though I could not stay in one place longer than 10 years. It wasn’t until I landed in Barcelona on a snowy Thanksgiving in DC that I appreciated how the deep blue sky of Barcelona inspired generations of painters. Aesthetics matter a great deal there.

The exterior, be it the beautiful architecture of buildings, not just Gaudi’s, but also the way people dress.

At every street corner there is either a gym or a beauty salon.

However, the real reason for my move to Spain turned out to be the numerous descendants of the *Anusim* (the Marranos), for whom exploring their Jewish roots was of crucial importance. Their collective memory had never died since 1478.

Shalom TV helped me reach out to larger audiences and help make their Jewish heritage more easily accessible to many.

After commuting between three continents for years, it was time to move back to Jerusalem. The wheel has come full circle.

It was time to welcome my European and American friends and colleagues to Jerusalem. I remember my friend, who runs a hi-tech firm and moved to Tel Aviv from Manhattan, warning me about the “dark” colors of Jerusalem. But I only saw Jerusalem of Gold. Nothing equals the unique pleasures of Jerusalem.

Walking to the Western Wall on early Shabbat mornings through breathtaking scenery, one feels a part in the long chain of history. It is ever so easy to be spiritual here. Jerusalem may not the fashion or art capital of the world but it is home to highest number of charitable organizations in Israel and ranks number one in Israel in optimism. Maybe the two are related.

As the Talmud so aptly states, “Ten measures of beauty descended unto the world, nine on Jerusalem.” ■

Shoshana Tita is a writer, lecturer and director of Torah Life Center in Potomac, MD



A woman looks down at the Western Wall during holiday prayers

MARC ISRAEL SELLEM

Coming alive at the Dead Sea

By Robert Hersowitz

LIVING IN Jerusalem on the top of a mountain and on the edge of the Judean desert is an exciting prospect. For one thing, the climate here is somewhat different to the rest of Israel. The summers are hot and dry and the winters delightfully cool, interspersed with chilly nights, rain and many sunny days. Toward the middle of December, when the cold wet weather really seeps into your soul, there is always a way out.

You can jump into your car and head south toward the Negev desert and the Dead Sea. My wife, Annie, and I have been doing this for years. From where we live it takes less than 15 minutes to begin the descent to the landlocked lake shared by Israel and Jordan, which, with all the excavations and mineral extractions has now reached a depth of about 430 meters below sea level. This makes it one of the lowest bodies of water on the surface of the earth. The drive takes in the city's magnificent landmarks, including the walls of the Old City and the Mount of Olives, followed by a steep decline south along the recently completed double highway toward the desert.

On a clear day you can see the mountains of Moab and Jordan in the distance. For anyone interested in the Bible, you get to pass through terrain that is filled with iconic sites going as far back as the Book of Genesis – where the origins of this weird and wonderful landscape are first mentioned in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, two cities destroyed by God because of the evils that were perpetrated there. We are told that once the land was “well watered like the garden of God,” green and fertile, a place on which Abraham's nephew Lot set his sights. For most of the year the land lies parched and desolate under scorching heat.

When winter arrives, often without warning, sudden downpours cause flash flooding and turn the area into a raging torrent of muddy rivers that cascade through the treacherous ravines and onto the road below. Route 90, the main access road that gets to you to the popular resort of Ein Bokek and beyond, can be one of the most hazardous roads in Israel.

It is especially dangerous in the winter when unexpected flash floods may render the road impassable. Nevertheless, undaunted adventurous Israelis flock to the area to witness this spectacle from “safe” viewing points along the way. For a short while in early spring, the desert literally blooms and changes color with carpets of green interspersed with exotic wild flowers that cover the mountainside.

Annie and I prefer to visit the area either in winter or early spring. We were there a few weeks ago, when the morning temperature in Jerusalem hovered at around 8 degrees Celsius.

Less than half an hour later, as we turned right onto Route 90, the gauge in my vehicle shot up to a comfortable 21 degrees. It was at that moment that we were able to take off our jackets, put on our sunglasses and experience the uplifting feeling of leaving the winter behind us.

From then on the road meanders through even more Biblical terrain, including the caves of Qumran, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. My wife, who guides at the Shrine of the Book at the Israel Museum, is a great aficionado on the subject and tells me that a large majority of overseas visitors come to see the Dead Sea Scrolls at the Shrine of the Book.

As we approach the signs pointing to Qumran, my New Yorker wife surveys the crevices hidden among the rocky cliffs that tower above the road and points up toward Cave 4, where many of the Scrolls were found: “How the hell did they get up there?”

The next amazing site en route to Ein Bokek (our intended destination) is Ein Gedi. It is mentioned several times in the Bible: in Genesis, Joshua, Ezekiel, Chronicles, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs and, most famously, in the book of Samuel, when the young David flees from King Saul.

A favorite on the tourist trail is David's Spring in the Ein Gedi Nature Reserve, with its sweet-water oasis buried deep inside the ravine. Even in winter it is well worth trekking along the path to see the spectacular waterfall that thunders down from the cliffs above into



the rock pool where many visitors brave the cold water and take a dip.

The ensuing stop along the route is the ancient fortress of Masada, towering nearly 1,500 feet above the plains with magnificent views of the Dead Sea. From here one can climb the Snake Path or take the cable car to explore the ruins of Herod the Great's palace, which was built in 30 BCE. There is now an impressive museum at the foot of Masada that explains the tragic history of the location, going back to the first Jewish-Roman War.

Our next port of call is our intended destination, the spa resort town of Ein Bokek, which, going at average speeds and without stopping, is a one-and-a-half hour drive. The town has its own archaeological history in the form of Metzad Bokek, a fortress dating back to the Roman era where the remains of a partly rebuilt perfume and medicine factory were found.

This is very much in keeping with the modern town's spa reputation, where visitors come from all over to “take the waters” and be cured of all sorts of ailments. The waters of the Dead Sea and some of the nearby springs are rich in sulfur and other curative minerals, which are beneficial for arthritic, muscular and skin conditions. Established in the early 1960s with the building of the first hotels, Ein Bokek has really come of age and entered



ROBERT HERSOWITZ

A view from the highway of the Dead Sea, the lowest point on the planet

the 21st century with its chic new Duty Free Dead Sea Mall and first class hotels. Today there are more than 16 hotels along the main road of the town offering everything from five-star comfort to more affordable options. Fortunately the resort has preserved its quiet backwater recuperative reputation rather than morphing into a vulgar mini “Las Vegas in the desert.”

A mark of the town’s recent progressive development is the construction of a stunning promenade. The impressive hiking and biking trail is both functional and aesthetically pleasing. It extends for more than seven miles along the shore and can readily be seen from the main road as one approaches Ein Bokek. The project was built for recreational purposes but also for protecting the adjacent hotels from any potential flooding that might occur in the future.

One of the problems the area faces is the shrinking effect of the excavation works, which have caused unwanted geological changes. So what attracts tourists from so many parts of the world to this strangely remote and low-lying place? The answer lies in the healing properties of its natural resources. Containing up to eight times more minerals than most seawater, the Dead Sea is made up of 33% salt and 21

minerals, including magnesium, calcium, bromine, potassium and bitumen.

These substances are known to cure skin disorders like psoriasis and vitiligo through strengthening tissues and maintaining the chemical balance of the skin, while stimulating blood circulation and expelling toxins. The extremely low positioning of the area on the earth’s surface also means that the sun’s damaging UV rays are filtered out. That is why almost all hotels are built with their own segregated solariums on the roofs so that men and women suffering from psoriasis and vitiligo can expose their skin to the healing light. The recommended hours for sunbathing by doctors are between 8:00 and 11:00 a.m. and between 2:30 and 6:00 p.m.

It is also claimed that the Dead Sea minerals help to relieve arthritic conditions. This is because the warmth and buoyancy of the water reduce the release of prostaglandins in the body.

Most of the hotels at the Dead Sea specifically cater to people wanting to “take the waters” and provide heated indoor Dead Sea water bathing facilities. They also offer a range of treatments, including full-body mud wraps, massage, facials and sulfur baths. There is also a medical center in the heart of the re-

sort, which has been treating patients from all over the world for the past 20 years under the supervision of Prof. Michael Rivkin. Patients from several European countries, including Germany and Austria, avail themselves of treatments subsidized by the national health services of their home countries. Ein Bokek also provides visitors with access to the solarium beach with its own treatment center. The International Climatology Center for Dermatology provides a number of facilities, including segregated bathing for men and women, changing rooms, showers as well as sun beds and mattresses.

For those not specifically visiting the Dead Sea for medical reasons, there is much to do in the way of recreation, local touring, sports and relaxation. During the day guests can venture out on jeep tours to the Ein Bokek Spring, Wadi Sdom and Mt. Sdom, where you pass by the legendary Lot’s wife rock formation. There are also longer excursions to the ancient copper mines of Timna, Sde Boker and the Ramon Crater, which competes favorably with the Grand Canyon for its vistas of sheer desert beauty.

For those who simply want to chill out in the warmth, there is always the option of relaxing at the beach. Most of the hotels have their own designated bathing areas with sun beds, chairs, umbrellas, vats of black mud and freshwater showers.

Guests can either float in the water or cover themselves and their loved ones in therapeutic black Dead Sea mud. The idea is to lie in the sun and wait until the mud cakes and dries, ready to be washed off under nearby showers. It’s always advisable to wear plastic footwear when wading into the water with its strange greasy consistency. In some places the salt forms crystals that can be quite sharp underfoot.

Swimming in the Dead Sea is a unique experience like nowhere else on Earth. Bathers are reminded to float on their backs rather than try and swim crawl or breaststroke or immerse their heads in the water. The salt is so concentrated that it can sting and burn. Getting some of it in the eyes is a most unpleasant experience and would probably require medical attention in some cases. Nevertheless, despite all the cautionary advice, there is nothing more calming than the sensation of buoyancy as you float weightlessly on your back, staring up at the sky, surrounded by the expanse of sea and the tranquility of the desert. The Dead Sea is truly a place where body and soul come alive. ■

On the trail

By Wendy Blumfield

THERE ARE many ways to face the challenge of the Israel Trail. Many people find safety in groups, spending nights in campsites or with “trail angels” in their bed-and-breakfast establishments. Others cover the trail with day trips rather than spending the night in the wild.

But Donald and Diana Barshaw Rich and their dog Taffy started their trek the hard way, probably not realizing what a challenge they were undertaking. They set off on the first stage in the Golan Druze village of Majdal Shams at the base of Mount Hermon with a modest supply of food and water, regular sneakers, one backpack, no tent and the sort of sleeping bags that one sends with one’s kids to Scouts camp.

“The Israel Trail actually starts at Kibbutz Dan but most people start in the Golan because it is so beautiful,” says Diana, adding that the first trip finishing at the Roaring Lion at Tel Hai taught them everything they needed to know.

“Hikers usually prepare and buy according to the book,” says Diana, “but we did not go with the trend.”

The Israel Trail was inaugurated in 1995, the brainchild of Avraham Tamir, who was inspired by hiking the Appalachian Trail. *National Geographic* describes it as one of 20 best epic hiking trails in the world. With minor changes over time, the trail covers 1,015 km from Dan in the north to Eilat in the south.

After a life-changing first leg, the Riches knew better and invested in far tougher clothing and equipment. Nevertheless, covering sections of the trail in legs of three, four or five days, they were totally self-sufficient, slept wherever they found a safe and private spot to camp, carried their own food and water and navigated totally alone. “At first our dog was confused, felt homeless and disoriented, but gradually he learned that he had a job, coped magnificently with the changes in weather and environment, and provided us with a sense of security,” Diana says, speaking fondly of her canine friend who has since passed away.

The decision to take this challenge was in itself a question of making an opportunity out of a crisis as both Diana and Donald lost their jobs simultaneously. “When will we both be free again at the same time?”



RICH FAMILY

Don and Taffy at the top of a ladder at Nachal Vardia, a deep water pool

they asked each other.

The Riches made aliyah in 1989 from New Jersey, where Diana had a post-doctoral position at Rutgers University Marine Field Station. They had each traveled a great deal during their lives in the US.

Diana got a job as a marine biologist at Haifa University but they took a sabbatical in the US in 1998 when she was offered a job of assistant professor for three years.

Upon their return, Diana worked at the National Institute of Oceanography at Tel Shikmona in Haifa and after she lost that job, she taught English as a second language and wrote a regular blog on wildlife in Israel for *The Jerusalem Post*. The couple have two sons, aged 27 and 31.

When Donald subsequently lost his job and they decided to tackle the Israel Trail, they had very little experience of hiking.

“I was 23 kilos heavier than I am now, so the first experiences were very hard for me,” says Diana.

Diana was determined to walk the entire trail from north to south. At the end of each leg they left a small rock hidden in a place to be found before starting the next stage. In this way, she was sure that they had actually walked every step of the way.

In total, they divided the trail into 18 sections, or legs, the longest lasting six days. Between Kibbutz Yagur – just south of Haifa – and Tel Aviv, they covered the area with day trips. “That was much easier, we did not have to carry so much weight,” says Diana, “but I’m glad that we experienced both types of hiking.”

They had started the trail at its northern point in May 2009 and, avoiding the height of summer, finished in Eilat on April 3, 2013.

“In the north it is easier to find sources of water, but in the Arava and the Negev one needs to stash water in advance,” she says. Some hikers hire a company to stash water and non-perishable foods, some even have their backpacks carried from stage to stage.

But the Riches were doing it alone and in advance of those southern treks would find suitable locations to leave sufficient supplies. “You need so much more water in the south, which is why one should not plan any legs in the summer or during a *sharav* [heatwave]. It is not just the issue of water, if you hike during the day in the summer in the Negev it will kill you.

“We were not in such good shape when we started the trail,” says Diana, “but by the time we got to the South, we were stronger and better organized. We had to really plan with maps where we could stash water in accordance to how far we could carry the weight of so many bottles.”

Asked why they did not hike the trail in the conventional way, in a group or using organized campsites or other accommodation, Diana replies, “Sleeping in the wild gave an added dimension. To actually sleep on the earth, the land of Israel, had a profound effect on me. Also we were able to see a different side of nature, the nights are profoundly beautiful.

“We had to be inventive with taking appropriate foods. We had a small camping stove and it was important to be able to heat soups and make tea.”



RICH FAMILY

Diana and Donald Rich and their dog Taffy on the Israel Trail

Finding camping spots was also a challenge. “The official camping sites on the trail are not pleasant; unfortunately, hikers do not always clean up after themselves,” she says. So we found spots that were legal and that provided privacy. She noted that farmers often leave a strip unharvested at the edge of their fields and this made a comfortable nesting spot.

Their dog, a medium-large half-Canaan had the character of a Bedouin dog. “We were never afraid when he was with us.” On the other hand, while tackling some of the mountainous sections of the trail, involving ladders and staples, they had to hoist the dog up these heights. “He was magnificent,” said Diana, “we could see him look up at those heights with great trepidation, as if to say ‘how on earth am I going to get up there?’” she reminisces. “But he cooperated and we managed to haul him up those steep gorges.”

The Riches also found the trail far more difficult than they had imagined. Donald is scared of heights but apart from one episode just before they descended to Eilat he did cope.

“The trail changed me physically,” affirms Diana. “The difficulty of hiking with my excess weight encouraged me to lose all those kilos. I also became more athletic and my discomfort threshold was raised, sleeping on the ground became quite comfortable, appreciating the contrast of sleeping in the wild with our home environment of showers and a comfortable bed.

“As a biologist I had a deeper understanding of the routine of nature. We remember every detail of the nights we slept out, the meals we prepared, the cycles of day and night.”

The episode mentioned where Donald experienced a severe case of vertigo was on a difficult leg of the trail, facing Mount Shlomo, the highest mountain in the Eilat range. “From a distance we saw this looming black mountain.” It was not clear to Donald that the trail did not actually go up the mountain but around it. “There is no place on the Israel Trail where you need to be a professional climber; there are always ladders, staples and footholds, and we never ventured off the trail,” Diana explains.

Eventually Donald saw that they didn’t have to go up Mount Shlomo, but while Donald and the dog rested, Diana felt compelled to complete that mountain climb. “I

felt super-human,” she declared.

And at last they walked into Eilat and plunged into the Red Sea with all their clothes on.

“We stayed in a grand hotel to celebrate the completion of this amazing adventure, of covering this wonderful country with its diverse geology, ecology, biology, history, geography and archaeology,” she says.

Diana made a further pilgrimage after her mother passed away. She hiked alone this time without even the dog, starting in Eilat, and leaving that same rock at the end of every leg. She finished the hike on this occasion in Jerusalem, where she placed the rock on her mother’s grave.

What does such a challenge do for a marriage relationship? Diana replied they had very few arguments. “Donald is stronger but I am quicker; sometimes I wanted to do the maximum, which was not always necessary. But we are both problem solvers and we never got irritated with each other.”

The Riches are passionate about keeping Israel clean and not littering. “It is surprising what decomposes and what doesn’t. There are many plastics that quickly decompose in the sun, while baby wipes persist for very long periods.”

She pleads: Take out more than you bring in; leave the site better and cleaner than you found it. ■

For more information on the trail and support services visit Diana’s website: www.dianabarshaw.com; www.israeltrail.net; http://shvil.wikia.com/INT_Angels



RICH FAMILY

Diana Barshaw Rich resting at the Hermon River



Vayyar sees through walls

By Shlomo Maital

SCIENCE FICTION writer Arthur Clarke (2001: A Space Odyssey) once wrote: “Truly advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.” Many Israeli start-ups make magic. But here, below, is a unique Israeli technology that I believe is a leading candidate to top the magic list.

Four years ago, writing in *Forbes* magazine, Jennifer Kite-Powell described an Israeli start-up, Vayyar, whose product could see through walls.

“The company’s low-power sensors can see through skin and tissue to detect breast or other cancer masses, peek through walls to detect structural foundations or fractures and track a person’s location and vital signs as they move through a smart home,” she wrote. “To see through things, Vayyar’s technology creates a 3D image based on radio frequency (RF) waves, which allow Vayyar’s sensors to look into and inside an object and detect an image of what’s inside.”

I recently visited Vayyar at its offices in Yehud, a city of 30,000 in central Israel and spoke to some of the company’s managers about product development. At the time, I recalled reading Superman comics as a child. Superman, you may remember, had X-ray vision and could see through walls.

Vayyar has closed a circle. Superman’s creators – writer Jerry Siegel and artist Joe Shuster – were Jewish. Superman first appeared in *Action Comics* #1, published on April 18, 1938. Some 81 years later, Israeli entrepreneurs made X-ray vision commercially available and viable.

Vayyar was founded in 2011 by Raviv Melamed, former Intel vice president; and Miri Ratner and Naftali Chayat, hi-tech veterans from Alvarion, a Wi-Fi company. Vayyar’s core technology is an advanced 4D (3D plus time) imaging sensor able to track everything in the surrounding area in real time without a camera. It does this by sending and receiving radar signals and cleverly interpreting what the bounce-back signal means.

Among Vayyar’s magical products: Automotive (e.g., keep parents from forgetting

RONEN ZVULUN/REUTERS



A marcher dressed as Superman performs opposite the Great Synagogue in the annual Jerusalem parade during the festival of Sukkot

children in hot locked cars); Smart homes (alerts when elderly people fall); Retail (track customers in a store, track product movement on shelves); and Medical (early stage cancer detection, without X-rays). I asked Vayyar managers which of their products was the most revolutionary. Someone responded, mammography – imaging without X-rays, with fast results.

I asked Melamed several questions by email.

You left a senior secure and well-paid position at Intel to embark on the risky adventure of Vayyar start-up. (Melamed was general manager of Intel’s Worldwide Mobile Wireless Group). Why?

I did wireless for many years and I wanted to do something else that will have a direct effect on people lives. The medical world

intrigued me and I felt there is a lot of room for innovation there, especially if you bring new capabilities from the wireless world to the imaging world. Since I enjoy building things from scratch, a start-up was the best way to go.

Research of some 800 Israeli start-ups showed that the average age of the protagonists is 36. I noticed that you have some graying hair. I recently wrote a column about “snow-capped idea volcanoes” – entrepreneurs over 60 or 70.

What in your experience are the advantages and disadvantages of “gray-haired” start-up entrepreneurs?

I don’t think that innovation relates to age. I think that when you get older you let your experience guide you, which sometimes can save time and money but, on the other hand,

can hold you back from trying new things as you assume that you will know the result. If you are willing to challenge your own experience and not be limited by it, then I believe that innovation will always continue no matter how old you are.

Raviv, when we met, we discussed Vayyar's unusual business model – your 4D imaging sensor technology finds use in a wide variety of applications, which creates a complex management challenge for a relatively small start-up. Normally business schools emphasize focus. Find your best product, identify your niche market, and single-mindedly focus on it. Vayyar operates in a dizzying variety of diverse markets. You agreed that Vayyar's core competence is expertly managing this very complicated business model. Can you tell us whether this business model just happened, owing to market demand, or did you envision it and shape it from the outset?

We envisioned that from the beginning. Our logic was based on the fact that imaging sensors were always used in many industries and betting on one industry for a new technology will be a higher risk than seeding different markets in parallel. It also gives the company a wide base that makes it more stable. We believe that this stability is important to overcome any changes in the market trends especially if you are trying to build a large company that will last a long time. I think this approach can only be relevant to companies that have technology that can serve multiple markets and doesn't need to conform to a specific industrial standard.

You say, "Build a large company that will last a long time." This compels the usual question: Can Vayyar remain independent and grow into a global giant – or is it possible that you will be acquired? What are your views in general on Israel's lack of ability to grow large independent global hi-tech companies, perhaps since Amdocs?

Recently, Dov Moran (founder of M-Systems and the USB flash drive) spoke at the Technion to students and admitted that selling his start-up to Sandisk for \$1.6 billion brought him major "heartache" – he really wanted to grow the company independently.

Everything is possible, but we are trying to create a large company. It starts from the way we structured the company and it also shows in the focus we put on growing a skilled management team at all levels.

With regard to large companies I think the market is changing and larger investors are coming to Israel looking for growth companies. This was one of the key elements that was missing for Israel to have more home-grown large companies. The other thing that was missing was people who knew how to run a large operation. This gap was also closed in the last decade as start-ups were acquired and many people got exposed to the way a corporate company thinks and acts at the highest management levels. I think that in the future we will see more large companies but we should keep the fast innovation cycle and diversity of small start-ups as they will always be the real driver for Israel's name as an innovation hub. ■

The writer heads the Zvi Griliches Research Data Center at the S. Neaman Institute, Technion and blogs at www.timnovate.wordpress.com



Raviv Melamed, CEO of Vayyar Imaging

Exit Nation?

In the past it often seemed that Israel was deliberately trying to be "Exit Nation," selling its start-up brains to well-heeled global bidders. But a report on exits by the consultancy PwC finds that "the exit performance of the Israeli hi-tech industry cooled down in 2018." Private acquisitions and initial public offerings of stock totaled \$4.9 billion, a drop of one-third compared to 2017. The average deal value was \$81 million, down from \$106 m. the previous year. All in all, the report states, the local hi-tech market continues to draw tech titans and other international players in pursuit of creative solutions backed by deep technology. However, "a new breed of investors ... more patient ... implies stakeholders with higher expectations, along with a longer life-cycle-to-exit and growing demand for stronger managements able to steer the ship over an extended period of time."

Exits will nonetheless continue. "Israeli hi-tech will continue to be a fertile breeding ground for the world as business models and economic processes continue to be disrupted in a faster and faster cycle."

In the largest acquisition of an Israel-

li cybersecurity company and the third biggest Israeli tech exit to date, Insight Partners of the US purchased Israel's Armis in a \$1.1 b. deal due to be finalized in February. Under the deal, Armis will continue to operate independently and will be fully managed by its two cofounders, Yevgeny Dibrov, CEO, and Nadir Izrael, CTO, and executive team, the companies said. The deal is expected to be finalized in February.

One of the basic principles of start-up entrepreneurship is a simple formula: X+Y. Combine products and technologies that others have not. Vayyar combined imaging and wireless in a unique and creative manner to create value. In addition to product innovation, Vayyar also engaged in business model innovation – tackling a broad variety of product markets and uses.

When Superman's imaginative creators gave their hero sharp X-ray vision, X-ray images were rather blurry at the time. Not for the first time, Vayyar entrepreneurs have turned science fiction into technological fact. Israel and the world will benefit as a result.

S.M.

Hydroponic gardening in Baka and beyond

Text and photos by Judith Sudilovsky

FROM HER property at the edge of on the northern Arab-Israeli town of Baka al-Gharbiya, where Ensherah Nadaf lives with her three sons and their families, she can look down on the plot of land which belonged to her grandfather and her father after him, and where she spent many happy days of her childhood, tagging along behind her father as he tended to his crops.

“It is so different between then and now,” says Nadaf, 65, a recently retired school librarian and teacher. “My father and grandfather had 60 dunams of land in Baka, they used to grow watermelons, beans and okra. We were little. We would be behind them for fun.”

Today Baka (the shortened form of the town’s name) is a far cry from the agricultural village it was back then, with its busy streets lined with high-end clothing stores, restaurants, bakeries, modern home furnishing stores and supermarkets and with its urban sprawl and a population of almost 30,000 people, it can sometimes take up to 45 minutes to drive from one of town to the other. No one farms anymore, says Nadaf.

But recently, together with a group of four other women Nadaf participated in a course in hydroponic gardening sponsored by Workers Advice Center WAC-MAAN and Sindyanna of Galilee, a women-led nonprofit that promotes fair trade and “business for peace,” and over the past weeks she has been enjoying the vegetables she tended, with lettuce, celery, mint and parsley growing outside her home in the special tubes used for the hydroponic method of gardening.

That means she did not plant her vegetables in soil, but rather is growing them in water.

Hydroponic gardening uses no soil, instead growing plants in a solution of water and nutrients. Because the plants do not need to grow extensive root systems to obtain the nutrients they need, they can be packed together closely making it suitable



Nadaf, 65, (center) remembers the hard life her father had farming their land when she was a child and now grows crops through hydroponic gardening

to use where less space is available. Its proponents maintain that plants in hydroponic systems can grow from 20% to three times as fast as crops grown by conventional methods. The system also uses less water because the reservoirs used to contain the water are enclosed and the whole system sealed preventing evaporation and allowing the plants to take only the water they need.

“If my father was here and he could see my garden, he would wonder where the soil is,” Nadaf chuckles. “My father didn’t have any water in his land. It was a hard life. Today nobody wants to be a farmer but with this (hydroponic) way it is easier and I can see all this amazing green (plants) just outside my door.”

The brain-child of environmental activist and community garden coordinator and community worker Sehrab Msarwi, the hydroponic gardening project grew out of

her desire to improve the environment in Baka, and to connect residents to nature, and along the way reconnecting them with their agricultural roots.

Msarwi learned about the hydroponic system years ago through the nonprofit Association for Urban Farming and fell in love with the method and decided to bring it to her city. Her first foray into using the method was at her mother’s kindergarden. When she saw the success she was having with the children she turned to the local WAC-MAAN office for cooperation to bring the project to a wider group of people.

“I understood that if I could succeed with this project with the young children, I could succeed with the whole community,” says Msarwi.

Out of 10 women who came to listen to a presentation by Msarwi on hydroponic gardening, five signed up for a seven-week workshop which taught them how to set up

their own systems and the basic principles of the method.

In October 2019, each graduate received a hydroponic system consisting of four pipes, a pump and an acid meter, and in November they already began eating their own homegrown starchy vegetables, lettuce, mint, parsley, basil, arugula, peppers, coriander and celery.

“What is important with this method is that it doesn’t need large areas of land to create the garden,” says Wafa Tayara, responsible for women’s development projects at WAC-MAAN. “There also isn’t enough water in the country and with this method of gardening we save on a lot of water and the plants grow three times as fast as they do in soil.”

The fact that they are grown without soil, also means there are less insects so less chemical insecticides are needed, she added. Mostly they use organic solutions such as vinegar and baking soda to contend with the pests. The system is also relatively easy to use once it is set up requiring periodic checks on the acidity of the water, whether or not water has evaporated and to make sure the pump is working.

“Now that we have finished the first workshop, a lot more women are interested in joining and learning,” says Msarwi. In December she started the second workshop, with the first graduates helping the new students and demonstrating how the

method works with the hydroponic systems they set up at their homes.

Growing organic vegetables at home not only can help the women contribute to their household’s livelihoods by the women becoming producers rather than just consumers, Msarwi says, but it also encourages a clean and healthy environment and, eventually could also provide additional income for the women if the project is expanded as planned to create a hydroponic gardening cooperative which would allow the women to grow enough vegetables to sell to others. Marwa Ghaniem, 42, lives in a multi-level building and used a movable stand for her vegetables on a large balcony.

“I also have potted plants and I could compare the growth pattern between what is planted in soil and what was grown with the hydroponic method,” she said. “I am having a romance with my hydroponic system. I can grow vegetables without chemicals and using less water and this way I am caring for the environment. It is nice to sit there on my balcony and see all the green. I sit there and drink my coffee.”

What she loves most though, she says, is the ability to take the amount of leaves and vegetables she needs while leaving the rest of the plant in the system. There is a lot less waste of food that way, she said.

“We used to buy these things in big bunches and they would spoil in the refrigerator. Now when I want mint for my tea, I

take a few leaves and the rest continues to grow,” she says. “We don’t have any land now, but I want to see green (plants) growing by the work of my hands.”

Her grandmother, who spent most of her life farming, was surprised to see how the lettuce grew so quickly in three weeks, says Ghaniem.

“For my grandparents it was such physical work, going out in the morning, weeding the fields, tending the soil, coming back home in the evening,” she says.

She says she has included her children in her gardening, and they help her check the roots and the plants. Her four-year-old daughter has especially become fascinated by the process, she says.

“In today’s society children want everything to happen immediately. This has shown her how to be responsible and patient,” says Ghaniem.

The participants were also exposed to concepts of conservation and sustainability, and some said following the course they began to act more environmentally responsible by reusing plastic bags, and stopped using plastic bottles and disposable plates and cups. The women keep in touch and consult each other and Msarwi through a Whatsapp group and have also joined other hydroponic social media groups for support and advice.

But in the end the project is not just a gardening course, says WAC-MAAN’s Tayara. Now the women are thinking ahead, about other ways they can help and use their newly acquired skills to improve the dietary culture, household economy and environmental awareness in their community. With studies showing an alarming high rate of diabetes among middle-aged Arab women in Israel – one study by Zahi Sa’id, Counsel for Arab Society, Clalit Health Services, found that 70% of Arab women over 55 are overweight with 35% of the women in that age group additionally having diabetes – re-learning proper nutritional habits is vital for maintaining good health, she says.

“All these things are interconnected. We can’t look at one subject and ignore the others. We want to still follow our traditions, using new technology which helps care for the environment. We want people to cooperate with each other,” she says. “We want to take women who will be leaders in society, and who will be ambassadors in this place and make deep changes in our society.” ■



From left, Msarwi, Nadaf and Tayara harvest celery grown by Nadaf

Gabriel Isaac, Gandhi's forgotten lieutenant

By Shimon Lev

DURING THE Round Table Conference, which took place in London in 1931, Mahatma Gandhi told a reporter from London's *Jewish Chronicle*, "I have a world of Jewish friends among the Jews. In South Africa, I was surrounded by Jews."

This indeed was true since some Jews became Gandhi's closest and most important European supporters during his long formative years in South Africa. Most of these Jews were theosophists and Gandhi understood that his best recruiting ground for European followers was the Johannesburg Lodge of the Theosophical Society. In recent years, a growing number of studies have focused on this unique phenomenon. Books and articles have been published about his relationship with architect Hermann Kallenbach, his secretary Sonja Schlesin and, recently, also about an English Jew named Henry Polak.

But one virtually forgotten English-Jewish supporter of Gandhi was the Johannesburg jeweler, Gabriel Isaac (1874-1914). The fact that he is unknown, and even deleted from history, is troubling, since closer research about him reveals that in fact he was the only European to sacrifice his life for the sake of Gandhi's struggle in South Africa. Gandhi didn't even bother to mention him in his popular autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*.

So who was Gabriel Isaac?

It is not easy to trace Isaac's biography, and one has to collect fragments and pieces of evidence from different sources, although there is still missing information.

Isaac was born in Leeds, England, on November 6, 1874 and died at the age of 40, a few months after being released from a Pinetown jail during the Satyagraha struggle in South Africa.

His father owned a large jewelry business and Isaac was brought up in the same occupation. As noted in the only "In Memoriam" published in Gandhi's journal, *Indian Opinion*, after his death, Isaac decided to move

to South Africa "feeling the need for greater freedom that he could not get in England."

He arrived in South Africa before the Second Boer War, which started in 1899, and it is not clear what he did for living. During the war he joined the Kaffrarian Rifles and was among the besieged in the town of Wepener in April 1900. Probably as a result of the war, he came in contact with the Theosophical Society in South Africa. The Johannesburg Lodge was founded in 1895 by an English Jew, Louis Walter Ritch. Ritch became the first and closest supporter of Gandhi in his early years in South Africa, arriving in 1893 and leaving in 1914.

Isaac, Ritch, Polak and Kallenbach met at the various activities that took place at the Johannesburg Lodge. Polak recounted his first meeting with Isaac in the lodge in "a personal note" after his death, describing their friendship and his "cheery presence, his serenity of mind and character."

For Polak, Isaac was his first intimate friend in Johannesburg at a time when he "ached for the friendship and the understanding of one moved by motives like one's own." The two greeted each other at the Johannesburg Lodge as fellow Jews, theosophists, vegetarians and later fellow workers for the Indian cause. This acquaintance developed into a close friendship and Isaac lived with the Polaks for three years. To Millie Polak, Henry's wife, he became "dearer than her brother."

Isaac became an ardent theosophist, a staunch vegetarian, and an active member of the South Africa Theosophical Society. He was one of the South African theosophists who asked Annie Besant to become president of the society in 1907, which she refused. He read papers before various theosophical lodges, and conducted conversations in which he emphasized "the need to live in accordance with one's beliefs."

As a vegetarian, Isaac frequented the Johannesburg vegetarian restaurant that Gandhi often visited, and through this the

two became closely associated. In fact, it was Isaac who helped introduce Polak to Gandhi.

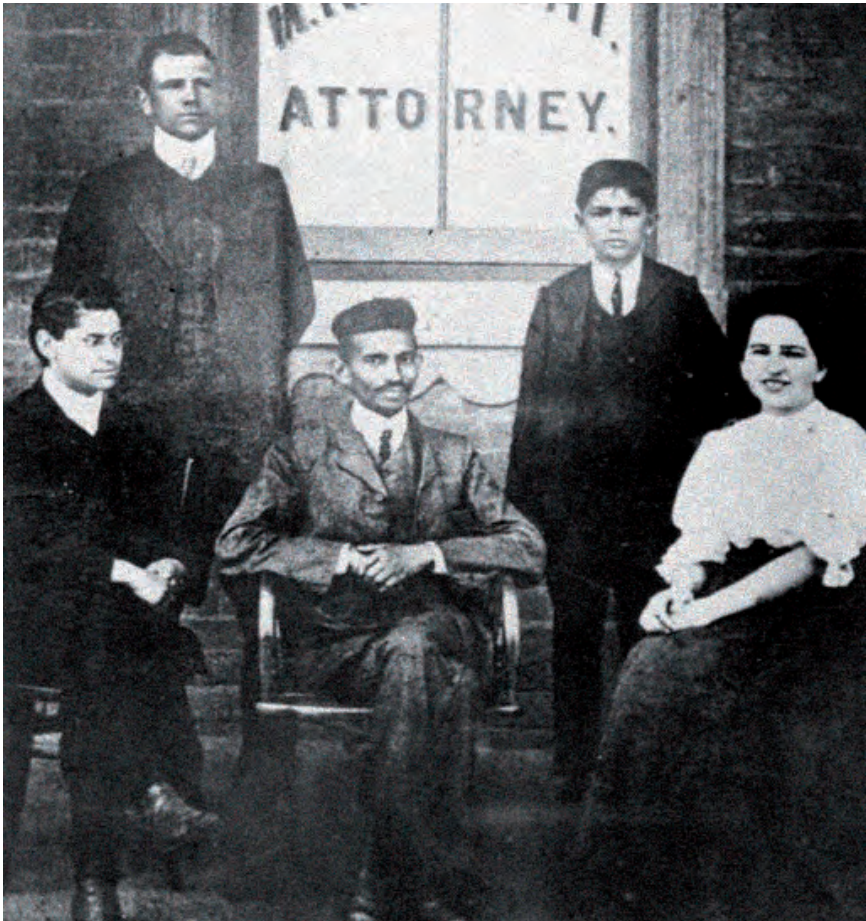
Polak recalled in his book, "I soon learnt that Gabriel Isaac knew Gandhiji well, and when I became one of the latter's articulated clerks, Gabriel used to join us at lunch-time, when we consumed homemade Kuhne bread spread with peanut butter and whatever fruits in season. He [Isaac] had been for some time importuning me to join the [Theosophical] society, but not wishing to become a member of any religious organization, having gone away from orthodoxy, I had refused. Learning that Gandhiji was a frequent lecturer at the Lodge, I mentioned this to him, he strongly urged me to become one, for, he said, as a good theosophist I should become a better Jew.

"Realizing the broadmindedness of this Hindu, I accepted his advice and have never regretted doing so. Except, perhaps, in a very general sense I cannot say that I have become 'a better Jew.' I regard myself as a brother, in the deeper sense, of a true Jew, Christian, Musulman or Parsi."

Isaac was never an Orthodox Jew but "took the highest pride in calling himself a Jew." For him to be a Jew was to live the "inner spirituality of Judaism." Like Ritch, Polak and Kallenbach, he also emphasized that "as a Jew, he could not rest while another people was being subjected to persecution of a type with which he was familiar." This was Isaac's reason to devote his energies to overcome popular prejudice against the Indian community by arguments, conversations, and lectures.

Isaac and the Indian struggle

Isaac became a member of the Phoenix settlement near Durban founded by Gandhi in 1905 and later a frequent visitor, though he continued to live in Johannesburg. As a jeweler he traveled all over South Africa, collecting subscriptions and advertisements for the *Indian Opinion*, the newspaper Gandhi founded in 1903. In 1908, Isaac



WIKIPEDIA

Mohandas Gandhi at his law office in Johannesburg (now called Gandhi Square), with his Jewish secretary Sonja Schlesin on one side and Henry Polak on the other

proposed himself as a nominal owner for some of the shops of Satyagrahis, Gandhi's passive resistance followers, after the government's policy of auctioning their goods in order to break the Indian Satyagrahis' spirit.

Isaac's name appears in a letter published by *The Times* in the first week of 1909 by 26 "Europeans" (whites) living in Transvaal, emphasizing that "there is an important body of sympathizers in the European section of the community who are grieved and hurt at the treatment being meted out to the Asiatics [Indians] for no apparent purpose at all."

These Europeans saluted the "courage and self-sacrifice of a movement in which all faiths and castes are represented." Morality and the imperial interest mandated that their demands be conceded, since passive resisters deported to India from Transvaal would "not be slow to ventilate [their grievance]

amidst the sympathetic surroundings of their native land."

Isaac regularly participated in the farewell and other joint Indian-European banquets, receptions and meals organized by the British Indian Association (BIA), and visited the Satyagrahis in jail.

Gandhi was proud to report that Isaac and Polak, recipients of gifts of money given to them in May 1908 in gratitude for their service to the Indian community, decided to use it for the benefit of the Indian community instead of spending the money on themselves. Isaac used the money to further the cause of Indian education. Gandhi emphasized "that this way of using one's gifts clearly deserves to be admired and emulated."

During the height of the 1909 Indian Passive Resistance Struggle, the government was deporting passive resisters to Delgoa Bay (Maputo Bay, Mozambique) in an ef-

fort to break down Gandhi's Satyagraha struggle. When the situation in Delgoa Bay became critical, Isaac was sent there in June 1909 in order to clear up the position and also to collect some funds along the US east coast for the struggle. During that time he suffered a severe illness from which, however, he duly recovered. The *Indian Opinion* reported that "Indian friends at Mozambique rendered excellent help to Mr. Isaac."

Toward the end of 1912, Isaac returned to England in order to pay a visit to his widowed mother.

When the Indian struggle was renewed in 1913, Isaac decided to return to South Africa and at once threw himself "heart and soul" into the movement. In November 1913, during the "Big March" he was arrested and sent to prison in Pinetown while in charge of the temporary marcher's camp at New Germany. He was sentenced in January 1914 to two months imprisonment with hard labor. Apparently, the trial had already taken place when the successful negotiation between the Smuts and Gandhi was already going on full speed. This might explain the silence in Gandhi's journal, *The Indian Opinion*, about Isaac's trial, especially compared to the coverage it gave to Polak's and Kallenbach's trial. Their speeches in court were fully reported by the paper.

As a strict vegetarian, Isaac's diet in prison obviously was very limited – "a starvation diet." Isaac was released following a provisional statement on February 13, 1914, after serving three weeks of hard labor. Although according to Gandhi, Isaac was "a freelancer Jewish friend... [who] cheerfully shared imprisonment with us," when he came out from imprisonment he was a broken man, physically and mentally.

Gandhi took charge of him at the Phoenix settlement and apparently, according to Gandhi researcher Dinna Patel, Gandhi even took on himself a secret private fast after Isaac could not stick to his own oath regarding the diet Gandhi imposed on him.

WIKIPEDIA



Gabriel Isaac (back center) with Mohandas Gandhi flanked by Hermann Kallenbach and Sonja Schlesin after Gandhi was released from a Johannesburg jail in 1913

A hint of the responsibility Gandhi felt for Isaac can be traced in a letter written to Kallenbach in May 1914, dealing with the arrangements due to be taken before their final departure to India. Gandhi did not know what to do with Isaac, to whom he felt obliged under his tragic situation. Gandhi wrote: “Isaac, I fancy, is going to Johannesburg. He will not be allowed to come to India. He is just now at Phoenix.”

When Gandhi, his wife Kasturba and Kallenbach sailed for London on the way to India, Isaac stayed for some more time in Phoenix Farm but then left to Johannesburg. Soon Isaac had a serious breakdown, mentally and physically, from which he never entirely recovered. A month before his death, he fell ill again with a severe attack of malaria fever and died early on November 8, 1914.

ISAAC WAS buried in the Jewish section of the Braamfontein Cemetery in Johannesburg according to Jewish ritual. The mourners came from different communities, which reflected the life of Isaac. There were Jews, among them his brother, M. Isaac, and Gandhi’s Jewish supporters, Polak, Schlesin and others. There were many Indians from the different sections of the Indian communities – Hindus and Muslims, as well as people from the small Chinese communities. They were theologians, businessmen, making for a very

unusual funeral scene in South Africa at that time.

An account describing the character of Gabriel Isaac appears in Prabhudas Gandhi’s unique memories *My Childhood with Gandhiji*: “Mr. Isaac was one of those English guests on whose coming to Phoenix all the children would be happy. He was very amusing. He was always finding ways of making us laugh. Sometimes he would jump like a frog, or surprise us with a bark. When he told us animal stories it was as if those animals were really before us.” Prabhudas Gandhi wrote in a book written in Gujarati about the dramatic change he noticed in Isaac’s behavior after he was released from jail. As Prabhudas recalled, before the arrest Isaac was a man full of energy, full of humor, and happy, who was never tired of making jokes – but after his release he was skinny and sick. No one of the farm’s children dared to approach him while he sat for hours, lonely and in despair under one of the farm’s trees or on the porch.

When Isaac passed away, Gandhi and Kallenbach were in London. On November 13, 1913, Polak informed Kallenbach of the sudden death of Isaac. Polak wrote:

“You must, I know, have been distressed to learn of the sudden demise of Poor Gabriel Isaac. You will, I suppose, have seen my letter to G. [I was not able yet to trace this letter] giving all the details. You know

how dear he was to Mrs. Polak and all of us, and you can therefore imagine how deeply we feel the loss.”

Unfortunately, we can’t find Gandhi’s reaction upon hearing of Isaac’s death in the collected works. A month later, Polak reported to Kallenbach: “We have now more or less recovered from the shock of poor Isaac’s passing away. At the moment the blow was very heavy, but one learns not to allow oneself to be rendered impotent by private grief. Polak added, “It is perfectly true, we who surround Gandhi are a queer crowd.”

Years later, when Gandhi published his autobiography, Henry Polak was not satisfied with the way Gandhi presented Isaac and omitted him from his autobiography. Polak pointed out some inaccuracies in Gandhi’s book in a letter to Gandhi in 1928, criticizing him for that, as did Schlesin in several other letters. Schlesin offered to replace the title of Gandhi’s book with “*My Experiments with Untruth.*” But Polak’s most severe rebuke was that Gandhi omitted Gabriel Isaac’s name and did not give him the appropriate credit he deserved.

Gandhi replied somewhat apologetically claiming that it was an “unintentional omission.” Gandhi wrote:

“And for your rebuke about the omission of Gabriel Isaac, I don’t know that the name was omitted. I have just looked up in the index of the English translation. I missed his name in the index. But of course that is no proof of the fact that the name is not to be found in the History. But even if it is omitted, of course it is an unintentional omission. I have often talked about him and his sacrifice to the Ashram people. I often think of him and his goodness and simplicity. But I can’t account for the omission if there is an omission. I dare say that some other dear names also have been omitted quite unintentionally.”

Gandhi’s sense of his history was probably wrong, since until today we are still missing biographical information about Isaac, and one can assume that his name was almost forgotten due to his death shortly after Gandhi left South Africa.

To the best of my knowledge, Isaac was the only European to sacrifice his life for the sake of Gandhi and the Indian Satyagraha struggle in South Africa. It is time to do historical justice for the forgotten and omitted from history, Gandhi’s important Jewish supporter – Gabriel Isaac. ■



Unity and uniqueness in Israel

Some 300 junior and senior high school students from 40 schools across Israel participated in the Harry Hurwitz National Speaking Competition at Jerusalem's Menachem Begin Heritage Center on January 14. The contest is the brainchild of Ann Kirson Swersky, founder of Si'ah Va'Sig – the Israel Debating Society, and its theme this year was “Unity and Uniqueness in Israel and in the Global Village.” The following is the winning speech in the high school English competition by Ynon Reiner of Ben Zvi High School in Kiryat Ono, who thanks his “coach,” Ruti Bardenstein.

HOW MANY of you identify with the Sigd holiday, celebrated by the Ethiopian Jewish community every 29th of the Hebrew month of Heshvan? Today I will speak about why unity and uniqueness can coexist in a delicate and ever-changing balance, specifically in an immigrant state.

I will begin by defining the terms relevant to your understanding of this speech, leading me to present the dilemma of being unique versus being united in an immigrant state. We will then dive into the complexity of both concepts and explore the disadvantages of their extremes.

Shall we? The definition of the word “immigrant” by the Cambridge Dictionary is as follows: “An immigrant is a person who has come to a different country in order to live there permanently.” This is a dictionary definition. There is, however, no formal definition for international immigrants.

What are immigrant states, according to this definition? Immigrant states are states comprised of an immigrant majority, or a majority of people whose origin is from a different state than the one they live in. This means that states such as Israel and the US are historically immigrant states, which raises a special dilemma in these countries.

That dilemma is being unique versus being united. A state needs unity in order to survive as one solid, stable entity. This isn't a new concept; we can track it way back to the Bible. Psalms 133: “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity.”

On the other hand, uniqueness and adversity supply the citizens' basic needs for a community. A quote out of Sri Aurobindo's book, *The Ideal of Human Unity*: “Collective life is more at ease with itself, more genial, varied, fruitful when it can concentrate in small spaces and simpler organisms.”

Let's dive deeper into the concept of unity and over-unification. When a state wishes to unite its citizens, it is trying to morph several different groups into one homogeneous group. Trying to unite unwilling groups can bleach the individual's sense of self. For example, we need to look no further than our own country, Israel.

When Israel was founded, millions of Jews from all over the world flooded its gates. The newborn state had to find a way to unite all these different groups into one nation. This led to the formation of the “ideal” Israeli image, the Sabra as we Israelis know it. However, not all of Israel's communities identified with this ideal. This led to feelings of loneliness and inequality among Jews of different origins.

These feelings built up for years, and culminated in the Wadi Salib protests in 1959 and in the rising of the “Black Panthers” organization in 1971. Both events shook the country, and the impact is still felt today.



SHIMSHON SHIR

The finalists in the high school English-speaking contest flanked by the two judges

In 2008, a group called “Black Panthers” ran in the Jerusalem municipal elections. The effect of these events took root in all of Israeli society.

The reason over-unification has such dire consequences is humans' basic need for exclusivity and community. Quoting Frances Moore Lappe, an American author and researcher, “Community – meaning for me ‘nurturing human connection’ – is our survival. We, humans, wither outside of a community. It isn't a luxury, a nice thing; the community is essential to our well-being.”

On the other end of the spectrum, let's explore the problems of over-adversity. Here Israel serves yet again as a great example. We are currently heading toward our third round of elections within one year. This crazy situation is caused by different groups with differences that seem unsolvable. Some citizens, including me, sometimes feel as if there are two states in one.

A good analogy for the situation is Solomon's trial. All parties want the baby (the state) for themselves and are unwilling to compromise. Like the trial, it's inconceivable to cut the state in half. Someone must let go. On top of the need for community, humans also require a higher sense of stability. This sense of stability is supplied by the state and its unity. Over-adversity leads to the exact opposite.

How do we cram all this conundrum into a functioning, perhaps ideal state? The answer, in my opinion, is a constant balance between unity and adversity. I do not mean a set, unchanged balance, but one that shifts depending on the state's situation. This balance requires non-stop involvement of the state in subjects such as education. It's important to educate youth to see the bigger picture, the unity of the state while retaining education for the smaller picture, each community's individuality. Quoting an article called “The Importance of Education,” “Having an education in an area helps people think, feel, and behave in a way that contributes to their success, and improves not only their personal satisfaction but also their community.”

In conclusion, unity and adversity can coexist, but under constant tweaking and supervision of both the state and its citizens. In fact, they already do coexist in a city like Jerusalem, where so many different communities live together despite their differences. It is possible here, but I believe it is possible anywhere. ■



The Palestinian Authority donor machine

WHEN IT comes to humanitarian aid to the Palestinian Authority, transparency does not exist.

The result is a rich Palestinian elite, which builds exclusive neighborhoods around Ramallah, leaving thousands of shoddily constructed apartments without services for the rest of Palestinian society.

Yasser Arafat set the tone for the PA when he arrived in Gaza in 1994. Arafat took control of every contract and investment, using donor money to build a secret \$1 billion portfolio, including investments in Coca Cola, a Tunisian cellular phone company and venture capital funds in the US and Cayman Islands.

Arafat stole \$1 b. in tax revenue relayed by Israel for Palestinian workers. The money went to Arafat’s personal account in Israel’s Bank Leumi in Tel Aviv.

Some \$100,000 a month went to Arafat’s wife, Suha, living in Paris. Arafat was estimated by US investigators to be worth between \$1 b. and \$3 b.

Within three years of the PA’s establishment, Palestinian auditors found that 40% of the PA budget, \$326 million, was misappropriated, a figure that rose to \$700 m. a decade later.

Not one Western government objected. This set the tone for theft at all levels in the PA. PA officials paid themselves high salaries and skimmed from others.

Enter Abbas

Under Arafat’s successor, Mahmoud Abbas, nepotism reached every level of civil service. Officials, often related to Abbas, commanded salaries of \$10,000 per month, more than 10 times that of ordinary civil servants, and opened secret accounts in Jordan with money received in bribes.

The difference between Abbas and Arafat: Instead of stealing from the PA, Abbas employed his two sons, Tareq and Yasser, to set up businesses that dominate foreign investment, building a consortium called Falcon, which took over Palestinian commerce.

Abbas has pumped at \$890,000 into Falcon, with branches in Jordan and the United Arab Emirates and a monopoly on the sale of US cigarettes.

Then there is Al Mashreq Insurance Co., operating 11 branches in the PA with a worth of \$35 m., headed by Yasser Abbas.



MOHAMAD TOROKMAN/REUTERS

The Palestinian High Court in Ramallah

In all, the wealth of Abbas’ sons is estimated at \$300 m.

Mohammed Dahlan, a challenger to Abbas, asserts that he received \$1.4 b. from Arafat’s personal finances after the latter’s death in 2004. Dahlan asserts that Abbas concealed \$600 m. of this fund. Mohammed Rashid, economic adviser to Arafat, reckons that Abbas’s embezzlement reaches \$100 m.

Abbas’s elite

Abbas fosters his own elite, builds palaces and approves construction of closed communities for his supporters around Ramallah. One such community is known as the “Diplomatic Compound,” where Abbas approves construction of a shopping mall under his control.

In 2011, Abbas’s adviser, Majdi Khaldi, asked \$4 m. from Bahrain for that community. The PA ensured the feasibility of the project by transferring public land at 60% of its market value.

Khaldi approves the entry of PA officials, security commanders and members of Fatah to the “Diplomatic Compound.”

Abbas uses a multi-million-dollar palace under PA security control. Unauthorized visitors, particularly television crews, are threatened with arrest.



MOHAMMAD TOKMAN/REUTERS

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas attends a torch-lighting ceremony to mark the 55th anniversary of Fatah's founding, in Ramallah on December 31, 2019

found that PA civil servants receive monthly salaries without reporting to work while tens of thousands of others actually working were not even paid. Brussels acknowledges it does not press the PA to reform the civil service.

The US State Department has done little better, continuing to withhold release of its reports of PA embezzlement.

US Aid has blindly provided the PA with over \$5 b. over the last 25 years. Washington has consistently paid PA debts to private companies, bypassing concern over Abbas' fiscal responsibility and priorities.

Instead, US taxpayers have ended up paying companies controlled by Abbas' sons. Abbas' Sky Advertising even won a contract from the US to improve the image of the United States in the PA.

From 2005 through 2009, Tareq and Yasser Abbas received at least more than \$2 m. in contracts and subcontracts, most of them from the United States Agency for International Development (US-AID). The agency will not release contracts to Abbas's sons and has redacted key pieces of information, including executives and employees involved in the contracts.

Western donor humanitarian funds have one purpose: to act as a political resource for Abbas and his supporters.

The notion that humanitarian aid to the PA reaches the Palestinian Arab people has no basis in reality.

The first step for any effort to ameliorate this situation would be to ask for conditions for aid to the PA, requiring accountability and transparency and the right to protect Palestinian whistleblowers.

At this point, no one in the world advocates such a change in policy. ■

David Bedein is director of the Israel Resource News Agency at the Center for Near East Policy Research in Beit Agron, Jerusalem, and author of Genesis of the Palestinian Authority (BEHR Publishing House)

Abbas involves loyalists in business deals, such as Mohammed Mustafa, former deputy prime minister in the PA until 2015, appointed head of the Palestinian Investment Fund, linked to Abbas, which holds 18% of Arab Palestinian Investment Corporation (APIC).

Abbas controls the PIF and chooses all of its directors.

By 2009, Mustafa was appointed chief executive officer of one of the two cellular phone companies in the West Bank, Wataniya Mobile. PIF owns 34% of Wataniya's shares.

Mustafa is allegedly involved in tax evasion and money laundering, as documented in the Panama Papers. Yet Abbas grants Mustafa protection from prosecution.

In February 2016, Palestinian Legislative Council member Najat Abu Bakr demanded an investigation of Abbas's Governance Minister Hussein Al Araj. Abbas threatened Abu Bakr with arrest, who fled to a PLC building for safe haven. The matter was silenced.

Abbas has fought against corruption of his rivals – mainly Dahlan, who often calls for Abbas' resignation. A PA court sentenced Dahlan in absentia to three years in prison on charges of embezzling public funds in 2007.

However, in 2010, Dahlan and his wife were granted citizenship in Montenegro. Two years later, Dahlan served as liaison between Serbia and UAE Vice President Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, crown prince of Abu Dhabi. Not long after, Dahlan was also granted citizenship by Serbia, allowing him safe passage throughout Europe.

The fortunes of Abbas and Dahlan have played a role in the succession battle for the Palestinian leadership. At 84, Abbas seeks to protect the his sons' economic empire. Abbas sought to groom PA chief negotiator Saeb Erekat as his successor but was opposed by the PLO Executive Committee – a blow to Abbas, who rewarded loyalty in the committee, where members receive a stipend of \$30,000 a month as well as a luxury car and VIP privileges.

Abbas has instead offered the mantle turned to a trusted aide – intelligence chief Majid Freij, deputy of Abbas. Yet the opponent of both Erekat and Freij has been Jibril Rajoub, former PA security chief.

The sentiment of Palestinians is that the PA is corrupt. From 1,200 Palestinians polled, 95.5% – or virtually everybody – declared there was rampant corruption in the Abbas regime.

PA corruption manifests itself in the black market, money laundering, human trafficking and profits accrued from foreign bank accounts – activities deemed secret until a new ruler emerges.

An Understanding West

Western governments confirm embezzlement of their aid to the PA.

In 2013, the European Union determined that the PA mismanaged €2 b. between 2008 and 2012. The European Court of Auditors



How it *really* was! Singing the songs of European Jewish life

AS THESE words appear on my computer screen, the kings and presidents and prime ministers are landing one by one. I do not know what our president or our prime minister will say in their public speeches. Will they mention the killing of two great European cultures? The ‘culturicide’ of Yiddish and Ladino – will these centuries-old languages be recalled – a tragic moment of eternal loss?

Will any European monarch or elected head of state or of government speak of the creativity of Jews in every field of human endeavor, from science to the arts to commerce? Will they say that without European Jews before 1939 the world would not have advanced in all fields: science, literature, theater, art, music and medicine as swiftly as it did?

Well, they should and well they might. I mourn the six million Jews, as we mourn their offspring never born. I mourn all groups murdered by the Nazis, but naturally I mourn first my own family and their families. In my heart I sing their songs, especially the Yiddish ones, some brought from my Canadian childhood in a Polish-Yiddish home.

In the rest of this column, I commemorate the joys of living Jews before they became ash and statistics. I revive one of their voices, who was the unique darling of Warsaw literati in the late 1920s and in the 1930s.

Itzik Manger grew up in Czernowitz, Ukraine, then Romania. In previous columns in *The Jerusalem Post*, the sister publication of *The Jerusalem Report*, I have written a great deal about him. Manger survived the war. I used the words of another great Yiddish poet to describe the survivor, as standing “like after battle” between “empty blackened walls.”

Manger’s genius was to mingle the beloved ancient texts with the modern: in dress, customs or modes of travel. Sometimes the time travel is ironic, sometimes poignant, and often it is both.

In the poem below he sees our Patriarch

Avraham holding a “*Shalom Zachar*” (safely arrived male) party for the birth – finally of a “Jewish son.” In Eastern Europe, usually held after the Friday evening Shabbat meal, it was celebrated with singing; the menu usually centered on peppered garbanzo beans and beer.

“Father Abraham celebrates his son’s birth”

*From every wall rebound
The chanted psalms of praise
Ten Jews in sable shtreimels
Sing with hands upraised.
“Ay bim-bam, bim, God’s Our Father,
Ay dee-dum, dee-dum, dee-dee.
They sing the holy haunting tune
Of the Rabbi of Turkey.
They eat well-peppered chickpeas
And dip their beards in beer,
“Reb Avroom, wonder of wonders.
A miracle, it’s a miracle, you hear!”
Beneath Abraham’s gray beard,
A smile forms on his lips
As he hears Isaac cooing,
Lying in his baby crib.
He shuts his eyes for a moment
And sees the Turks leave with a sigh,
They cling to the fragile thin thread
Of the little baby voice’s cry.
Now they brush off the dust
From their shoes, robes flowing about,
They kiss the lintel mezuzah
And say quickly on their way out:
“Mazel tov, Reb Avroom, mazel tov
Surely you recall that night,
Sarah laughed when we promised
Next year an end to her plight.”
And before Abraham could even say:
“Welcome! my dear honored guests
Take your places at the table,
Eat, drink and sing with zest” –
The Turks slip through the curtain
And leave his time and ken –
Abraham opens his eyes:*

*“Where are the stranger men?”
“God be with you, Reb Abraham,
Ay dee-dum, dee-dee,
Better you sing with us the tune
Of the Rabbi of Turkey.”
Ten Jews in sable shtreimels
Sing with hands upraised.
From every wall rebound
The chanted psalms of praise.*

The “Turks” are the three angels who visited Abraham a year earlier and foretold Isaac’s birth to 90-year-old Sarah (see Genesis 18). Manger pictured the angels as Middle Easterners, and was much taken with the word, the strangeness of Turk and Turkey. The latter in Yiddish is *Turkay* – which is pronounced “Tourk-eye” – and is easy to rhyme .

Isaac, so long sought after, is saved from knife’s edge at the last minute. It is a subject looming large in both the Bible, the daily prayer book and Manger’s mind. The Christians call it the Sacrifice of Isaac, but in Hebrew tradition it is the Binding of Isaac. “Binding” (of Isaac on the makeshift altar) in Hebrew is *Akedah*, in Yiddish, *Akeydeh*. Its mesmerizing message celebrates obedience to heavenly commands, and the end of child sacrifice. Later the *Akeydeh* (binding) became a symbol of all Jewish suffering.

“Our father Abraham rides to the akeydeh, the binding of Isaac”

*Gray first light sheds twilight shades,
Across the earth dim light courses.
Old and trusty Eliezer harnesses
The carriage and the horses.
Abraham carries his late-life child
To the carriage through the gloam,
A guardian blue star sheds its light
Upon their beloved old home.
“Get going, Eliezer!” The whip snaps,
And the highway gleams silver.*

*(How poignant and beautiful, the poet says,
Are the ways the Bible uncovers.)
The gray willow-trees lining the road
Recede and fade into naught.
Look back, is the mother weeping
Over her child's empty cot?
"Where are we going, sweet father?"
"To Lashkev to the fair."
"What will you buy me, dear Papa
At Lashkev at the fair?"
"A soldier made of porcelain,
A fife, a trumpet, a little clock;
And for mama waiting at home
We'll bring satin for a frock."
Avraham's eyes moisten,
The burning knife scalds his chest
Beneath his modest robe.
To such a "fair" are we blessed?
"Eliezer, park by the millrace
Stay there and await our account!
From there I'll walk with Isaac
To the top of Moriah Mount."
Eliezer, sitting on the box-seat, growls
And stares only at the road,
(So beautiful and poignant, the poet says,
Are the ways the Holy Books uncover.)*

Manger displays special sympathy for the non-Hebrew participants in the Abraham story. Eliezer, the Damascene, does not like what Abraham is about to do to Isaac. Hagar, whose name means the immigrant or the stranger – the Egyptian concubine thrown out by Sarah – is being mistreated by the matriarch Sarah; Manger sides with Hagar.

His criticism of the anachronistic silk-frocked hypocrites was pointed at those posing as holy while mistreating the weak and the stranger. Manger had internalized the Biblical commandments of protecting the weak – the orphans, widows, strangers and victims of power – and instinctively empathizes with them.

"Hagar leaves Abraham's house"

*Blue light dawns in the window,
Three times the cock has crowed
Outside the horse is neighing
Ready for its long road.
Hagar stands, is weeping
Her child held tight in her arms
Her eyes drink in a last look
At the walls and the house's charms.
The wagon driver is bargaining*



Itzig Manger



Mordechai Gebirtig



A portrait of Itzig Manger by Arthur Kolnik

*With Abraham over his pay:
"Add another sixpence, sir,
There are two people, I say."
The horse, impatient, scrapes hoof
As to say: "Enough! I need to pace.
Any minute I'll show you, my Jews,
How beasts taught Balak his place!"
"Don't cry dear little Ishmael,
This is bashert – preordained;
Thus our forefathers behaved.
Pious long beards hide their shame."
She envisions herself abandoned
In a distant train station's great hall
And she sheds copious tears
Into her Turkish shawl.
"Hagar, enough, stop crying
Do you hear what I say, or no?"
And Hagar takes up her bundle,
And sets off on the road she must go.
Here stands with his velvet skull cap,
Rabbi Abraham, the so pious Jew.
"Does he at least, sweet mama,
Of my bitter struck soul have a clue?"
The whip snaps, "Start up, horse"
And before her weep-red eyes
The houses of the shtetl slowly
Fall away, fall away with her sighs.
And Hagar summons as witness
Heaven and earth to attest
That so act elders and patriarchs
With long beards and pious dress.*

Manger wandered his way across Europe to England, and finally in 1958 made his home in Israel. He survived, changed forever. The *Akeydeh* of Isaac is also the Sacrifice of Yitzhak, the name which in its Yiddish diminutive form is Itzik. After the Holo-

caust, in a poem called "Akeydas Itzik," Manger expresses his own pain and anger at God for the destroyed cities of Jews and of graves. His grandfather, his *Zeydeh* – who represents the ancient Jewish people – wafts Itzik through the air over a devastated land.

Excerpt from "Akeydas Itzik"

*Then Zaydeh says, "Itzik recall
Back then, under the knife,
When the Angel told me to stop,
He gave us back your life.
Now the Old God regrets it.
Demands the sacrifice then denied.
Well I've lived so many times
And so often have I died...
Enough! An end! I don't want Your favor!
Don't think we'll come creeping.
Itzik, it's good your mother is dead
At least she forgoes the weeping."
By the hand Zaydeh takes me in charge
Over cities and villages and graves
The cities are small, the villages large
As we fly over them and the graves.*

We mourn them, our families. Yes, monarchs and governors-general, presidents and prime ministers. It is good you came. It is right you came. It was right for the sponsor, Dr. Moshe Kantor, to make this happen. But let us not just mark the graves, Itzik! Let us also celebrate what living Jews did before 1939. How in spite of – and sometimes because of – hardship, deserted by almost all, they lived, strove, created and gave. ■

*Avraham Avi-hai invites comments.
2avrahams@gmail.com*

On the variety of genius: A conversation with Norman Lebrecht

By Inna Rogatchi

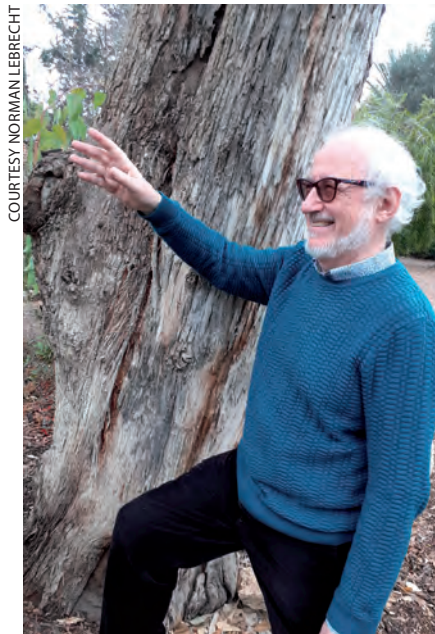
NORMAN LEBRECHT, 71, is well-known to all those interested in classical music and its history. But the scope of his writing and expertise go well beyond that. He is one of the most erudite and authoritative commentators on cultural history and the author of a range of books, from the unique *Why Mahler?* about how Gustav Mahler's music has impacted the world, to his award-winning first novel that has just been turned into a new film, *The Song of Names*, produced by a stellar team led by Francois Girard. The film premiered at the Toronto and London film festivals in the autumn of 2019, and was released in January 2020 in the US.

The London-born Lebrecht is closely connected to Israel, where he studied at a yeshiva (Kol Torah Rabbinical College) in Jerusalem at the age of 16, and later at both Bar-Ilan University and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. After his graduation, he started working in the Kol Yisrael news department before returning to London in 1972. He married Elbie Spivack, a sculptor and writer, with whom he has three daughters.

Lebrecht worked, inter aliyah, as a columnist for *The Daily Telegraph*, an assistant editor of the *London Evening Standard* and a broadcaster on BBC Radio 3. He is the author of a new book on modern Jewish history during the dramatic century before the establishment of the State of Israel. The critically acclaimed book, *Genius and Anxiety: How Jews Changed the World, 1847-1947*, was launched in the UK, US and Canada at the end of 2019, and is due to be published this year in Hebrew by Kinnereth, and interestingly, also in Chinese. I asked him about the book in an exclusive interview.

When did you come up with the idea for the book, which comprises a lifetime of material?

As you correctly say, these were ideas developed over half a lifetime. About 30



COURTESY NORMAN LEBRECHT

Lebrecht in the Galilee, December 2019

years ago I asked myself why it was that, of the three-dozen or so individuals who changed the way we see the world between the middle of the 18th and 19th centuries, at least half were Jews? The emergence from the ghetto does not fully explain it. There had to be other factors that produced this flood of ideas. One, in my understanding, was the pressure of anxiety, the fear of expulsion, of extinction. Another was an unconscious background in Talmudic argumentation, which trains the mind to challenge accepted propositions and approach problems from a different perspective. I use the word unconscious in the Freudian sense. Freud himself denied all knowledge of Judaism, yet when the Nazis entered Vienna his first response at the Psychoanalytic Society was to quote, from memory and almost faithfully, the Talmudic story of

Rabbi Yohanan Ben Zakai and Vespasian. *How did your work on this book develop? What was your aim?*

As the book took shape in my mind over three decades, I made the decision to shine as much light on temporary geniuses – those whose light shone briefly in particular circumstances – as on those who are household names. I also came across quite a few obscure characters who made a significant difference to life on earth, none more so perhaps than Karl Landsteiner who discovered blood groups, or Emanuel Deutsch, the British Museum curator who inspired George Eliot to write *Daniel Deronda*, the book that first dared to dream the Zionist dream.

How did you make your selection of 55 personalities to demonstrate genius and anxiety, including many interesting figures about whom the public is not aware, while leaving others out – such as Ben-Gurion and Chagall?

The question of who was in and who was left out became almost self-selecting. Ben-Gurion was just another politician, as was Leon Blum. Both were prime ministers at a delicate time but they did not, in my understanding, reconceive the world as we know it. Chagall – fine painter that he was – was not a formative figure in modernism as Modigliani undoubtedly was.

Out of Poland and Lithuania, I mention Isaac Bashevis Singer because I knew him, because he gave Yiddish its only Nobel prize and because the story of his encounter with Begin – which I heard both from him and independently from his son Israel Zamir – touches on a critical fault line in changing Jewish attitudes to the use of language. I also mention Zamenhof, Menahem Mendel Schneerson, Israel Salanter and a few others, but the heavy intellectual and creative lifting in this period was not being done in Poland and on the Baltic but else-

where in the Jewish world. One could also say that there are not too many Sephardim in the book, though the Ben Ish Hai is critically important, as is the Sephardi influence on figures like Rosenzweig.

Tell me more about your acquaintance with Leah Goldberg, of whom you write with a palpable and gentle love.

I struggled to read Russian literature. The English translations of Pushkin, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy were heavy and unappealing. When I came to Israel at age 16, I found Russian works in Hebrew translations by Leah Goldberg and was struck by the naturalness of her idiom. Without ever meeting her, I was grateful to her for unlocking this vast literary storehouse. She gave a master's course at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in comparative literature and I was determined to study with her. But in September 1969 when I registered, I was told that she was on sick leave. The following January she died of breast cancer. So I never got to meet her, but I was drawn into her world by her late poetry, by her smoky, quizzical outlook on life and love. Once she died, I saw no point in returning to the university.

Thinking about all those outstanding people whom you have met in your life, who did make the most profound impact on you, and why?

As you rightly say, most of them are in the book, if only in the acknowledgments. Gustav Mahler has taken up a considerable chunk of my life.

From the heroes of your book, whose legacy you regard as most important for your personally?

Solomon Schonfeld. When I was a child, he was my role model for a man who got things done, for better or worse. I have never known anyone quite like him.

Returning to your motivation for this book: Was this a book which you always

would like to write? Or was it, as you put it, "the sense of otherness is back" in the UK and elsewhere with the manifestation of open antisemitism, that prompted you to write it?

In the course of writing the book over the past two to three years I could not ignore the return of antisemitism in societies where we thought it had been eradicated. The book is, in a certain sense, a tangential response to the recent demonization of Jews. The first review to appear, in *The Times*, was by a Muslim writer, Tanjil Rashid. He acknowledged: "Claims to have 'changed the world' tend to be exaggerations, but Lebrecht's subtitle, *How Jews Changed the World 1847-1947*, seems understated". The world wasn't changed, it was remade. Jewish inventions – the monotheism of Abraham, the morality of Moses – were the central concepts in the West's long religious age, but the shibboleths that define our secular era have Jewish origins too.

How much time did it take you to research and write the book, and what was your work on it like?

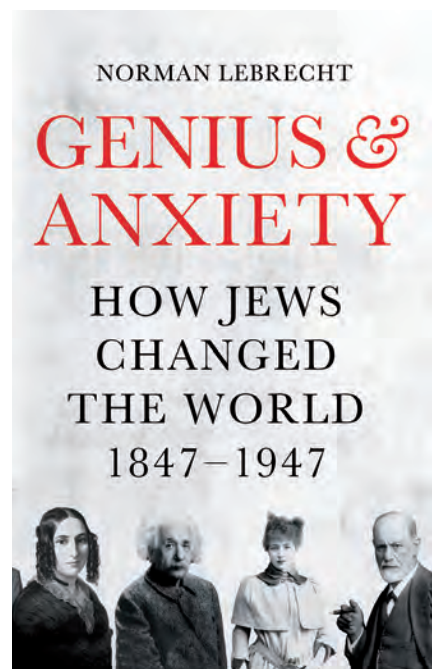
I have been storing away material for this book for half my life. I have used my own family archives and those of close friends, university libraries, unpublished private papers, obscure books that I dug out in dust-choked bookstores, worldwide travel, intensive conversations. I don't mean to name drop, but my work has brought me in contact with quite a few of the personalities discussed, from Gustav Mahler's daughter, to Golda Meir, from Yehudi Menuhin to Leah Goldberg. I was particularly pleased to bring back to life Leo Kestenberg who, more than anyone else, was the engine that created Weimar culture and later tried to re-establish it in Tel Aviv – not to mention the Berlin researcher Magnus Hirschfeld who first identified Tel Aviv as a gay city.

On the working process, I liked all of it:

swimming, walking, thinking, reading, arguing, studying, discovering, translating, revising. I think I must have rewritten the opening of this book at least 100 times until I was satisfied.

Who do you perceive as your readers? Were you thinking of Jewish people worldwide, the younger generation, or were you aiming at a wider audience?

I usually have an 'ideal reader' in mind when writing a book. Not in this case, however. I had no idea how it would impact on the world, no idea what my agent, my editors and a wider readership would make of it. I cast my bread upon the waters and held my breath for the reactions. So far, they have been overwhelmingly gratifying. ■



The cover of Lebrecht's book published by Oneworld Publications, London

Arboreal delights

The Highgate Haggadah for Tu Bishvat

By Mordechai Beck

TU BISHVAT or the New Year for Trees, which is celebrated on the 15th day of the month of Shvat, is one of the post-Biblical feast days in the Hebrew calendar. Although its arrival is announced in the Mishna (Rosh Hashana 1), where there is a famous dispute between the houses of Hillel and Shammai as to its actual date, its celebration as such comes much later. Even Maimonides locates it in his discussion of the tithes rather than in the laws governing festive days. There are some hints that the day was celebrated during the Biblical and Temple eras but was then forgotten. It was revived somewhat in the Gaonic period (6th to 10th centuries CE) by the composing of special hymns (*piyutim*) with quotes taken from earlier texts exhorting trees and nature.

Yet it was only in the 17th century when the book *Pri Etz Hadar* (*The Fruit of the Goodly Tree*) appeared in Safed that the day took on a significance it had not known beforehand. The anonymous author – possibly the mystic Binyamin Halevi, although the author of the present Haggadah gives the anonymous author credit to Rabbi Chaim Vital – created a source book for the day as a sort of seder echoing that of Pesach. He was inspired, he writes, by a heavenly voice that assured him that the celebration of the fruits of the Holy Land (he counted 30) would bring redemption closer. Alongside the fruits, which were to be eaten in a particular order, participants in this *Seder* were to quaff four cups of wine.

The book's popularity quickly spread around the Mediterranean basin. Nevertheless, the restoration of the day became more explicit with the revival of the State of Israel. Even prior to that enormous event, the idea of planting saplings on this day – which might seem to be an ancient ritual – is a 'tradition' initiated by the early Zionists

COURTESY



A page from the Haggadah titled 'Advice From a Tree'

pioneers just over 100 years ago. The celebration of Tu Bishvat is seen in Israel as a symbolic return to the world of nature, and of rootedness in a specific place, the ancestral soil. As the Book of Job has it: "For in the tree is hope. If it is felled, it will sprout again..." (Job 14: 7).

And now comes an English translation of the *Seder* ceremony by a gentleman who usually invests his time in sorting out psychoanalytical patients. Dr. Joseph Berke turns his analysis to the world of nature and specifically of trees. Indeed, as Berke explains, there are many connections between the two. Although his Haggadah is rooted in the 16th century *kabbala* of the Ari (Rabbi Isaac Luria), Berke shows that the significance of the day is universal. For him it is closely aligned with ecology, climate change, psychology and the relationship be-

tween nature and mankind.

What exactly is this relationship? He ponders the peculiar fact that we celebrate trees precisely when the earth is barren and the trees bare. But as puts it "the sap is rising, the life force begins to ascend from the earth." It is when the tree appears lifeless and bare that it comes to life again.

Turning to the world of mysticism, Berke asserts that for the Kabbalah the tree is a metaphor for God:

He is both above the ground – in the heavens – and below, on the earth. He unites the physical and spiritual. Likewise, the four cups of wine, which are drunk in different proportions at the *Seder* table, mixes red wine (pure materialism) and white (spiritual).

The goal of the original Haggadah – the *Pri Etz Hadar* – was to increase the amount of divine blessing in the world. This is done by eating the fruits with the proper intention, an action helped by the angel who commands the fruit to grow.

This analysis of source texts is supplemented by quotes from Berke's friends who maintain that just like a tree, a person needs a rich and fertile soil from which to grow. They need strong and deep roots to access water that is buried beneath the surface. The purpose of this development is to grow fruit so that others can benefit from each individual's genius.

In passing, the author notes that there are many other things we can learn from trees, including remembering one's roots, going out on a limb and enjoying the view!

Berke then quotes a forester named Peter Wohlenben who claims that trees can communicate with each other through their roots and surrounding fungi, and that further they can count, learn, remember, and warn each other about coming dangers. He



COURTESY

The almond tree and its blossom, according to the Haggadah, have a special significance for Tu Bishvat

then invokes six special trees, each with a particular characteristic that again are held up as models for replication by humans. In the process of the *Seder*, he shows how all aspects of trees – their healing barks, roots, leaves for shade, beauty, and fruits – make the necessity of protecting them ever more urgent.

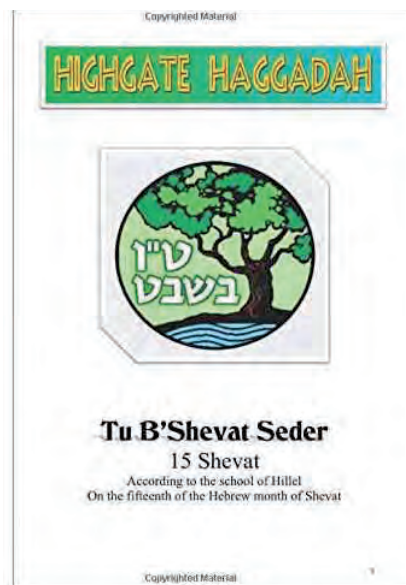
Berke also makes the point that Tu Bishvat is a festival, which is not connected to persecution. Moreover having no fixed, halachic status, its form of observance is varied and different communities celebrate it with different customs.

This said, it is obvious that for the author the Haggadah should take preference in terms of ritual.

Central to this ritual is the drinking of four cups of wine, which helps transform the body and the consciousness of the drinker. As a supplement, a glass of whiskey is also allowed since it contains barley! Berke emphasizes the journey that the body/mind

takes, rising through the four kabbalistic worlds, shedding along the way all the negative, hard impurities that prevent a person from achieving the ultimate breakthrough. Thus the final stage is achieved with the cup of white wine that symbolizes the highest world of *Atzilut*. At this point no fruit is eaten since the participant is already beyond corporeality and beyond the physical.

Finally and although this Haggadah is written with a universal perspective, Berke emphasizes the prime importance of Israel and of planting trees in its soil. You can plant a tree wherever you are, even in Highgate, London, but a special merit inheres if you plant a tree in Israel (or buy trees to be planted in Israel). Berke backs up this option with a quote from the Bible, “When you come to the land, plant fruit trees” (Leviticus 19:23). He wraps up this arboreal text with the prayer of Rabbi Natan of Nemirov which asks us to look on nature as a way of awakening in us the wonder of God’s world. ■



COURTESY

The cover of the Highgate Haggadah (Teva Publications)



Tu Bishvat: The Jewish people's new year of the trees

EXCITEMENT REIGNED

in the US Jewish community in January 1948.

The world had entered into the countdown for the establishment of a Jewish nation as defined by the Partition Plan passed by the United Nations on November 29, 1947. Rabbi Avraham Silverstone chose to capture the fervor of those heady days through the spirit of Tu Bishvat, the "old-new holiday" as he labeled it.

"Where there is life, there is hope for new strength," he began. "The festival that has survived the hostile interference of men and nature, just like Am Yisrael's steadfastness through the centuries, has been revived and brings us renewal once again."

He shared with his readers a description of the communal tree planting on Tu Bishvat at Yesud Hama'ala in 1884. That settlement was founded by members of the First Aliyah, 12 families from Poland who immigrated to the area in the Hula Valley.

"Last week we planted a grove mutually with all the company, more than 1,500 trees." A specific count was listed. "There were 708 etrogs and 100 pomegranates, 400 figs and mulberries. And we shall plant, with God's will, other types of plantings, for aside from the large profits from the fruits, which with God's help will be successful, we shall need also good health, for humans are one with the trees of the fields, and without them they do not have a good life."

Even a divine purpose was noted. "We plant, as the Creator of the Universe showed us, to plant as He did for it is written in Genesis 'And the Lord God planted a garden eastward, in Eden.'" Silverstone stressed this planting of trees at Yesud Hama'ala had dual meaning both for health reasons and to imitate the Biblical actions of God.

What was the true intent of the holiday as the rabbi sensed it 67 years ago? "Jews outside of the homeland fill up their blue box-

DAVID GEFFEN



'Tu Bishvat' by Ze'ev Raban (1890-1970)

es and their children bring dime bank 'treecards' to religious school to underwrite the reforestation of Eretz Yisrael, which plays a vital role in this national renaissance."

For Silverstone in 1948, he strongly believed that "in the free and independent New Judea we may look forward to a bright future for ourselves, for our land and for this delightful folk festival."

On that Tu Bishvat in 1948 rabbis and educators recalled a most dramatic event at the end of the 19th century in Eretz Yisrael, November 1898 to be exact, when Theodor Herzl made his first visit to the homeland of his people. In his diary he described personally planting a cypress tree in Motza, just outside of Jerusalem.

With hopes of meeting German Kaiser Wilhelm II, who was also in the Holy Land in 1898, Herzl traveled from the coastal settlements of Mikve Israel and Rishon LeZion toward Jerusalem for a possible audience stopping in Motza along the way.

Herzl, and those traveling with him, entered the village to a warm welcome and reception. When the sun started to set, Herzl looked out at the land of Judea and saw "a variety of lights of brilliant colors reflected upon its hills." He knew that he had to plant a tree here so Herzl climbed the hill and placed a young cypress tree in the earth. That tree grew quite quickly. Six years later, it stood tall and statuesque signifying to the settlers the Jewish people's return to Zion."

In 1901, a major step was taken at the World Zionist Congress when the Jewish National Fund-Keren Kayemet was established. For the last 114 years tree planting has been the special activity of that agency working diligently to redeem the land. In a study of Tu Bishvat, Israeli historian Dr. Zerubavel noted how Jewish educational institutions helped the Jewish National Fund by "socializing the children to give weekly donations to the JNF blue box, teaching

them (in the words of a famous Hebrew song) that every penny counts and contributes to the redemption of the land.” For 110 years this well-recognized container has been a source of inspiration for Jews, young and old, around the world.

When Henrietta Szold visited Eretz Yisrael, for the first time in 1909, she began to see the possibilities of the homeland reborn. In her comprehensive article on the trip published in the *American Jewish Yearbook*, she described the Tu Bishvat celebration which she witnessed. “There was the future in the processions of school children, on whose breath the world stands, as they wend their way singing to Motza, on *hamisha ossar beShevat* (Tu Bishvat), the Palestinian children’s Arbor Day.”

She captured their joy “as they placed the tiny seedlings into the soil, watering them carefully and hopeful that they would grow into tall trees pushing their way against the sky.”

Szold conveyed the potential of the land by comparing it with a fast-developing American state. “Palestine has the conditions and the opportunities of California. The soils in various parts of our homeland are adaptable for all sorts of growth.”

She stressed that the “success of the reforestation work already underway may well offset the dearth of wood in the country.”

As World War I ended and the British Mandate was established, the Palestine Restoration Fund, Keren Hayesod, called for a \$10 million campaign whose goals were: the purchase of land in Palestine, the preparation of Palestine for Jewish settlement and the maintenance and development of work already in progress in Palestine. A most attractive “propaganda” poster was commissioned by the *New Palestine* journal of the Zionist Organization of America for the campaign. Through ten poignant illustrations, the planting, developing, striving by those living in Eretz Yisrael brought home the message “let us rise up and build.”

In 1928 an artistic depiction of children planting on Tu Bishvat in the vicinity of Jerusalem underlined the authentic meaning of the holiday. Ze’ev Raban, a leading member of the faculty of the Bezalel School of Art in Jerusalem, drew a series of pictures capturing the celebration of all the Jewish festivals in Eretz Yisrael itself.

They appeared in a little book *Hageinu* (Our Festivals) published in New York under the sponsorship of the well-known Jewish educator, Zvi Scharfstein. In the series of books commissioned and issued by Scharfstein, he called upon a group of artists – Raban being one of them – to provide illustrations of the modern Jew of the 1920s. His goal, which was fulfilled well, was to show the world the “Jewish home” in Palestine and the “Hebrew home” in Jewish communities as they existed at that time.

The book, *Hageinu*, illustrated by Raban in a most exciting fashion captured the celebration of the Jewish holidays and Shabbat in varied locales in the Jewish homeland. Yom Kippur, for example, was being observed in the Istanbul synagogue in the Old City of Jerusalem.

On Shavuot there is a procession of children from all the various *edot*, Yemenite to Ashkenazim, carrying the bouquets of flowers. The Lag Ba’omer observance was depicted on the shores of the Kinneret. Shabbat is captured with a mother lighting the candles as her children encircle her.

Dr. Bathsheva Goldman Ida, the curator of the Raban retrospective held at the Tel Aviv Museum 20 years ago, explained in the catalogue how the artist used as models for some of his drawings children he knew plus his own. For example in the illustration for Shabbat, his daughter Ruth can be seen in a contemporary 1920s frock wearing red shoes, which had been ordered from Paris.

Ze’ev Raban, who trained in Europe, joined the Bezalel faculty in 1912 at the invitation of the director, Boris Schatz. In that pre-World War I period, he experienced the spirit of growth of the land as a result of the initial *Aliyot*. Even though the draconian rule of the Ottoman Turks was ever-present, the Jews in Palestine laid the foundation of the cultural renaissance which was to be in the mandate period.

Once the British took over with Lord Samuel as the first High Commissioner, the “vibrant” Twenties became a time of constant growth in the Jewish homeland. Dr. Goldman Ida explained the role played by Raban.

“The body of his work took form parallel to the historic events [leading to the establishment of the state]. His is not the work of a hermit or a recluse; on the contrary, Raban was a propagandist ... actively involved in creating the ethos of the emerging country. His artistic motifs were to become those of a majority Jewish culture.

“When we look at the colorful Raban drawing of children planting in the vicinity of Jerusalem with the Tower of David in the background, we observe the delight of the 1920s here on this soil. The boys are wearing their pith helmets to protect them from the sun. Their spiffy ties create a most fashionable outfit. Their dress is similar to that of the Jewish Palestine Guides, those important pioneering figures. In Raban’s noted tourism poster of the 1920s, the guide is also dressed in his helmet, his white suit and tie. A few years ago the World Zionist Organization reproduced this poster in the wonderful series of notable posters which were reissued.”

According to Goldman Ida, one of those depicted, the girl with pigtails, is modeled after the sister of a member of the tragic drowning episode of the “Yordei HaSra” in 1941. The happiness expressed as the children are planting resounded in Jewish communities all over the world. “With the assistance of sites close to his heart, Raban created an intimate and moving picture of life in that era.”

The poem in Hebrew facing the illustration has a beat most fitting to Tu Bishvat – the New Year of the trees – a century ago.

*“To the field! To the field!
In pairs we go out together!
Each of us with tool in hand
A miniature gardener
Let us go out – let us go out
Into the field let us move!”*

Tu Bishvat falls this year on February 10. As we watch the young and the old marching out to plant – to make the soil blossom and bloom – we can be inspired by the message of Tu Bishvat, a day on which we plant for the future as others have done before. No matter how difficult it may be – *hazorim bedima berina yikzoru*: We will reap in joy! ■

On the FRONT Lines ★ °°

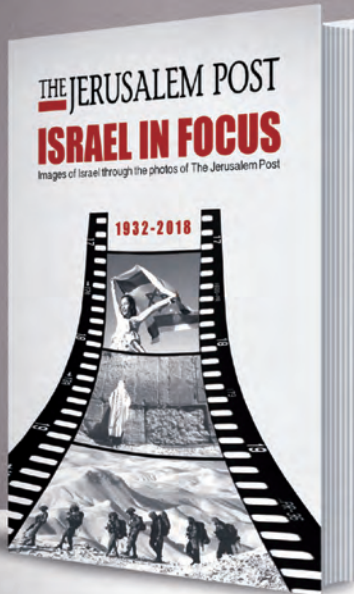
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