

FROM THE EDITOR

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Thanks to an incredibly generous gift from friends, I visited Israel last year for the very first time in my life. What follows are some of the thoughts and impressions that I shared with my family while I was there:

It is very painful to see *Yerushalayim* this way – to see the state of *Har HaBayis* (the Temple Mount) and the site of the *Beis HaMikdash* (the Temple); to stand at the Southern Wall (where active excavations are taking place), the site from which those coming up to the Temple would gain access to it, and to see the entrance gates bricked up; to see a pile of enormous stones and learn that those stones

have been sitting there in that very same place since the Romans pushed them off on Tisha B'Av when they destroyed the Second Temple; to see the Arabs in control of *Har HaBayis* and other religiously significant areas – it is nothing surprising; I've seen many photos, but it is profoundly more painful – and infuriating – experiencing it in person. We had an IDF guard stop us from going near a doorway that led to *Har HaBayis*. We couldn't have gotten very close anyways because of being *tamei* (in a state of impurity), but to be told 'no' because we "may incite the Arabs". Oy. To be told as a Jew in Israel, "This far and no further" – it's just very difficult to accept. Israel is indeed an apartheid state – only it's the Jews who are being discriminated against!

As I stood next to the Southern Wall looking up at those blocked gates, just at that very moment the minaret above me (part of the mosque located on *Har HaBayis*) called out for Muslim worshippers to come and pray. My heart ached. How could we let them control it, let alone disgrace and deface it? It's very hard to witness such a thing. I found myself crying, as I have many times throughout my trip. Even at *Maras HaMachpela* (the Cave of the Patriarchs), the Jews can access only a small section (with the exception of ten days per year). Sad. Hard to see. Hard to stand by. Hard not to feel angry.

When I visited the kever (grave) of *Shmuel HaNavi* (the prophet Samuel), I was surprised to see a large group of Arab men sitting there in a circle drinking coffee. I have experienced anti-Semitism before, but the way the Arabs look at you here – there is such hatred. As I walked out after saying some *Tehillim* (Psalms), I stopped an off-duty Israeli soldier who was wearing civilian clothes and a *kippah*, his M16 slung over his shoulder. I asked him why there were so many Arabs there; after all, the prophet Samuel has no religious significance whatsoever for them. His response? "This is *galus* (exile). This is what *galus* looks like. Whatever has meaning to us, they create a presence there. And the government does nothing to stop them." It might sound strange, but I feel more aware of the fact that I'm Jewish in Israel than I do living in *chutz l'aretz* (outside of Israel) – and I actually feel more like I'm in *galus* here. When I go about my daily life back home, I'm aware that I'm a Jew (I wear a *kippah* every day), but no one else really reminds me of it. But, in Israel, it's quite a different experience.

SNIPPETS:

- There is nothing like seeing highway signs with "Jerusalem" written on them.
- I passed a place where a poor man sleeps in a tunnel nearby the Central Bus Station. He wasn't there at that moment, but someone had left him *shaloch manos* for *Purim*.
- The *duchening* (blessing from the *Kohanim*) every day is so special – nothing like getting a blessing from Hashem to start each day.
- The guy sitting next to me on the bus asked me what *daf* (page of the Talmud) it is today! And he's learning out loud with a *niggun* (melody) on the bus – so beautiful.
- With all of the traffic and the tension in certain areas for obvious reasons – there is, at the same time, a palpable feeling of peace. You feel good here.
- *Davening* next to the *Kotel* feels like you're whispering in Hashem's ear. Whereas in *chutz l'aretz* you sometimes want to (and even feel like you have to) shout to be heard, here it doesn't feel that way. It's incredible to *daven* for the rebuilding of *Yerushalayim* and the *Beis HaMikdash* when you are here – a whole new meaning, a whole new level of *kavanah* (focus).
- Amazing to walk up to the *Kotel*, find shelves full of *Siddurim* and *Tehillim*, and always be able to find a *minyan* – and what a *minyan*, made up of all different kinds of Jews.

Israel – the most wonderful place I've ever been.

ROBERT SUSSMAN,
EDITOR

ON THE COVER: ARCHWAYS IN THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM. ARCHWAYS WERE THE DEFAULT CHOICE IN THE ANCIENT WORLD FOR VARIOUS STRUCTURES (ENTRANCES, BRIDGES, AQUEDUCTS, ETC) BECAUSE THEY COULD SPAN LARGE AREAS AND SUPPORT A LOT OF WEIGHT. PHOTOGRAPH BY ROBERT SUSSMAN.



CREDITS

PUBLISHER & MANAGING DIRECTOR

Martyn Samuels
martyn@jewishlife.co.za

EDITOR

Robert Sussman
robert@jewishlife.co.za

OPERATIONS DIRECTOR

Linda Superfain
linda@jewishlife.co.za

ART DIRECTOR

Rizelle Hartmeier
studio26@telkomsa.net

FEATURES WRITER

Chandrea Serebro

COPY EDITOR/PROOFREADER

Dovid Samuels

DIGITAL MANAGER

David Blumenau
david@jewishlife.co.za

CONTRIBUTORS

David Cohen, Rabbi Dr David Fox, Dean Furman,
Bev Goldman, Rabbi Yossy Goldman,
Larry Hirschowitz, Wendy Kahn, Serenne Kaplan,
Richard Pearce, Ilan Preskovsky, Liz Samuels,
Chandrea Serebro, Rabbi Ari Shishler,
Michelle Vinokur

Printers Paarlmedia kzn

Distribution

Merle Jacobson
Marc Levitt

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