

## Reflections on My Recent Trip

Now that I've returned from my latest trip to Israel (I hope to return in the future), let me share a few observations about the country and our people living there.

The last time I was in Israel was 15 years ago. If you don't return on a frequent basis, you will be astonished at the rapid physical growth within the country. Areas that just a decade and a half ago were villages, have expanded to become cities. As an example, Tel Aviv throughout the 20th century had few tall buildings. Most were the original Bauhaus style that comprised only a few floors. Hence, many of the older buildings were "walk-ups". In addition, most of these buildings got their heating from large water tanks sitting atop the buildings, heating up in the strong sun that shines on Israel throughout the year. Today, the Tel Aviv skyline is dominated by sleek new high-rises, and cranes putting up more high-rises. Gleaming towers overlook the Mediterranean, and purchase prices have "gone through the roof". Apparently, the demand to live in Tel Aviv - despite the war and economic pressures - is very high. And why not? The allure of the beach and the attraction of many high end shops is powerful. It was hard for me to decide whether to run to the Mediterranean for another knee-high wade, or window-shop for things I'd have trouble affording! I'm not complaining, mind you. It is invigorating to see Israel's economy growing steadily. It is a divine blessing that our Israeli cousins can live in an Israel whose stores rival any we have in the West.

Second- the people. Sometimes, Israelis are criticized for their very forward attitude. It seems to outsiders that Israelis often interfere in other people's business. Stories abound of Jewish women looking at babies in strollers, and telling the mother they think the baby is too cold or too hot or too thin. Or Jewish men who overhear a political conversation at the next table and "butt in" with their opinion. This is not because Israelis are rude for the sake of rudeness. It stems, rather, from the fact that, as all Jews are extended family, most Israelis are genuinely concerned for your welfare, and will opine as to how to raise your child, or how to cook better, or how to vote. While



we might consider this “none of your business”, this attitude has a positive side. As an example, one evening I was sitting outside my hotel, on a fountain-pool wall. I may have had a “far-away look” on my face (or, perhaps, a confused look). In any case, a woman noticed me, walked over, and kindly asked, “Atah B’seder “? (“Are you o.k.”?) I assured her that I was, and thanked her for asking. As she walked away, I wondered whether I would have gotten an inquiry like that if I had been sitting in a similar spot in the United States. So often people walk by without stopping, even if they know the person may indeed need some help.

Third- the food. The food in Israel is delicious. My younger son, Daniel, happened to be in Israel with me to celebrate a family wedding. As he has been to Israel many times in the last two years, he is quite familiar with several major cities. When I asked about lunch one afternoon, he took me to a shawarma/falafel stand that has been in steady operation since 1939. It is reputedly the best fixed- stand shawarma/falafel place in Tel Aviv. The food was outstanding! (I am starting to salivate just remembering the dish we got - we shared one because the plate was piled high with food). Vegetables and fruit throughout Israel are very fresh, usually delivered just hours before use. And, it is remarkable to note that historically, under every foreign conqueror, the soil became weak, yielding very poor results. Only under the Jews does the land reveal its fertility.

Fourth- the incredible advances in archaeology. Fifteen years ago, a tunnel under the Western Wall in Jerusalem had been uncovered, and the process of searching it had recently begun. Today, much more of the tunnel has been excavated, and all sorts of treasures from both Second and First Temple times have been recovered. A bell from the hem of the robe of one of the High Priests’ garments was recently found! The tunnel now leads to a place within just a few yards of where the Holy of Holies stood! The Pilgrim Road, on which our ancestors walked, as they ascended Mount Moriah to reach the Temple has been revealed! It is breathtaking to realize that one discovery after another fits right in with the Biblical story of Israel during the reign of King David and of King Solomon. Our enemies



wish these discoveries didn't exist. Anyone who appreciates the Bible, however, hears historic voices from 3,000 years ago calling clearly to us. Archaeological discoveries prove that those stories and details are as true today as the day they were recorded. Israel is, indeed, the motherland of the Jewish people.

Taking these 4 observations together, you can understand why I was reluctant to board the plane from Tel Aviv to New York. Of course, I love and appreciate the many friends and family I have here in the U.S. But, truth be told, I'd hop on the next plane to Tel Aviv, if I could. I hope to return to breathe in more of the air of Eretz Yisrael, and celebrate the existence of the State of Israel. "My heart is in the East, and I am in the uttermost West", lamented poet Judah Halevi, 900 years ago. What would he have given to be able to board an airplane and arrive in Israel in a matter of a few hours? Let's see- the next El Al flight from JFK to Tel Aviv leaves at.....