

OUR VISIT TO ISRAEL - 1988

Introduction- ONE DOESN'T BECOME AN EXPERT ON ISRAEL ON THE BASIS OF A TWO WEEK VISIT, BUT IT IS POSSIBLE TO GET SOME GOOD IMPRESSIONS, IF YOU ARE OPEN-EYED AND IF YOU LISTEN CLOSELY.

LIKE THE OTHER REFORM RABBIS WHO VISITED ISRAEL EARLY IN MARCH, I HEARD SPEECHES BY PRIME MINISTER SHAMIR , MAYOR KOLLEK, ABBA EBAN, AND DICK HIRSCH, DIRECTOR OF THE WORLD UNION OF PROGRESSIVE CONGREGATIONS. WHAT THEY HAD TO SAY CAN BE GARNERED FROM THE NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES. WHAT I WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH YOU ARE THE IMPRESSIONS I GATHERED FROM THE MAN IN THE STREET AND FROM THE LAND ITSELF.

THE MOST PESSIMISTIC PERSON I MET WAS A CAB DRIVER BY THE NAME OF EGAL. EGAL WAS A MAN ABOUT 45 YRS OF AGE and handsome. EGAL'S FAMILY HAD COME TO ISRAEL FROM IRAN SOME 50 YRS AGO. IF EGAL DIDN'T HAVE A WIFE AND CHILDREN, HE WOULD PROBABLY COMMIT SUICIDE. HE COMPLAINED CONSTANTLY ABOUT POLICEMEN WHO GAVE HIM TICKETS AND ABOUT THE HIGH TAXES. 'IT'S NO USE TRYING TO MAKE MONEY,' SAID EGAL, SO HE ONLY WORKS NOW AND THEN. HIS WIFE, HOWEVER, WORKS REGULARLY IN A TOY SHOP.

THE MOST OPTIMISTIC PERSON WE MET WAS A WOMAN NATIVE TO KIRYAT SHMONA, A BORDER TOWN NEAR LEBANON WHICH REGULARLY IS BOMBARDED BY PLO ROCKETS. THIS WOMAN, ABOUT FIFTY YRS OF AGE, WAS EXTREMELY FAT. HER ENGLISH WAS WONDERFULLY BRITISH AND TO HER KIRYAT SHMONA WAS THE GREATEST PLACE ON EARTH WITH ALL OF ITS DANGER AND ITS PROBLEMS. IT WAS ENCOURAGING, SHE SAID, THAT MANY OF THE PEOPLE WHO HAD LEFT K. S. BECAUSE OF THE BOMBINGS WERE NOW COMING BACK. NOW. K. S. COULD GET ON WITH ITS BUSINESS OF BUILDING A THRIVING WELL-ROUNDED TOWN. AS LONG AS THERE ARE PEOPLE LIKE *this Lady* , K.S. AND ISRAEL WILL SURVIVE. SHE WAS AN EFFERVESCING PERSON EXUDING ENTHUSIASM AND CONFIDENCE.

p. 2 IN K.S. WE ATTENDED A CENTER FOR OLDER PEOPLE, AND THERE WE MET A WOMAN FROM ARGENTINA. THE WOMAN SPOKE TO ME FIRST IN HEBREW AND THEN DISCOVERED THAT SELMA COULD SPEAK YIDDISH. IT WAS AS IF THE WOMAN HAD FOUND A LONG LOST MEMBER OF HER FAMILY. IN A FLASH, THE WOMAN HAD TAKEN SELMA INTO A CORNER AND WAS POURING OUT HER LIFE'S STORY. SHE WAS A WIDOW, A CONCENTRATION CAMP SURVIVOR, AND SINCE HER HUSBAND HAD DIED IN ARGENTINA, SHE HAD SOUGHT MEANING FOR HER LIFE HERE IN ISRAEL IN THIS BORDER TOWN. THE WOMAN HAD A GOOD CRY.

ONE OF THE HIGHLIGHTS OF OUR TRIP WAS A VISIT TO A SMALL VILLAGE ABOUT HALF AN HOUR FROM TEL AVIV. THE NAME OF THE VILLAGE OF ABOUT FIFTY HOMES WAS BETH OVED, WHICH MEANS THE HOUSE OR HOME OF THE WORKER. THE VILLAGE WAS BEGUN EARLY IN THIS CENTURY BY A GROUP OF IDEALISTIC PIONEERS FROM EASTERN EUROPE, AMONG THEM SELMA'S UNCLE ABRAHAM GELLER. ABRAHAM UNDERTOOK FIRST TO RAISE CHICKENS AND THEN TO RAISE ORANGES. HE LIVED IN A ONE ROOM HOUSE FOR 15 YEARS AND THEN BUILT A SECOND ROOM. ABRAHAM DIED LAST YEAR, SO WE VISITED HIS SON JOSEPH AND HIS FAMILY IN BET OVED. JOSEPH, HIS WIFE AND THREE DAUGHTERS LIVE IN A HOUSE SOMEWHAT BETTER THAN THAT OF HIS PIONEERING FATHER AND MOTHER. , BUT IT ~~was~~ A HOUSE MUCH SMALLER THAN THE ONE YOU AND WE LIVE IN. JOSEPH WALKS WITH DIFFICULTY SINCE A LEG HAD BEEN CRIPPLED IN THE YOM KIPPURWAR. HE SMOKES A NEW CIGARRETTE EVERY TEN MINUTES. HIS ELDEST DAUGHTER, ABBE, LOOKED AND SPOKE LIKE AUDREY HEPBURN. SHE WAS MARRIED TO A 33 YEAR OLD MAJOR IN THE ISRAELI ARMY. AT 33, BENGI HAD SPENT HALF OF HIS LIFE IN THE ARMY. HE WAS HIGHLY INTELLIGENT AND DEVOTED TO HIS ARMY TASKS. HE BELIEVED THAT ISRAEL WOULD SURVIVE ONLY SO LONG AS IT MAINTAINED A STRONG ARMY. AT 33, HOWEVER, HE WAS READY TO GET HIS DOCTORATE IN MARINE BIOLOGY AND HE HOPED TO COME TO AMERICA FOR THAT PURPOSE.

SARA, THE MIDDLE DAUGHTER WAS 29, SINGLE, AND RESENTFUL OF HER PARENTS PUSH TO GET HER MARRIED. SARA HELD DOWN TWO JOBS, AS DID MANY ISRAELIS. SHE WAS A TEACHER AND AN AIDE TO A VETERANARIAN. EFRAT THE YOUNGER DAUGHTER WAS BEAUTIFUL AND INSECURE. ALTHO SHE HAD A GOOD "BOD", SHE IMAGINED HERSELF TO BE FAT, AND SHE SEEMED ALWAYS TO BE TRYING TO HIDE. SHE WAS EXTREMELY QUIET. SHE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT SHE WANTED TO DO WITH HER LIFE. *She was currently serving her hitch in the army.*

P. # 3. JOSEPH, SELMA'S COUSIN, WAS A HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL, AND HE ALSO OPERATED A SMALL, PRIVATELY OWNED ORANGE GROVE WHICH WAS PART OF THE MOSHAV. HE HAD TWO ARAB WORKERS AT HARVEST TIME. THEY WERE PICKING NOW. I DOUBT, SAID JOSEPH, THAT THEY WILL COME OVER FROM THE WEST BANK NEXT YEAR. THEY WON'T LET THEM COME. AN OTHER YOUNG LADY IN THE MOSHAV TOLD US THAT SHE HAS TO RELATE TO ARABS EVERY DAY IN HER JOB. I CAN JUST SEE HOW MUCH THEY HATE US, SHE SAID. LIFE IN THE MOSHAV BET OVED SEEMED TO BE ISOLATED FROM THE PUSH AND SHOVE OF BIG CITY LIFE IN ISRAEL. ONE COULD ALMOST FORGET THE REAL PROBLEMS IN A PLACE LIKE THAT.

EVERY TIME WE TOOK A CAB IN ISRAEL, WE BEGAN A CONVERSATION WITH THE CAB DRIVER. AFTER ALL ARE NOT THE CAB DRIVERS THE REPOSITORY OF THE INFORMATION THAT REALLY COUNTS? MOST OF THESE DRIVERS WERE SEPHARDIM, FROM IRAN, IRAQ, AND MOROCCO. MOST OF THEM WERE FROM FAMILIES THAT HAD BEEN LIVING IN ISRAEL FOR SEVERAL GENERATIONS. THEY TENDED TO BE VERY CONSERVATIVE IN THEIR POLITICAL VIEWS, NO DOUBT FOLLOWERS OF THE LIKKUD. ONE OF THE DRIVERS CALLED THE ARABS, " BARBARIANS". THE OTHERS WERE NOT SO ~~INFORMED~~ EXTREME.

WAITERS ARE ALSO A GOOD SOURCE OF INFORMATION. THE WAITER WITH WHOM WE STRUCK UP A FRIENDSHIP IN OUR JERUSALEM HOTEL SPOKE AND LOOKED LIKE THE MOVIE ACTOR TOPEL, WHO PLAYED THE ROLE OF TEVYE IN FI DDLER ON THE ROOF. TOPEL, AS WE'LL CALL OUR WAITER WAS FROM MOROCCO AND SPOKE IN ADDITION TO HEBREW AND ENGLISH, FRENCH AND ARABIC. OUR WAITER IN FEFFERBERG'S RESTAURANT IN JERUSALEM WAS ALSO FROM MOROCCO. HE SPOKE FIVE LANGUAGES. ALTHOUGH HE HAD NOT FINISHED HIGH SCHOOL, HE SPOKE WITH THE ARTICULATION AND LOGIC OF A HIGHLY EDUCATED PERSON. ^{THIS WAITER} _{also strongly} SUPPORTED THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY IN THE WEST BANK

IN TEL AVIV OUR WAITER WAS A 23 YEAR OLD YOUNG MAN FROM NEW ZEALAND. HE TOLD ME THERE WERE ONLY ABOUT 5,000 JEWS IN ALL OF NEW ZEALAND. WHEN I POINTED OUT TO HIM THAT ONE OF THE WAITRESSES WAS ESPECIALLY PRETTY, HE SAID TO ME, " THERE ARE A LOT OF PRETTY GIRLS IN ISRAEL." NEVERTHELESS THIS YOUNG MAN, NAMED DAVID, HAD NOT YET MADE UP HIS MIND TO REMAIN IN ISRAEL AWAY FROM HIS NEW ZEALAND FAMILY.

p. 4 IN HAIFA THE YOUNG LADY AT THE INFORMATION DESK WAS FROM AUSTRALIA. SHE HAD BEEN IN ISRAEL SIX YEARS. "DO YOU LIKE ISRAEL," I ASKED HER. NO DOUBT ABOUT HER RESPONSE. THIS HAD BECOME HER PERMANENT COUNTRY.

THOSE INVOLVED IN THE LOWER PAYING JOBS SEEMED TO BE LIKKUDNICKS, THAT IS TO SAY, FULLY SUPPORTIVE OF THE POLICIES ADVOCATED BY PRIME MINISTER SHAMIR. THOSE WITH MORE MONEY AND A BETTER EDUCATION, SEEMED TO BE MORE LIBERAL AND WERE ADVOCATES OF THE POLICIES RECOMMENDED BY PERES. WE MET A NUMBER OF THESE PEOPLE AT A LUNCHEON ARRANGED BY A FORMER MEMBER OF THIS CONGREGATION IN CEASAREA ^{at City} ABOUT ONE AND A HALF HOURS FROM JERUSALEM WHERE WE WERE STAYING AT THAT TIME. SANDY AND CHARLES SIMON SENT A CAR FOR US AND BROUGHT US BACK TO OUR HOTEL. AT THEIR LUXURIOUS HOME, WE MET SOME VERY INTERESTING PEOPLE, ALL OF WHOM HAD MADE ALIYAH TO ISRAEL FAIRLY RECENTLY. THERE WAS BASIL, WHO HAD BEEN AN ATTORNEY IN NAMIBIA, AFRICA. BASIL WAS MARRIED TO A WOMAN FROM AUSTRALIA. TOGETHER THEY RAN A DELI MANUFACTURING PLANT IN ISRAEL. ^{Another woman at the luncheon} Ann HAD COME TO ISRAEL FROM SOUTH AFRICA AFTER HER DIVORCE TO BEGIN A NEW LIFE. SHE MET DR. ROBERT KLUGERMAN, A DENTAL PROFESSOR AT HADASSAH HOSPITAL, ON A BLIND DATE. THEY WERE NOW MARRIED. BOB IS FROM AMERICA. THERE WAS ANOTHER COUPLE FROM CHICAGO. ALL OF THESE PEOPLE SEEMED TO BACK A MORE LIBERAL POLICY TOWARD THE ARABS.

AFTER THE CCAR CONFERENCE, WE BECAME PART OF A TOUR SINCE WE WANTED SHIRA TO SEE MORE OF ISRAEL. ONE OF THE INTERESTING PLACES WE VISITED WAS THE KIBBUTZ "NES AMMIM". NES AMMIM WAS FOUNDED BY A GROUP OF CHRISTIAN, ^S MOSTLY FROM HOLLAND, WHO WANTED TO MAKE A STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF THE JEWS. THE KIBBUTZ SENDS 50,000 ROSES A DAY TO EUROPE. OUR CHRISTIAN GUIDE AT THE KIBBUTZ TOLD US THAT THE LAND HAD BEEN PURCHASED FROM AN ARAB SHEIK WHO LIVED IN A NEARBY VILLAGE. . THE JEWISH NATIONAL FUND HAD PURCHASED LARGE AREAS OF LAND FROM SIMILAR SHEIKS WHO MUST NOT BE IMAGINED TO HAVE SUFFERED BY THE INFLUX OF NON ARABIC PEOPLES TO THIS LAND.

5. IN OUR VISIT TO THE JEWISH QUARTER IN THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM, WE HAD SOME INTERESTING EXPERIENCES. AFTER PURCHASING SOME JEWELRY IN AN OLD CITY SHOP, WE TURNED TO PASS THROUGH AN ARCHWAY AND WE WERE TOLD BY THE SOLDIER AT THE PASSAGEWAY THAT IT WAS CLOSED TO TRAFFIC. HE INFORMED US THAT THEY WERE SEARCHING FOR A POSSIBLE BOMB. LATER WE LEARNED THAT A REBBETIZIN FROM POMPANO BEACH HAD PLACED HER KNITTING ^{BAG} ON A BENCH AND THIS WAS THE OBJECT OF SUSPICION. LIFE IS SUCH IN ISRAEL THAT ^{HUNDREDS} ~~HUNDREDS~~ OF INCIDENTS LIKE THIS OCCUR EVERY DAY. EVERY SUSPICIOUS BAG MUST BE INVESTIGATED.

A FEW MINUTES LATER ^{AS WE PAUSED TO Rest} AN AMERICAN WHO HAD MADE ALIYAH TO ISRAEL DETERMINED THAT SELMA AND SHIRA WERE REFORM JEWS AND HE PROCEEDED TO GIVE THEM A LECTURE ON THE GALL OF REFORM RABBIS WHO DARED TO CRITICIZE ISRAEL FROM THEIR IVORY TOWERS. AS I CAME UP TO RESCUE THE LADIES, AN ADULT YESHIVA STUDENT, CLAD IN THE TRADITIONAL BLACK SUIT AND HAT WHIZZED BY ON ROLLER SKATES. WE WATCHED IN AMAZEMENT AS HE BEGAN THE IMPOSSIBLE FEAT OF ^{DESCENDING} ~~WALKING~~ DOWN A STAIRWAY OF 100 STEPS ON THE ROLLER SKATES. HE ACCOMPLISHED THE FEAT WITHOUT LOSING HIS YAMULKA.

THERE WERE SOME INCIDENTS WHICH INVOLVED ARABS. WE VISITED THE JERUSALEM BRANCH OF THE HEBREW UNION COLLEGE WHICH IS DEDICATING ITS NEW AND IMPOSING BUILDINGS. WE NOTICED THAT THERE WERE A NUMBER OF ARABS WORKING ON THE CONSTRUCTION. WE WERE TOLD THAT THEY COOPERATED COMPLETELY WITH THE RUSH SCHEDULE.

AT THE EL AKSA MOSQUE NEAR THE DOME OF THE ROCK, WE BARGAINED WITH AN ARAB GUIDE AND AGREED TO PAY HIM \$12 FOR THE TOUR. ONCE WE GOT INSIDE THE MOSQUE OUR GUIDE LEFT US PRETTY MUCH ON OUR OWN AS HE DRIFTED OVER TO A LARGE GROUP OF PEOPLE TO BECOME THEIR GUKDE. AT THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE IN THE CHRISTIAN QUARTER OF THE OLD CITY, WHERE JESUS IS SAID TO HAVE RISEN FROM HIS GRAVE, WE FOUND AN ARAB GUIDE WHO WAS WELL INFORMED AND INSTRUCTIVE. WE PAID HIM TWICE AS MUCH AS WE PAID THE OTHER GUIDE. HUNDREDS OF GERMAN TOURISTS VISITED THIS CHURCH WHILE WE WERE THERE AND BENT DOWN TO PUT THEIR HAND IN THE HOLY ~~WHERE~~ WHERE IT IS SAID THE CROSS OF JESUS RESTED ON THE EARTH.

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A FEW STEPS FROM THE CHURCH AN ARAB HAWKER SOLD SELMA A \$25 SCARF FOR \$6 AND ANOTHER ARAB TRIED TO SELL ME A KAFIYA, AN ARAB HEADDRESS. I DIDN'T BUY IT BECAUSE IT WOULD CHANGE MY PERSONALITY.

AS PART OF THE POST CONFERENCE TOUR, WE VISTED JERICHO, THE 6,000 YEAR OLD CITY. SOME ARAB SHOPS WERE CLOSED IN JERICHO FOLLOWING THE PLO DISCIPLINE. OTHERS WERE OPEN.

WE SAW THE AMPITHEATRE AND RUINS OF AN ENTIRE GREEK CITY IN AN AREA NOW CALLED BET SHEAN, ONCE CALLED SKITOPOLIS. THE RUINS RECALL THE DAYS WHEN ALEXANDER THE GREAT CONQUERED JUDEA AROUND 300 BCE.

WE SAW THE CONVERTED SWAMPS OF THE HULEH VALLEY, NOW A MAJOR SOURCE FOR THE VEGETABLES FOR THE FAMOUS ISRAELI BREAKFASTS. BEFORE 1967 SYRIAN GUNS Poured DOWN DESTRUCTION FROM THE GOLAN HEIGHTS INTO THIS REGION, BUT NO MORE.

WE TOURED THE GOLAN HEIGHTS CAPTURED FROM THE SYRIANS AND SAW THE "VALLEY OF TEARS", SO CALLED BECAUSE IT WAS HERE ON THE BORDER ESTABLISHED IN 1967 THAT SYRIA LAUNCHED ITS SURPRISE YOM KIPPUR ATTACK, 500 TANKS VS 75.

WE SAW BEAUTIFUL SNOW KISSED MT. HERMON AND BANIAS SPRINGS, ONE OF THE KEY SOURCES OF THE JORDAN RIVER. HERE WE VISITED THE ANCIENT WORSHIP PLACES FOR THE GOD PAN ^{IN} HELLENIC TIMES. WE VISTED METULLAH AND THE GOOD FENCE" AND NOTICED THAT THE ISRAELI ARMED FORCES ARE NO LONGER BACKED UP AT THIS FENCE ON THE LEBANESE BORNDER. RATHER ARE THEY FURTHER INTO LEBANON IN AN AREA JOINTLY CONTROLLED WITH THE MARONITE CHRISTIANS.

ONE CANNOT VISIT THESE BORDER AREAS WITHOUT BEING CONVINCED THAT ISRAEL IS IN A STATE OF ETERNAL SIEGE AND CANNOT AFFORD TO RELAX ITS GUARD .

7. NO STONES WERE THROWN AT US IN ISRAEL, BUT THEN AGAIN, WE DID NOT VISIT HEBRON OR GAZA. AMERICAN TOURISM TO ISRAEL HAS BEEN SHARPLY CURTAILED BUT EUROPEAN CHRISTIANS ARE SWARMING ALL OVER THE PLACE. THIS CAN ONLY BE CAUSE EUROPEAN TV HAS NOT PLAYED UP THE WEST BANK REVOLT AS AMERICAN TV HAS.

WHILE WE WERE IN ISRAEL A LARGE PEACE RALLY WAS HELD NUMBERING FORTY THOUSAND PEOPLE. FOR THE MOST PART, HOWEVER, ISRAELIS JUST GO ABOUT THEIR DAILY ROUTINE, TRYING TO EKE OUT A LIVING. EVERYWHERE THERE ARE SOLDIERS WITH GUNS, NOT SO MUCH BECAUSE *they are* ~~THEIR TOUR OF DUTY REQUIRES IT~~ BUT BECAUSE THEY ARE GOING TO THEIR HOME OR COMING FROM IT. THESE SOLDIERS ARE A REMINDER THAT WHATEVER PEACE ISRAEL NOW HAS HAS NOT COME CHEAPLY.

ISRAEL HAS A LIMITED SELECTION ON ITS TV STATIONS. THE JORDAN STATION IS AS MUCH WATCHED AS ITS *the* ISRAELI STATION. ONE NIGHT I SAW A FILMED PRESENTATION OF A NEW SONG IN ARABIC. IT WAS CALLED, ~~WE~~ WILL NOT FORGET. AS THE MUSICIANS STROMMED THEIR GUITARS THE VIEWER SAW SCENES OF ARABS IN THE WEST BANK THROWING STONES AND GETTING CLUBBED OR PERHAPS KILLED. ISRAELIS WERE PRESENTED AS MURDERERS, AND THE SONG WENT ON, " I SHALL NOT FORGET". HOW PEACE CAN BE POSSIBLE IN THE LIGHT OF THIS KIND OF DAILY PROPAGANDA IS HARD TO ENVISION.

I CAME BACK FROM ISRAEL WITH A RENEWED DETERMINATION TO SUPPORT MY KINSMEN THERE. THIS IS NO TIME FOR JEWISH SETTLERS TO CREEP UP ON THE ARAB SECTORS OF HEBRON, AND IT IS NOT TIME FOR GENERAL SHARON TO MOVE INTO THE ARAB SECTION OF THE OLD CITY, BUT NEITHER IS IT A TIME FOR JEWS TO CLOSE THEIR EYES TO OTHER REALITIES. JEWS CANNOT TRUST THEIR FATE TO OTHERS. THEY MUST CONTROL THEIR OWN FUTURE. THEY CAN AFFORD TO TAKE ONLY THOSE RISKS WHICH WILL NOT LEAD TO THEIR DESTRUCTION.