

ODD MAN OUT
Brian Sacks

Volume 2

Moving On
Replanting a Life in Israel

Brian Sacks



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For Jessica, David, Tzviya, Amit, Yaara, Alan and Eliot,
for whom I moved 2000 miles;
and for Lyn, 2000 Miles away,
who was always at my side.

Preface

I moved to Israel on August 1, 2018, after almost 67 years of living in South East England; I was very unsure whether it would be a permanent move. It proved to be a difficult transition; the immediate culture shock led me to start a diary for my own therapeutic benefit. I maintained the diary for two years, although, after around nine months, I reduced the frequency of my entries as I understood that I needed to switch from "outside observer" mode to "would-be integrated citizen".

Occasionally, I look back at the diary myself. I find that rather than reading from the beginning, it is more enjoyable to jump into the middle at a random point, before going back to read from the start; because my first few days were quite challenging, bootstrapping a life from zero in a language that I could not speak.

Of course, "challenging" for an individual can sometimes mean intriguing, instructive or amusing for an onlooker. In the light of that possibility, I hope this diary is worth some of your attention.

Brian Sacks

July 2023

Israel Diary

22-10-18: Prologue

Perhaps it was pre-destined that I would write this account. Nonetheless, I certainly did not pre-plan it, nor did it start out as a diary. Its beginning was as a text exchange with a friend, in which I described the difficulties I had been having with the Israeli banking system, and the seeming impossibility of complying with the requirements of the Israeli Immigration Authority. Having thus vented my frustration in text form, I reworded the exchange as a diary entry. Then one diary entry led to another.

But I did not step off the plane on August 1st straight into the Kiryat Ono branch of Bank Hapoalim. At Ben Gurion airport, just before the entrance to Passport Control, I and two others were whisked away into a side room where our photographs were taken, various formalities were dealt with, and we left, with Israeli identity cards, as new Israeli citizens. It was an emotional moment. Whether I live in Israel in the long term or not, I will certainly always be spending a lot of time in Israel, and I will be proud of my citizenship. It is not an unthinking pride, or one based on any messages drummed into me in my not-so-impressionable youth. It is only in the last twenty years that I have really taken an interest in the history of Zionism, and I find that history inspiring, even as recounted dispassionately and objectively in the British Government Peel Commission Report.

On collecting my three suitcases and hand luggage, a taxi took me to my AirBnB in Ganei Tikva. Jessica, David, Tzviya and Amit were there waiting for me, Tzviya with a drawing of a duck she had made for me, with the message "Welcome Saba" (Saba is Hebrew for Granddad). Yes, I was home.

06-08-18

I've been experiencing the intense frustrations of trying to set up a bank account in a language that I don't understand. I set my bank account up today, but the branch where I set my account up would not let me deposit any money! Meanwhile, the Ministry of Absorption will need to see, on Wednesday, a bank statement showing money in the account. I gave daughter Jessica 100 shekels and got son-in-law David to transfer it into my account, so it should be there by Tuesday. So hopefully Tuesday evening we will negotiate the other issue of not having a printer to print a statement! All these hurdles one has to negotiate seem to assume that everything will work like a well oiled machine. But, for example, leaving aside the fact that the bank would not let me deposit money, it sent a verification code to my email address that I was to type into a return SMS. Then my phone refused to send the SMS, or it may have been that the bank refused to accept it! Needless to say, I have tons of paper from the bank, all in Hebrew that I cannot decipher. Everything that I do on the phone is accompanied by written Hebrew instructions that I can't fully understand or satisfy. So my basic phone settings are incorrect, quite apart from the settings on any banking app for example.

One is really bootstrapping a life. But Jessica and David are a great help, and there are other help resources. I have enough to live on without question, but it's a question of logistics. Apparently if I want to transfer a significant sum across, like enough to pay for rental, I need to get a character reference from my UK bank, certification from an accountant that the money has been appropriately taxed, and a statement of where the money came from, presumably with some proof. All of it is doable I'm sure, but together with setting up my tenancy for my flat in Hendon, finding somewhere to live in Israel, and everything else, it's an interesting time.

I have never had an accountant in my life, and don't as of this moment, but I probably will have within a day or two. I have met him in London and semi-coincidentally he is my son-in-law's accountant. My son-in-law is quite canny so it is a good recommendation.

So hurdles to get over, but they are not impossibly high. And in the spare 5 minutes before I went for the bus, Jessica went on to a property site, and it seems that the rents around here are significantly more affordable than Tel Aviv, seeing as it is five or 6 miles inland. But for me it is an excellent position, because I can walk to Jessica, or there is a single bus to Jessica, and there is a single bus to Tel Aviv, and the bus doesn't pass through the area that would raise my hackles!

12-08-18

I am in an airBnB in Ganei Tikva, 4 km away from Jessica and 10 km away from Tel Aviv, until the end of the month. I went looking at possible apartments to rent for the first time today. I was really only interested in one, but ended up seeing three. The one that I was really interested in was actually beautiful and suited me down to the ground, so I hope I secure it. It is where I want to be, that is, Kiryat Ono - very well positioned for walking to Jessica and using public transport to either Jessica or Tel Aviv. It was a nice end to the day that began with an ant swarm in the flat.

21-08-18

Recapping the last few days: Friday, August 17 I went to Jerusalem for nephew Gad's aufruf (presumably the word is Yiddish, and it denotes calling up to the Law scroll in the synagogue, on the Sabbath before his wedding). I returned on Sunday, having been forced to walk from the old train station to the Jerusalem Central Bus Station (45 min in baking hot sunshine, wheeling my hand-luggage case) because Jerusalem buses no longer permitted payment by cash; one needed the Israeli equivalent of the Oyster card, called a Rav Kav card. I also learnt on Sunday that my prospective landlady had decided that she wasn't going to rent her flat out anyway.

Monday was a depressing day from the point of view of flat hunting. That evening I realised I needed to widen my search criteria, and so I also looked at four-room apartments (which in England would be termed three-bedroom flats). Then today, August 21, I visited a flat in Ramat Ilan, just 1.3 km away from Jessica. Having checked that there was nothing better available, I negotiated a price, for the rental to begin in a week's time, August 28. I also had my first Israeli haircut, and acquired for myself the Rav Kav card so that when I am in Jerusalem this weekend, I will be able to use the buses. So it was a successful day! But perhaps a feeling of minor euphoria caused me to temporarily forget the necessity of washing up the moment one had finished one's meal. The ants soon reminded me.

22-08-18

Today I signed a one-year contract to rent a flat in Ramat Ilan, virtually across the road from the campus of Bar Ilan University. Although it is not exactly where I was hoping to live, it does have the advantage of being less than a mile away from Jessica, and several bus routes to Tel Aviv (though not, apparently, direct buses to the beaches). Not feeling awake enough to venture further afield, after my session with the landlords I wandered through the university campus. It was almost deserted, and the campus supermarket had a sign in the window saying that it was closed all week. It was a very pleasant experience having the campus to myself, and being able to lie full-length along a bench without embarrassment, to shut my eyes for a few minutes. The faculty buildings of the campus are set amongst flower gardens with benches and sculptures. Virtually every building, garden and sculpture bore the name of a benefactor, who typically donated in memory of a parent or a relative who had died in the Holocaust. An emotionally mature, admirable and touching response to tragedy.

26-08-18

I spent Thursday to Saturday in Jerusalem for the extended celebrations of the wedding of Sarena to my nephew Gad. The wedding took place on Thursday evening at sunset in a beautiful setting in the hills outside of Jerusalem. Then over the Sabbath, Friday evening to Saturday evening, three sets of relatives of the bride and groom hosted celebratory "Sheva Berachot" meals. ("Sheva Berachot" translates to "Seven Blessings", which, on the occasion of a wedding, are added to the set of short thanksgiving prayers recited after a meal). So it was a weekend of expressing our celebration and good wishes to the newly married couple through the medium of eating, praying and getting to know the wider family. As such I found myself present, over a 24-hour period, in more prayer services than I normally experience over, shall we say, a month. Though I do not possess the level of belief that would allow me to pray with any meaning, I was struck in seeing the joy and pride in the face of a five-year-old great-nephew as he took part in the ritual of re-adorning the Scroll of the Law in its velvet cover and silver chain, after the weekly Reading of the Law. It reminded me of my older brother describing his pride in taking part in the same ceremony at a similar age, and its deep effect on him. Much of what my brother says about the values of tradition, ritual and community seemed to be captured in the smile on that young child's face.

28-08-18

My telephone step counter for the last two days has recorded 25,303 steps for Monday and 22,288 steps for Tuesday. Tuesday's exertions included around 600 metres carrying a fairly hefty microwave from the University supermarket back to my flat, and a somewhat smaller trip carrying a slightly lighter vacuum cleaner. Having also bought a basic set of crockery and glassware over these two days I'm gradually assembling the necessities for the flat that I have now begun renting.

Having experienced this month the two processes of renting out a flat in London and renting a flat in Israel, the contrast between them is stark, and shows the UK rental market in a very good light. In England I cleared and cleaned my flat as well as I possibly could, so that the inventory report would be favourable and would require my tenants to leave the property in an equally good state at the end of

their tenancy, barring legitimate wear and tear. For that matter, I also assembled a very comprehensive Tenants' Pack, including instruction manuals for virtually every item in the flat for which a manual had been produced.

In Israel there is no comparable system. Most flats are left unfurnished, and the so-called furnished flats leave much to be desired. The flat I have rented has a single bed, just 84 cm wide, with a spare bed underneath it. This "spare" is a shallow Ottoman bed, so has next to no padding whatsoever. The single bed was covered with a dusty fitted sheet. On removing this fitted sheet, I was presented with a sight that was stomach turning. I bought two mattress protectors to use one on top of the other, but when, in a video chat, Lyn saw the bed she warned me that if I slept on it I would get fleas. So I will use the spare Ottoman bed and endure a couple of night's poor sleep before deciding how to best improve matters. If I were in England I would buy a thick mattress topper straight away, but such things are harder to find here.

Today's purchase of a vacuum cleaner was an immediate necessity as the flat is extremely musty and dusty. Cupboards, railings and drawers are in a very dirty state, and in some cases falling apart. Tomorrow I will renew my search for reasonably priced cleaning materials, and set to work.

Yesterday I met my family doctor for the first time, and was very impressed by her professionalism and bedside manner. However, on my way to the appointment I had quite an unsettling experience. I guess that something similar happens to many new Israelis. However, I was totally unprepared for this initiation rite. By chance, my daughter rang me while I was in the lift to the clinic. I managed to speak only a word or two to her before someone shouted in extreme agitation, "Turn the phone off!". I assumed that it was considered anti-social to speak on the phone in a lift, so I stopped speaking. She continued shouting, "It's still open – shut it off!".

Jessica later explained that there is a received wisdom in Israel that if you use a mobile phone in a lift then you are frying the other occupants. I did a quick Google search, which indicated that there is some paranoia about reflected waves, standing waves and the like, but also that it's a bit of a fuss about nothing. Anyway, I'm assured that beneath the brusque exterior, there is a warmth to the Israeli personality. So that's all right then. And I know it is only sensible to be upbeat about the range of experiences I will encounter. I am here to enjoy the ride.

01-09-18

My last four days have been dominated by moving to my new flat and making it habitable. For much of this time I have been cleaning, scrubbing and vacuuming cupboards, drawers, shelves and surfaces throughout the flat. I developed minor hay fever and certainly felt that the copious dust was not doing my bronchial tubes or lungs any good at all.

I actually made the move from AirBnB to rented flat on Friday. I took a taxi from Ganei Tikva to Ramat Ilan, my luggage consisting of three full suitcases, a hand luggage case and a brown paper carrier bag. I had the taxi drop me off at a point which meant that he did not need to ride all the way along my circular one-way road to get me virtually back to the start. So I had a little bit of a walk myself, employing the mechanical advantage / velocity ratio payoff trick that meant that so long as I was prepared to walk each little journey segment three times over, then I only needed to transport one third of the luggage at any one time. Later that evening, I took advantage of my new location to enjoy a pleasant and delicious shabbat supper with Jessica, David and Tzviya (Amit kissed me goodnight having supped earlier).



Travellin' Light..

Since Friday I have also been unpacking and trying to create order out of chaos. It was early Saturday morning that I tried out the bed and it was as uncomfortable as I had expected. I fell asleep at about 6:30 AM, having been forced to take a sleep aid and more of a midnight feast than was good for me. I have been researching mattresses ever since.

Living in Israel does challenge the instinctive actions and muscle memory built up over a lifetime. Of course, the childhood rule of "Before crossing the road, stop, look right, look left, look right again" has to be replaced by "Look left, right, left, right, left, right until you are safely on the pavement at the other side" – after all, we are talking Israeli drivers here.

One aspect of muscle memory that I am finding hard to reverse concerns light switches. In England, one always presses the bottom of the switch to turn it on, and the top of the switch to turn it off. One does it without thinking. But throughout this flat, the opposite applies. I certainly have not yet internalised the change.

After taking my shower yesterday, I found that I had used the shampoo as body wash and vice versa, having made an unconscious, and erroneous, equation between the shape of a bottle and its function. Of course, I don't think it made a blind bit of difference to either my bodily cleanliness or the state of my hair.

03-09-18

Three days after moving to within a quarter of an hour walk from my grandchildren, I plunged into grandfatherly duties big-time. I turned up at Jessica and David's flat at 7:45 a.m. for a six and a half hour stint of babysitting. Thankfully both grandchildren gave me an easy ride. Tzviya knows exactly what she wants, and her day's plan started with me taking her to the University (to eat a 'Bamba' snack in a stimulating environment) and then for me to host her for elevenses at my flat. She approved of both the flat and my hospitality. Amit spent most of the morning at his Gan (i.e. kindergarten). He is remarkably placid, and after we picked him up at lunchtime he was happy to act as Tzviya's sparring partner.

A printer that was supposed to arrive tomorrow came today, and so I had to direct the deliveryman to Jessica's address. So, laden with the printer in addition to some moderately heavy shopping that I (and Tzviya) had already bought, I had to take the bus back to my flat. The minibus, racing round the corner,

sent me rotating virtually full circle around the pole I was clinging to, and sent the printer crashing to the floor. Thankfully both I and it survived unscathed.

The printer, once installed, immediately proved its worth by scanning previously undecipherable letters I had received from the electricity company and the National Insurance Institute. I could then upload the scanned documents to the internet for optical character recognition, and then plug the output into Google Translate. The documents were now intelligible!

I picked up my full month's washing from the local laundry; they provided a great service although I think I might have made a mistake entrusting my good shirts to them. On putting some of the clean washing away, a three-or-four centimetre long cockroach emerged from the shelf on which I had stacked my jogging trousers. It gave me a run for my money but I'm afraid its seconds were numbered. Inspection showed that it had left a few calling cards of its own. Welcome to the Middle East!

04-09-18

As part of my continuing enrollment into Israeli society, I had my first Israeli shout-out. A fierce-looking dog came barking and running menacingly straight at me, twice within the space of twenty seconds. "That's not nice, that's not fair, it's very scary", I called out to the owner. My feeling somewhat shook-up was slightly tempered by my minor satisfaction in having expressed my emotion in Hebrew.

Note to reader: Skip all this stuff in small print.

(If you are nerdy enough to actually read it, an update is that connectivity is no longer a problem, or at least, the work-around is straightforward. It remains true that there is no method of printer/scanner close down other than switching off the electric supply.) My second day with the printer/scanner went less smoothly than the first. I am using my phone as a Wi-Fi hotspot, and that may have something to do with it. Also the printer is vintage 2013, and its idea of how to connect to a Wi-Fi network may be equally antediluvian. Anyway, it seems that it refuses to actively find the network, but insists on being found first by a print request rather than by a scan request. I will have to get into the habit of printing out a blank page before attempting to scan. As another little feature, it refuses to close down. I must physically pull the plug out of the socket, and suffer its little admonishment about inappropriate shut-down when I start it up again next time. Yes, I did a Google search, and yes, I am not alone with the problem, but nobody has come up with a solution.

05-09-18

Profuse thanks to Alan for making possible a trip to IKEA, a 25 minute drive there (so away from Tel Aviv) and a 45 minute drive back (thus suffering the ever-present Tel Aviv traffic jam). It enabled me to buy, most importantly, a mattress, to double my number of chairs from two to four, and to enhance them with comfortable seat cushions.

06-09-18

Life can definitely be frustrating here!

One of the tasks I had set down in my orderly plan for the day was to attempt to update my address and telephone details at such institutions as the Ministry of Absorption, Ministry of the Interior, my bank and my health care provider. I decided to start with the Ministry of Absorption, assuming that seeing as it is the institution specifically there to facilitate matters for new immigrants with limited knowledge of the language, it would be the simplest. With my machine-and-internet-assisted ability to scan, character recognise and translate, I deciphered the document that the ministry had given me detailing their website and my allotted password. I duly entered my national identity number and password onto the site, only for the password to be rejected as containing letters and digits but not the necessary special characters. The password I had entered was, exactly, the password that they had allotted to me, and it was failing their own basic verification process. So I rang them up, and after waiting through 10 minutes of hold music, I was told that there was nobody there who could speak English.

Roll on the days when such frustrations occur less often! Meanwhile, yes, dear reader, I will definitely and speedily enrol onto a language course.

As a postscript to the above, I should mention that I immediately rang up Miriam, my contact in Nefesh B'Nefesh, the charity that helps new immigrants to Israel. Together we went through the list of relevant organisations, and the two outdated addresses that they might have on their systems (my daughter's address and my airBnB address). She decided that actually, I didn't need to worry about updating any of them. So there is a lesson for me - don't worry, be happy... I suppose that as long as I pay my taxes and my National Insurance contributions, the authorities can't get too upset.

08-09-18

After the incident with the cockroach some days ago, I went looking for a spray that might prevent the incident from recurring. I already knew two Hebrew words for cockroach: juk (ג'וק) and makak (מקק). But an element of uncertainty was introduced into my search because the cans instead used a third word for cockroach: tikan (תיקן). My older brother has noted the number of Hebrew words for joy, reflecting the importance of that state to Hebrew culture. People refer, in a similar vein, to the number of Inuit words for snow. I will say no more.

11-09-18

It has been Rosh Hashana – the Jewish New Year – for the last two days. The first evening of the festival – Sunday – Jessica, David, Tzviya, Amit and I enjoyed a very pleasant meal with friends. I duly put in a one-hour-plus appearance at the synagogue on Monday, before fear of catching cold sent me out. The synagogue is just 20 yards away from my building, and its design is pleasantly modest and tasteful. Fondness for my bed got the better of me today (Tuesday), but later, when walking, an Orthodox gentleman – weighing me up, no doubt, as "secular", gave me a personal 'shofar' (ram's horn) service of my own, first coaching me through the two preliminary blessings: for listening to the shofar, and for God having sustained me to reach this time. He then performed quite an extended series of blows on the shofar. As I had been in conversation with Lyn at the time, she was able to vicariously participate, and it was really quite moving.

In the evening I went on a wild goose chase to find a SIM card, whereby I could hopefully improve my available internet bandwidth beyond the pitiful. It was a thankless task, but the search will resume, with son-in-law David's help, tomorrow.

While writing this I have been intermittently shortening the lifespan of various ants on a one-by-one basis – I haven't encountered colonies of ants as I did at my airBnB. I am sure that it is excellent cognitive behavioural therapy for my cleanliness phobias, though whether I respond like a good cognitive behavioural therapee is another matter entirely.

12-09-18

I was confined to my flat throughout the morning and early afternoon as contractors commissioned by the landlord changed a window in the one bedroom that I don't use. This ruled out any furtherance of administrative issues since most municipal activity and the like is conducted in the morning. I spent the afternoon with Tzviya. Much progress on the purchasing of homewares - pedal bin and floor cloths and the like - less progress on the internet front. David kindly obtained a SIM card, but unforeseen difficulties left the new card inactive and the old card disabled. But this did lead me to discover that if one stands in the street next to Bar Ilan University, one can make use of their unrestricted Wi-Fi to the extent that its signal reaches that far.

One consequence of my extremely limited internet bandwidth over the last week has been my inability to upload this diary beyond the confines of my PC hard disc. I remain hopeful for tomorrow.

13-09-18

At times during the day I seemed stripped of my usual life support systems to the extent of needing to rely on homespun musings along the lines of "Well, I'd rather be in this position than have a serious health problem..."

In brief, I started the day with no working internet or phone, and with the belief that I had lost my passport. After spending perhaps half an hour searching in vain for the passport, I decided to go to the Town Hall, to set up automatic payment of my arnona (Council Tax) and to apply for my new immigrant's discount. Finding my way there was "interesting", guided by Google Maps, which broke down every few yards as it lost its connection into the Bar Ilan University Wi-Fi. But the walk led me for the first time through the full extent of the campus, and again I was struck by the buildings, streams and community park, all endowed by benefactors.

On reaching the Town Hall, I was faced with a machine that allocated one a place in the queue once one had typed in one's National ID Number and password. Surprise, surprise, this was the first I had ever heard about a password. This was not going to be my day.

Thankfully, on entering the room of counter staff, I could just sit down, state my business, and all got sorted. My day was getting better. I went home, with a new burst of inspiration found my passport, had a lunchtime nap, washed the floors of the flat for the first time, inserted my new SIM card and found it working! To cap it all, I registered myself on the government website and set up a password, which is maybe the password that the Town Hall system was referring to. The process involved jumping through several verification hoops, and of course dealing with the Hebrew language. The only Hebrew keyboard at my disposal is the on-screen one provided by Google Translate, and so typing "Brian" in Hebrew told me incidentally that my name means "Best regards". Well, waddayaknow!

16-09-18

One small step at a time, my quality of life is improving. My telephone package, costing just 30 shekels per month (around six pounds) should provide 50 gigabytes of data monthly, which hopefully will suffice even for those bloated Windows 10 updates. I have been able to negotiate the Israeli bank site to print off account and credit card statements, and I am homing in on an appropriate Ulpan course. I have cleaned my picture window looking out over Tel Aviv as much as I can whilst paying due respect to the fact that on the other side of it is a sheer drop from the fifth floor to a concrete car park. I have managed to transform sofas from looking unspeakable to almost passable.



Settees 21-08-18, the day I first visited



Settees 16-09-18

I had another afternoon and evening gated in the flat, waiting for the air conditioning repair man. But having given a two-hour window and then turning up an hour and a half after the end of it, he also repaired a couple of broken cupboard hinges. As an additional benefit, the trail of dirt that he left behind gave me another opportunity to clean the floors, and now the flat is suffused with the pleasant aroma of cockroach repellent!

19-09-18

My first Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) in Israel was an affecting experience. After our pre-fast meal, I accompanied Jessica, David, Tzviya and Amit to synagogue yesterday evening. Despite dressing more warmly than on my previous synagogue visit, the air conditioning and my fear of catching cold again sent me out after a time. It gave me the opportunity of looking after Amit and allowing Jessica to spend more time in the service herself. It also gave me the opportunity to wander down the middle of a road in which there was no traffic other than children meandering up and down on bicycles. At the bottom of the road I crossed a small bit of wasteland and found myself on Route 4, a major road traversing the coastal centre of the country from Haifa in the North to Gaza in the South. In England it would be considered a motorway. I was at a straight stretch of the road in which I could see probably a full mile in both directions. I stayed for 20 minutes, transfixed by the scene. During that time not a single car or motorbike went by. Every now and then, somebody passed by on a bicycle that was presumably assisted by an electric motor. But there was no traffic noise at all. The only noise was that of the many adults and children pedalling up and down the middle of each carriageway, seemingly with no need to worry about any danger or to obey any rules of the road. One of the children on a bicycle was being accompanied by his father on a skateboard.

Just as I was leaving to walk back over the wasteland, I heard a vehicle driving by. I turned around to see that it was a van, and it was immediately followed by an ambulance with flashing red lamp. Clearly the two were connected and presumably were rushing to an emergency situation.

The following afternoon, the situation was the same. There was not a single moving car or motorised vehicle on the road. All the shops were shut, there was no noise of industry or of building work. But the roads were full of children pedalling up and down in loose orbits around groups of parents gathered in the middle of the road. For the "chilonim" - the "seculars" – the day was seemingly also a festival, one of bicycle riding for children and socialising in the middle of the road for adults. A day when there was no fear of children being run over by cars.

A day when one could find calm, peace and quiet in the middle of a car park, in which one could take a brief moment of introspection to take stock of oneself, take a mental ethics questionnaire, note one's few good points and show some compassion for one's several not-so-good points.

Or, by contrast, one could go to synagogue. The synagogue was certainly fuller than over the New Year, but one could still find a place to stand in comfort. This was now the time of the Closing service, throughout which the Ark (containing the Scrolls of the Law) remained open, and everyone who felt capable of it stood standing. But by half an hour before the end of the Day, things were changing. By this time, most of the bicycles and all the groups of parents were off the road – presumably anticipating the resumption of normal traffic. The synagogue was filling to burst point, and the service was reaching a crescendo. The Shofar (ram's horn) was sounded, and immediately after that a few people left even though it was in the middle of a prayer (this synagogue was one of the few that blow the shofar slightly earlier than most). The Closing Service finished in a way I had not experienced in England: the congregation singing "Next Year in Jerusalem" with gusto. That short prayer had sustained Jewish hopes for two thousand years, but it did seem a bit whimsical coming out of the mouths of Israelis living an hour's bus ride away from the Holy City.

With the Closing service thus finishing a full 10 minutes before the astronomical end of Day itself, around half the congregation promptly left while an announcer notified them of the exact time that the Day, and the fast itself, terminated.

Not wishing to join the undignified mob beating their retreat, I waited several minutes and then walked out to the road to see the first moving car I had seen during the Day of Atonement. The 25 hour day still had two and a half minutes to run.

19-09-18

Yom Kippur sharply highlighted the Givat Shmuel community divide between the "dati'im" (the religious) and the "chilonim" (the secular). The differing aspirations of these two sectors of society is clearly a prominent issue for the upcoming mayoral elections, as there are posters in the streets for one party with a banner message "Supporting the needs of the chilonim".

There is a rather more disturbing advertising display along a stretch of road on the walk from my flat to Jessica's. A housing development is in its early stages of construction on one side of the road, and along its full length there are about half a dozen identical hoardings advertising the development. The advertisement features a happy family of father, mother and three children, two girls and a boy. On each hoarding, all female faces have been obliterated. I assume that this vandalism is an instance of religious fanaticism. To me it is very surprising as the Givat Shmuel community would be described as "modern Orthodox" rather than "ultra orthodox" – "knitted yarmulke" rather than "black hat". Perhaps, as John Cleese says in the Life of Brian, "there's always one, isn't there..".



Presumed religious extremism

Postscript: On my mentioning, a day later, the obliteration of female faces in the posters, my dinner companion opined that "That wouldn't be locals, that would be the Haredim (that is, ultra orthodox) from Bnei Brak". Incidentally, Bnei Brak is the neighbourhood I was referring to when I wrote, at the end of my first diary entry, "But for me it is an excellent position, because I can walk to Jessica, or there is a single bus to Jessica, and there is a single bus to Tel Aviv, and the bus doesn't pass through the area that would raise my hackles!"

22-09-18

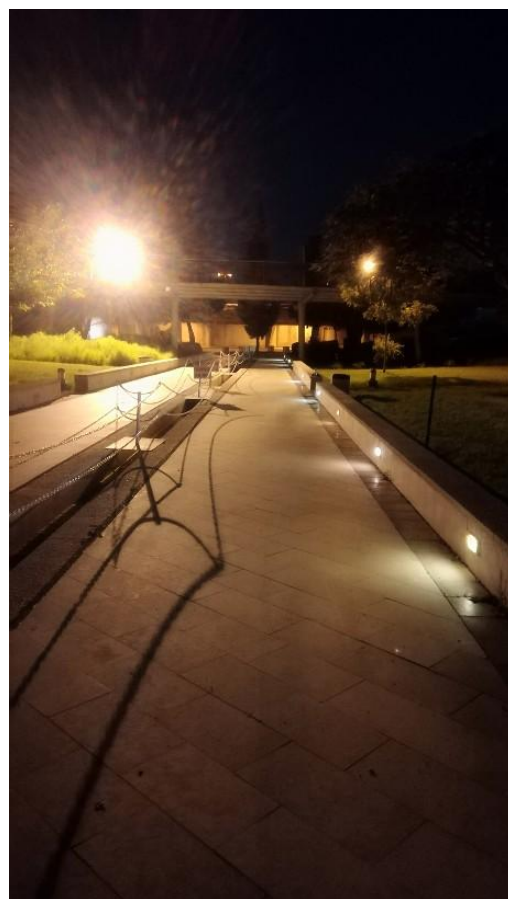
Last night again re-emphasised the urgency of further softening my bed. It took me till past 6 AM to fall asleep, and then only through reliance on over-the-counter sleep medication.

I had travelled some distance to a "Dreams" bed shop on the day before Yom Kippur, only to find it closed up, in contradiction to its advertised opening hours. This is a typical occurrence – pre-advertised or pre-notified opening hours are not adhered to. Shops are shut on Sabbath and festivals, and only open in the morning on the days before these, and that itself cannot be relied upon. It means that during the "Jewish Holidays" period, the country shuts down to a large extent. I must resume my quest on Tuesday.

But during my waking hours I started reading the book "Reuben Sachs", written in 1889, and learned about its author, Amy Levy, the first or second Jewess to study at Cambridge University, and a suicide at age 27.

22-09-18

The Bar Ilan University campus is a real amenity for me. I approached the main entrance at 9 PM after the end of Shabbat, expecting to be summarily turned away. But the guard waved me through when I showed my national identity card, and from then on I had only cats for company. In human terms, I had the campus to myself. I was seeking some well-lit, soft ground to attempt a few, faltering running strides. The temperature was still 27° and humidity 73%, but in my isolation I was able to run bare-topped without any fear of causing offence. And to stop running almost immediately with no need for embarrassment.



Bar Ilan campus grounds, with only cats for company



Immediately outside my apartment building



At the Givat Shmuel mall

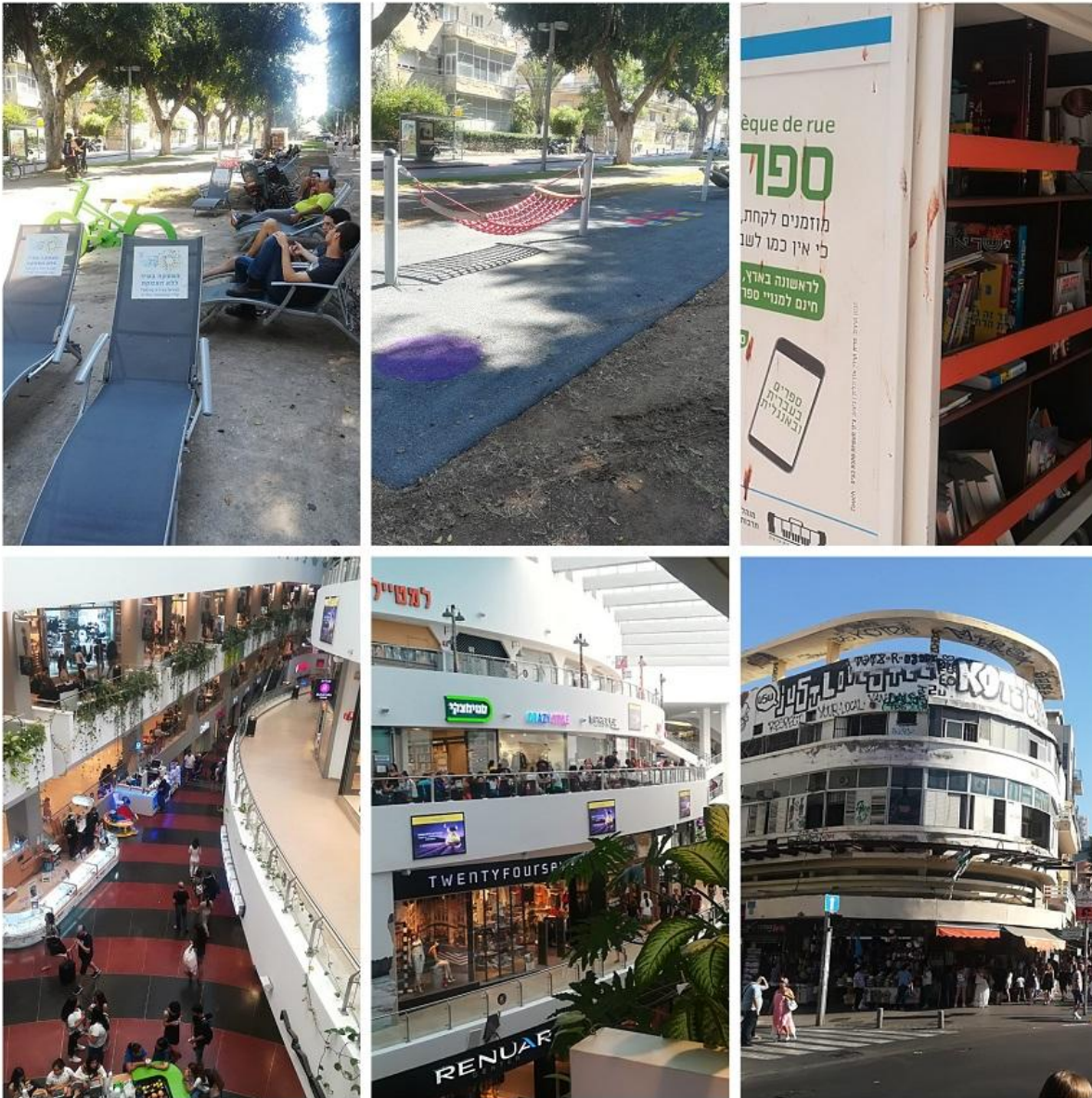
"You shall live in Tabernacles for seven days": Leviticus 23:42

25-09-18

The downside of the Jewish Holiday period in Israel – shops shut with no prior notification – caught me out today. Having started the day by hauling 5 kg of washing to the laundry down the street, I had to haul it back home again. A trip to two bedding shops in Bnei Brak established that one did not exist and the other was closed with no prior notification. At day's end, my purchases on the bedding front consisted of one single duvet, which, doubled up and used as a mattress topper, will hopefully result in a better night's sleep!

26-09-18

A very pleasant day! Sorted out electricity and gas payment issues in the morning, had a productive shopping trip to Tel Aviv in the afternoon, and a satisfying power walk in the evening.



Top: Rothschild Boulevard Tel Aviv invites you to sit down, lie back and read a book

Bottom: The screw-thread walkway of the Dizengoff Centre allows you to traverse the mall from bottom to top without taking the stairs or a lift. Out in the street we are enjoined to "Respect your local vandals".

01-10-18

Today is a milestone in a number of ways. Firstly, I have now been in Israel for exactly two months. Secondly, it is the start of the month in which I turn 67 and, as far as Israel is concerned, I become "kashish" - elderly. Thirdly, this evening brings to a close the period of the "Chagim", the Jewish Festivals, during which, to a significant extent, the country comes to a standstill.

To mark my coming of (old) age, the National Insurance Institute has sent me a raft of paper. Much of it comprises an application form for an old age pension. Thankfully, regardless of how little I may or may not qualify in terms of residence and contribution history, I certainly don't qualify in terms of need. So that is one application form that I can ignore.

The Institute also sent me a document listing the various counselling services available for the elderly. Amongst the categories of help was one for "Families employing foreign workers", and prominent in the Help topics was "Rights of foreign workers". In reality, the category largely refers to the Filipino carers that so many people here employ.

The popular travel vlogger Nas Daily has devoted several videos to the Philippines, including one expressing gratitude for the care services that Philippine nationals provide throughout the world. Certainly when one walks the streets of Tel Aviv one is made aware of this debt of gratitude owed to carers whose work means that many old people can continue living in their own home while not being trapped inside of it.

Regarding the country returning to normal functioning, it is a toss-up which is more of a relief to me: being able to make further progress on joining a language class, or being finally able to take my washing to the laundry!

2-10-18

I woke up this morning exactly at the conclusion of a running dream; not surprisingly, running features a lot of my dream life.

I finished the run more-or-less together with someone who does not exist in my "real" life; he seemed perhaps Scandinavian, a bit taller, stockier and younger than I am. As he finished he exclaimed, "We finished together – and in parallel!". It was a statement of pure camaraderie and encouragement. This was a person so happy in his own skin, and with such generous personality, that he could see that I lacked confidence and could do with a boost, and it was natural for him to give it.

When I am awake I often ask myself, "Why, when I can construct people in my dream life who are managerial, or extrovert, or self-confident or whatever, can I not switch on those qualities myself in real life?"

To anyone reading this: Thoughts? Do you experience the same or similar? By all means drop me a note.

2-10-18



A trip into Tel Aviv for a cheap and cheerful attempt to address the shortcomings of my sofas

04-10-18

It sweetens the pill when, after a blood test, you can walk out of the clinic and jump onto a bus going straight to Tel Aviv beach



Worthy of note: Bottom left: surrealist architecture in North Tel Aviv

Centre, top and bottom: memorial to Chaim Arlozorov, erected at the point where he was assassinated in 1933. Arlozorov negotiated the Ha'avara Agreement, about which Ken Livingstone has his rather controversial views.

Bottom right: Twenty years of Pride celebrated at the Tel Aviv Gay beach.

05-10-18

It took some persuasion on my part to gain entry to Bar Ilan at four o'clock this afternoon. But then I had the entire campus to myself.



Top: walkway leading to the Dahan Family Unity Park.

Middle (left and centre): Twelve Tribes Plaza

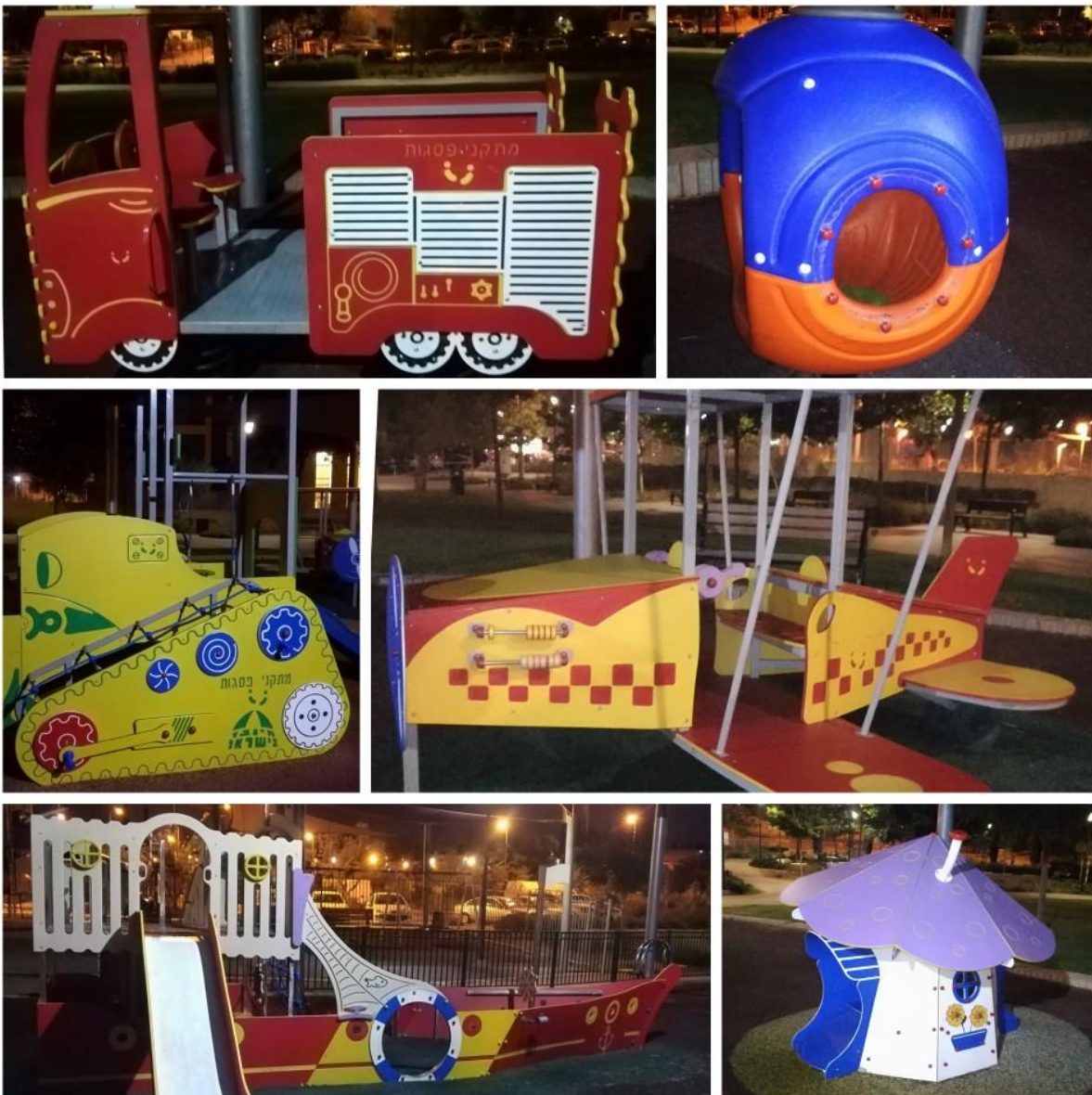
Bottom: at Dahan Family Unity Park: Left: the Hebrew visible in the picture reads, "A time to live, a time to forgive, a time to love, a time to give, a time to receive, a time to listen". Right: in the background behind an amphitheatre, four identical buildings, each devoted to an engineering discipline, each named in honour of a benefactor.

06-10-18

The day of rest can also be a day of stimulating the mind, and I began re-reading Pete O'Connor's visionary book "The Stars Beneath our Feet". It promises to be even more impressive second time around.

I also learned how the Babylonians, the Greeks and the Hindus obtained square roots! Three separate methods, and the Hindu method was quite ingenious. Wikipedia and YouTube are amazing resources. In recent days, I have also dipped my toes into Group Theory for the first time in 45 years. I don't know whether I will wade in beyond getting my ankles wet.

In the evening I ambled around the vicinity of my flat and found this amazing playground. Tzviya and Amit, fancy a test flight?



09-10-18



Just cats for company again at Dahan Family Unity Park

13-10-18

In the first half of last week I was diving into mathematics, partly prompted by being in the company of Group Theoreticians, and also by learning of an ex-colleague who was reading up about Linear Algebra. So it was a return to a pleasure ground of my youth that had turned into a battleground; an arena that once gave me a false sense of self-satisfaction but then implanted a false sense of inadequacy. The brief return to those pastures also reminded me how maths used to make me tense, and that I am now no longer able physically to run that tension off on the streets.

It was nice to absorb mathematics through the medium of YouTube videos watched on a bus or at the beach. But it was also refreshing to realise that I can let go and have no need to keep fighting the demons of forty five years ago.

On Thursday I went for the first time to the health clinic in Givat Shmuel; I was there for my flu shot and a lifetime pneumonia injection. The clinic was full, mainly of rather boisterous children and their mothers. As in previous encounters with the health care system, I found it very disorienting, with signage only in Hebrew. Rather than a receptionist at the entrance, there was a machine to allocate a number in the queue and for you to select the service that you required. It was only after struggling with the machine and its options that I found out that instead I needed to go to a different queue allocator elsewhere on the floor. As I sat down to wait my turn I saw opposite me an information display with three pockets, for three versions of the same booklet. This was "Know your Rights", and the versions were Hebrew, Russian and French. In my temporary feeling of alienation, I found that quite telling.

There is a kindergarten immediately behind my building. Now that the children have returned after the Jewish Festival season, I was finding that I was being woken up by the noise in the playground. So on Friday I decided to move into the unused bedroom at the far end of the flat. I spent much of the day making the room habitable, moving bedding and furniture and cleaning shelves and floor. I was returning to the "house proud" frame of mind of six weeks ago, one that had slipped away in the interim. I then found myself cleaning the floors elsewhere in the flat that I had been starting to neglect. The experience was a gentle reminder of how easily one can slip into a comfortable state of apathy and complacency.



At the Bar Ilan campus: A biblical quote I knew since schooldays, through reading the John Wyndham novella "Consider her Ways"

14-10-18

My Ulpan (language course) was due to start this evening in Tel Aviv, but two days ago I was notified that the start was postponed because the class was now inquorate; one of the participants had dropped out.

Nonetheless, I enjoyed a satisfying few hours in the city, following up an afternoon spell on the beach with an evening concert by the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, broadcast into Habima Square over closed-circuit television.



Then on return home I was notified that the class will start tomorrow!

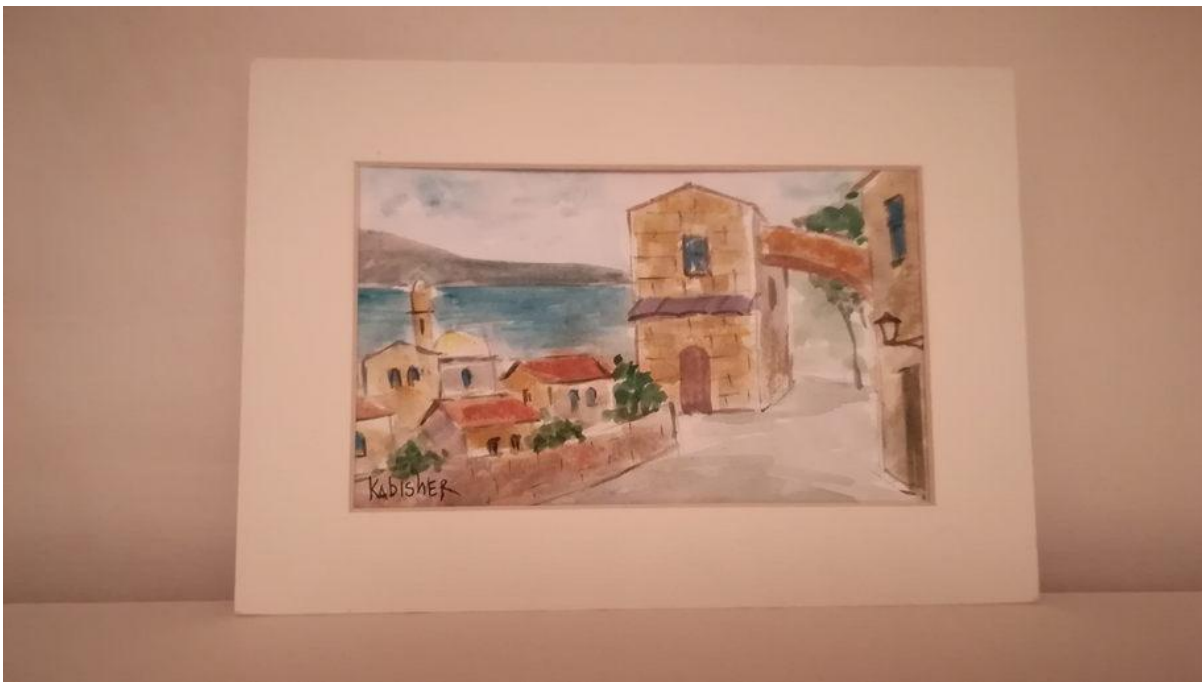
15-10-18

On my return home at night after my first Ulpan session, I was greeted by this beautiful neighbourhood stray with an expensive taste in cars



20-10-18

Climbing further up the hierarchy of needs in terms of transforming the flat into a home, I started thinking about artwork for the walls. There is a twice-weekly art market in an area of Tel Aviv called Nachlat Binyamin, so I went there on Tuesday and bought these from the artist



I had been keeping my eyes open for several weeks for a rug for what was, until a week ago, my bedroom; simply to reduce the assault on the senses by its ghastly floor tiles. They are of a design that is, unfortunately, ubiquitous in Israel, so I apologize to those Israeli readers who have it in their own flats. It is only my opinion!...

The only rug shops I had seen were filled with Persian rug designs more suited to my grandparents' tastes of a century ago. But on my way to pick up some cash for the art market, I found two shops next to each other that seemed more hopeful. After making my purchases in the market I returned. I spent several minutes pondering the offerings of the rug shop but left having only mentally bookmarked one

or two possibilities. I then popped next door to the cheap-and-cheerful shop, full of cheap bedding, cheap toys, cheap anything, but no rugs. But I thought: 20 shekels, that's four pounds, why not?



The floor remains a work in progress...

I also invested 10 shekels in a beach towel, and one can start to imagine the room as maybe a chill room, an exercise room, the possibilities are endless! As Arthur Daley would say, the world is my lobster!



And for the living room, a cheap-and-cheerful canvas print:



Election fever appears to be taking hold in Givat Shmuel,



but a recent opinion poll shows the two women mayoral candidates totalling less than 8% of the predicted vote. So Naomi Annie Feldman has an impressive poster,



but a predicted 0.7% share of the vote..



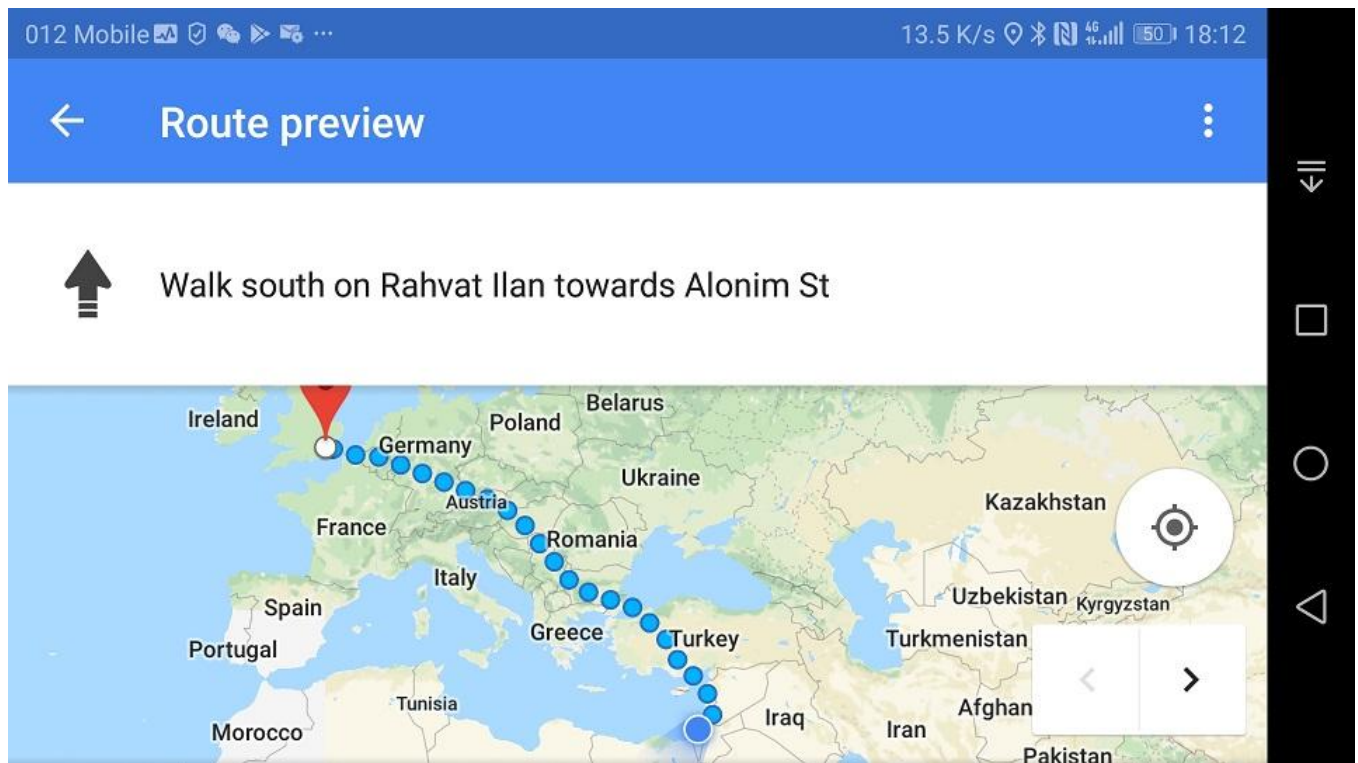
I have never abseiled in my life, so I can only be impressed by the Givat Shmuel playground that makes abseiling freely available to every child..



This playground, incidentally, is in the Ramon Park, named after Ilan Ramon, the first Israeli astronaut for NASA, who died in the fatal Columbia mission. Ramon was born locally and studied at Tel Aviv University.

20-10-18

It's always good to have a safety net. If I ever chuck it all in and want to go back to London, I should begin by walking south on Rahvat Ilan towards Alonim Street.



22-10-18

A number of people have written to me remarking in various ways on the difficulties that I described at the start of this diary. This crystallized in me a feeling that I needed to restore the balance with a prologue. You will find this prologue, not unexpectedly, at the start of this diary.

22-10-18

It is difficult to convey energy, noise and sheer spectacle on the printed page, but this was the view as I crossed a bridge walking to my Ulpan this evening.





Learning Hebrew is quite a challenge. I have been comfortable with Classical Hebrew since childhood, so the Hebrew alphabet is no problem. Also, Classical Hebrew has given me an understanding of verb conjugations and irregularities that some students of Modern Hebrew do not possess; in the same way that, perhaps, students of English as a foreign language possibly have learned a list of verb conjugations whereas we mother-tongue speakers, well, we just speak it!

The Hebrew alphabet consists of 22 letters, all of which are consonants. In Classical Hebrew, the vowels are denoted by dots and small shapes above or below the letters. But Modern Hebrew presents the new challenge that, in written or printed form, it leaves out all the vowels. So if one is not proficient in the language, reading it requires some guesswork.

I am in a class of four, and the other three students are young women, all of whom are probably in their 20s. It is a very friendly and supportive group, with an excellent teacher. We meet three times a week, from 8 PM to 9:45 PM.

The first part of each lesson involves no reading or writing; just listening, and answering, and repeating.

And repeating.

And repea. And ting.

And repeating.

An eavesdropper who was not aware of what was going on might think that it was a mind-control re-education programme out of George Orwell's 1984. But no, this is the Pimsleur Method. Perhaps it is modelled on the way an infant learns to speak, without inhibitions, at one or two years old. As such, I feel that my habitual state of mental and bodily tension is a barrier to my learning. So I feel I need to consciously relax, and for that part of the lesson, my eyes are shut and my arms and legs are extended. It has been a fact of my life, for almost all my life, that I have needed to be different, to be the odd man out, or, let's face it, to be odd, just to survive. So no change there.

Possibly to everyone's relief, I am on more familiar, more academic territory for the remainder of each session.

23-10-18

Back to Kabisher at the Tuesday Nachlat Binyamin art market, and back to my shop in Allenby Street, now selling everything with a further 30% off marked price.



In the evening, listening to the Israeli Nostalgia radio station, I was bemused to hear "Puff the Magic Dragon" in Hebrew!

24-10-18

Returning to the subject of Hebrew, I learned in the last few days that the Hebrew letter 'resh' has a different pronunciation from the English 'R'. I got some help on this from an unexpected source:

http://www.briansacks.com/Temp/Roy_practising_his_resh.mp3

27-10-18

At Thursday's Ulpan session I learned of Galgalatz, the most popular radio station in the country. I listened to it today and found that it broadcasts an excellent mix of Western and Israeli pop music. Despite my owning their Greatest Hits, Volumes 1 and 2, it was the first time I had ever heard Queen's "Love of my Life". Galgalatz is one of two Israeli army radio stations; it reminds me of the days of my early childhood, when radio programs would end with, "brought to you by the American Forces Network in Germany".

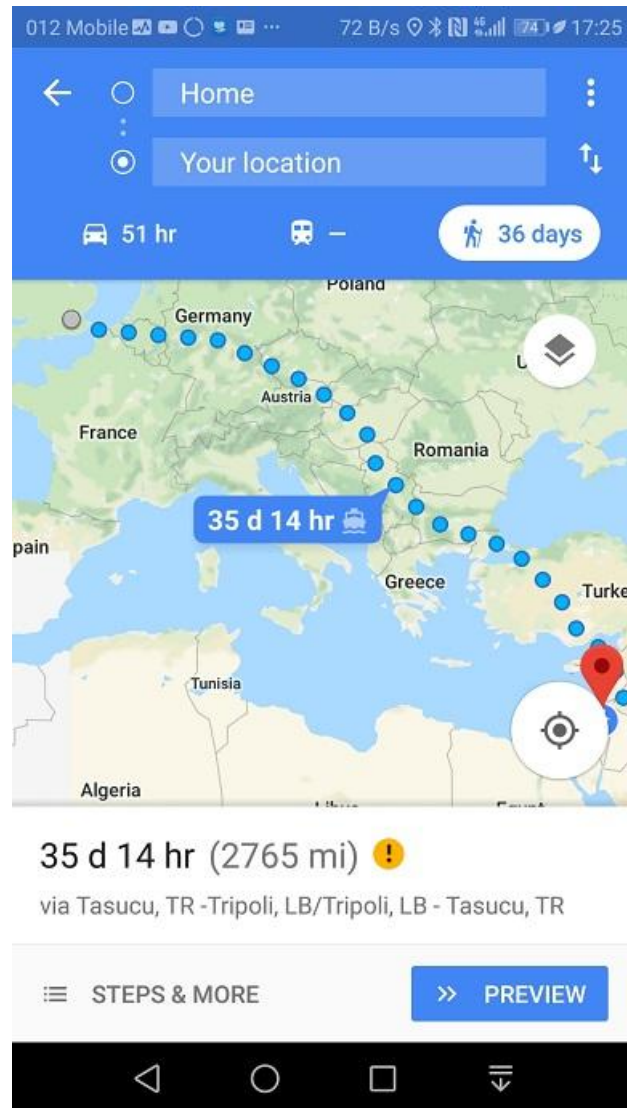
On Friday, Jessica, David and Tzviya threw a joint birthday party for Amit (one and a half) and myself (somewhat older); complete with a Sarah & Duck cake, and a dramatic print for my walls:



Exploring further this afternoon I found a wonderful outdoor gym, which one can reach by walking right through the Bar Ilan campus and then over the bridge to the other side of Route 4. This picture shows only some of the equipment:



Meanwhile my phone, unbidden, keeps dropping hints!

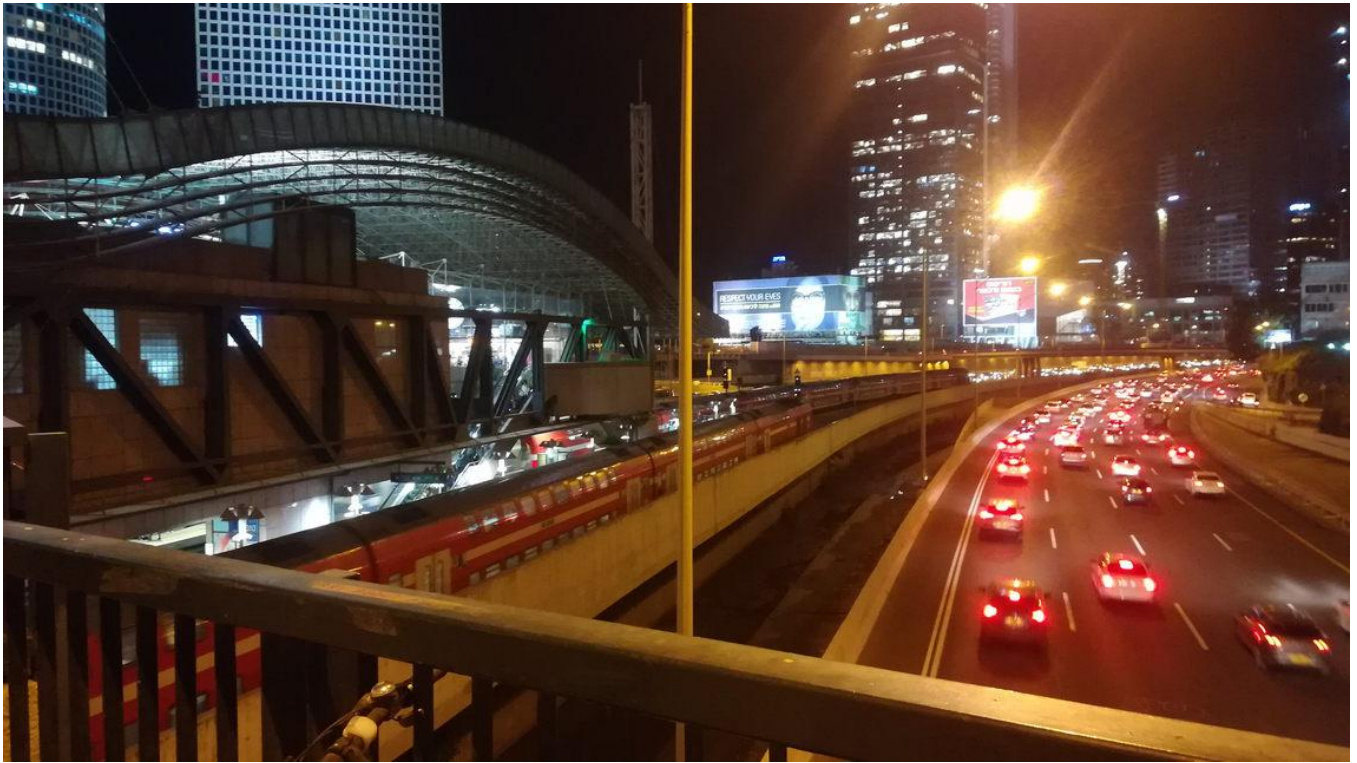


28-10-18

There are at least five different bus routes to Tel Aviv from where I live, and I take the first bus that comes along. So I am liable to get off at a different place and walk each time I travel to my Ulpan.

This was the view when I got off the bus tonight:





Turning to dramatic cityscapes on a different continent:

Google reverse image search adds information value to the canvas prints that I bought on Tuesday:

012 Mobile 0 K/s 16:12

Google Image Result for...
<https://www.google.com>

AliExpress

San Francisco skyline and Bay Bridge at sunset California mur...
 US\$26.80* · In stock · Brand: AliExpress.com

Cheap wallpaper mural art, Buy Quality mural paper directly from China wallpaper murals flowers Suppliers: San Francisco skyline and Bay Bridge at ...

* Check website for latest pricing and availability. Images may be subject to copyright. Find out more

012 Mobile 4 K/s 16:18

Google Image Result for...
<https://www.google.com>

USA Guided Tours NY

New York City Bus Tours | USA Guided Tours NY | Top Rated
 South Street Seaport

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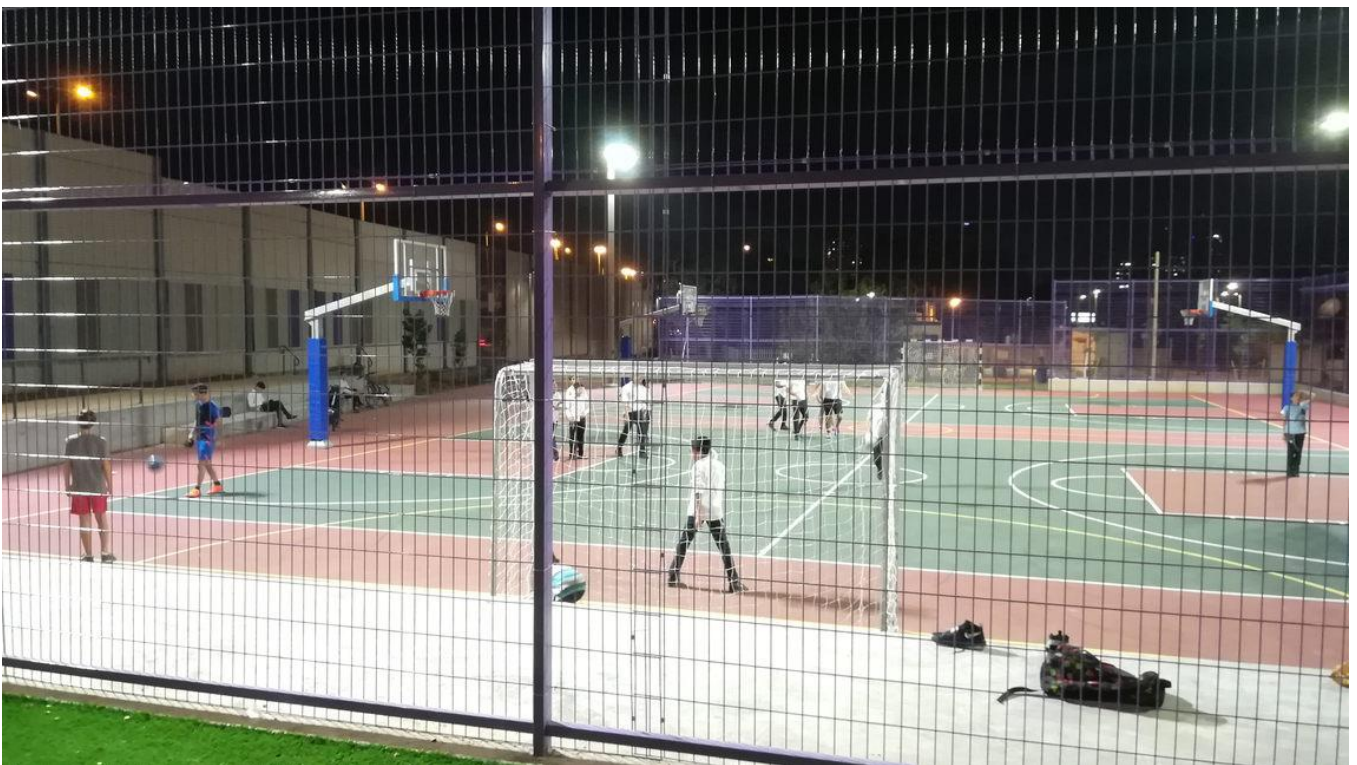
30-10-18

Today was municipal election day throughout the country. One of my fellow Ulpan students took this photo of the available electoral choices at her voting station in Tel Aviv: the yellow slips denote the four mayoral candidates, while each white slip represents a different political party aspiring for representation on the Council. So no shortage of options for the voter...



In the evening I walked through the Bar Ilan campus and across the bridge over Route 4, back to the open-air gym that I found on Saturday. It is clearly in an ultra-Orthodox neighbourhood, and it was surprising and satisfying to see, at eight o'clock in the evening, so many children and their parents working out and playing football:





Having lived in my rented flat for a full two months, it is clearly high time to let the Ministry of the Interior know my new address. As such, I have just spent another torrid hour playing the Israeli game of "Can you maintain the balance of your mind while negotiating the obstacle course of Israeli officialdom". Thankfully Lyn rang up just in time to prevent me being sucked into a black hole of frustration. And I have an appointment next Wednesday in which hopefully I will register my new address and also submit an application for my first Israeli passport.

01-11-18

Today's bus journey to Tel Aviv was a characteristically Israeli slice of life. The bus was massively overcrowded for the first few stops. After that it thinned out somewhat but then hit a police roadblock. We were stuck at a junction for some time, with passengers and bus driver alike getting noisily agitated. The bus driver then shouted his decision about the rerouting. A major hullabaloo broke out, with most of the passengers yelling out their frustrations in Hebrew, and the majority eventually walking out. All there was for me to do was to sit down, swallow a mental valium and hope for the best. The rest of the journey was punctuated by the driver yelling his announcement at regular intervals, that he was only going to the Central Bus Station.

Once I reached the bus station, and overcame the challenge of finding my way out of it, I walked through a rather seedy part of Tel Aviv to a significant event, the "NAS Daily" meet-up. Nas, full name Nuseir Yassin, is a Muslim Arab from a village in the north of Israel. Very self-motivated, he taught himself English, largely by sitting in his room and playing video games with English speakers across the internet. He learned that Harvard offered scholarships for those in financial need, and duly earned himself a Harvard place. From there he went into hi-tech, then chucked that in to make videos; one video per day, generally one minute long, each ending "That's one minute, see you tomorrow". The videos tell stories from his travels around the world, and are almost exclusively positive. Nas is now 935 days into his commitment of 1000 days, and he has just short of 10 million followers on Facebook.

By the time I got there, the hall, with capacity 450, was full and I needed to wait for one or two people to leave before I was allowed in. I found myself standing at the back, with Nas at the front responding to questions from the attendees. In the course of it he explained how difficult it was to make videos in Israel: "I have been to some of the most corrupt countries in the world: Egypt, North Korea, African countries where corruption is rife. But I can still find positive stories and make videos about them. But when I make a positive video set in Israel I am told that I am normalising relations with the oppressor, that I am spouting Hasbara, even that I am a Mossad agent!" He lamented the separation between the Jewish and Arab communities in Israel, whereby he did not have a single Jewish friend until he went to Harvard. He is a very impressive young man, walking a tightrope across the chasm between the Jewish and Palestinian communities.



With thanks to Norma Franklin, who found a place near the front!

02-11-18

New light was shed on two of the incidents I wrote about yesterday.

Those events exemplify what are probably the two most bitter divisions affecting Israeli society internally and externally: that between the ultra-Orthodox Haredim and the rest of Israeli society, and that between Israel and the Arab world.

Firstly, my son-in-law David told me that the roadblock I encountered on the bus was caused by the Haredim bringing Bnei Brak to a standstill with a protest because one of their number had been arrested for draft dodging.

Extremist haredi protesters to shut down Bnei Brak on Thursday

Yerushalmi Faction launches fresh wave of riots over yeshiva student arrested for draft dodging.

Contact Editor Tzvi Lev, 01/11/18 16:02



Yonatan Sindel/ Flash 90

Israel Police and haredim

The extremist Yerushalmi Faction (Jerusalem Faction) says that it will block roads in Bnei Brak in protest of a faction-affiliated yeshiva student that was arrested for draft dodging.



Secondly, Nas Daily's description of the reaction he receives to any video he makes in Israel was borne out with today's video, on a subject as apolitical as veganism. I post here a screengrab from Facebook, with the full meet-up complement from yesterday joining Nas in his customary sign-off "That's one minute, see you tomorrow!". On the right-hand side, Facebook is showing the most significant comments on the video. Of the 6.6K comments, a large proportion expressed a sentiment similar to the first one listed, which, as you will notice, has attracted 2.5 K 'likes' and seemingly no dislikes.

World's Vegan City!

Nas Daily

2.5M Views · 11 hours ago

Comments (6.6K)

Most Relevant

Laith Hammad It's spelled PALESTINE not Israel, was & still. 2.5K likes

Nas Daily Palestine is right next to Israel. 1.6K likes

David Sawyer 1 min video on Vegans and the chat turns to a political and religious argument. When are people going to grow up? 919 likes

Nas Daily I am guessing never but it's okay - I enjoy it too! 394 likes

David and Jessica hosted a "Partnership" Shabbat evening prayer service in their flat. This is a service in which a group of like-minded Modern Orthodox Jews try to extract every possible drop of gender equality from the rather rigid and dry body of Orthodox Jewish Law. Women have pride of place in the seating arrangements, and lead the less legally-contentious parts of the service. Attempting to take the viewpoint of an objective observer, it is gratifying for me to see that green shoots of religious innovation can sprout to counter ideas that have been fixed for two thousand years.

(Yes, I know I could extend the metaphor to more closely parallel the Parable of the Sower, but I wouldn't want to venture over stony ground)

I was bemused to note that every single male participant wore a knitted kipa (that is, yarmulke); this is clearly the uniform of the Modern Orthodox. But in contrast to the black-hatted sameness of the Ultra Orthodox male headgear, these kippot were each colourful and individual. Three of the youngsters wore "football supporter" kippot; the two that I could identify were for Paris St Germain - quite a telling hint towards the size of the relatively recent French "Aliya". When walking along the Tel Aviv beach and overhearing snippets of conversation one could sometimes think that one was in the South of France.

03-11-18

Trigger Alert:

Might offend religious sensibilities! But only intended as a bit of fun – though it might make you think...

On my walk back from the outdoor gym - still being well utilised late at night by Ultra Orthodox youngsters - I stopped to take this photograph. It is the reverse side of the road sign adjacent to my bus stop to Tel Aviv. I also post here Google's translation, which is self-explanatory, and represents a belief held by many thousands of people regarding Menachem Mendel Schneerson, who died in 1994.



While on the subject of the Messiah, it may be of interest to note his identity as named by the prophet Isaiah:

ישעיהו Chapter 45

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>א כה-אמר יהוה, למשיחו לכורש אשר-החזקתי בימינו לרד-לפניו גוים, ומתני מלכים, אפתח--לפתח לפניו דלתים, ושערים לא יסגרו.</p> <p>ב אני לפניך אלה, נהדורים אושר (אִישׁר); דלתות נחושה אִשְׁבֵר, ובריחי ברזל אִגְדַע.</p> <p>ג ונתתי לך אוצרות חֹשֶׁךְ, ומטמני מסתרים: למען תדע, כי-אני יהוה הקורא בשמך--אלהי ישראל.</p> <p>ד למען עבדי יַעֲקֹב, וישראל בחירי; נִאֲקֵרָא לך בשמך, אֲכַנֶּה וְלֹא יִדְעַתְנִי.</p> | <p>1 Thus saith the LORD to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him, and to loose the loins of kings; to open the doors before him, and that the gates may not be shut:</p> <p>2 I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the doors of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron;</p> <p>3 And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I am the LORD, who call thee by thy name, even the God of Israel.</p> <p>4 For the sake of Jacob My servant, and Israel Mine elect, I have called thee by thy name, I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known Me.</p> |
|--|--|

Oh! I almost forgot:

and by Andrew Marr [www.briansacks.com/Temp/Andrew Marr and the Messiah.mp4](http://www.briansacks.com/Temp/Andrew_Marr_and_the_Messiah.mp4)

05-11-18

There was impressive thunder and lightning last night, and now autumn is definitely here. Daytime has been grey and drizzly, though with the temperature still in the low twenties. Then it rained constantly throughout the evening and night.

People are sneezing and catching colds, not least playschool children and their parents. So I will need to be careful when I babysit tomorrow. I will definitely be in the hunt for winter clothes when, earlier in the day, I travel to Petach Tikva for my meeting with the Ministry of the Interior. (I had previously written that it was scheduled for Wednesday; I should have written Tuesday. The Hebrew for Tuesday is "Yom Shlishi", which translates to "Third Day". The Hebrew days of the week are named in this fashion, with the "First Day" being Sunday. The one departure from this pattern is Saturday, which is simply "Shabbat").

05-11-18

Is it that they believe that the House of Lords is a den of money launderers? Or is it more personal than that?

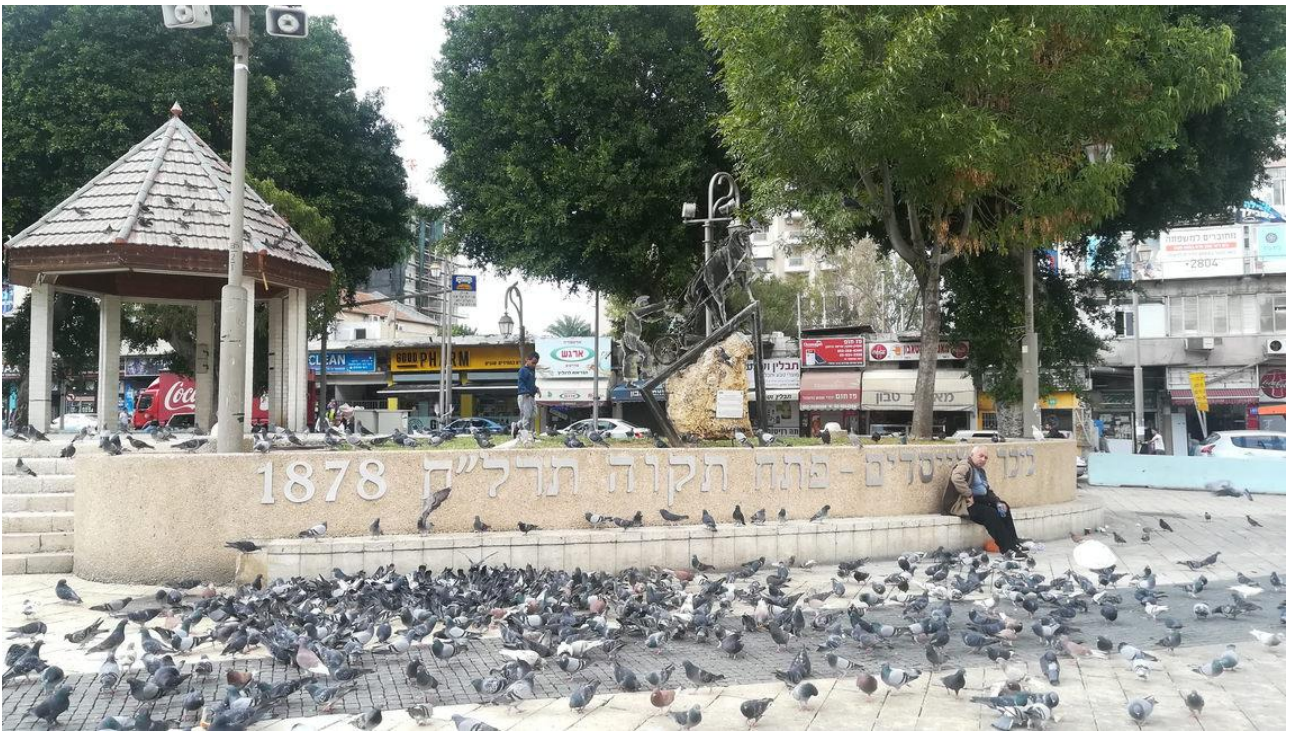
Those are questions that spring to mind as a result of something that happened today. I will reveal more in due course, when things are sorted out.

06-11-18

I took the bus to Petach Tikva, for my appointment to apply for my first Israeli passport. The bus stopped at Shuk Ironi; as Jeremy Corbyn has pointed out, this cannot be the Irony market, so I assume it must be the Iranian market. I did succeed in finding a sweatshirt to prepare for the colder weather to come.

Petach Tikva is the fifth largest city in Israel, and one of its founders was my great-grandfather, Aryeh Leib Frumkin. Quoting Wikipedia, "He emigrated to Eretz Yisrael during the First Aliyah in 1883. While there he founded the settlement of Petah Tikva in which he built the first house and helped to drain the malaria-ridden swamps. His planting of the first tree there is emblazoned on the seal of the municipality and there is a street named after him."





Only in Israel

As you walk out of the facilities at the office of the Ministry of the Interior, a poster displays for you the appropriate blessing for coming out of the toilet: "Blessed are You, Adonai, our God, King of the universe, Who formed man with wisdom and created within him many openings and many hollow spaces. It is obvious and known before Your Seat of Honour that if even one of them would be opened, or if even one of them would be sealed, it would be impossible to survive and to stand before You even for one hour. Blessed are You, Adonai, Who heals all flesh and acts wondrously."



07-11-18

Thanks to my brother Alan, I attended the Balfour Annual Dinner, commemorating 101 years since the signing of the Balfour Declaration and 70 years since the founding of the State of Israel. The main speakers were Natan Sharansky, who spent nine years in the Gulag before being freed to emigrate to Israel, where he has made a major impact in political life; and Roderick Balfour, great-great-nephew of Arthur James Balfour, who wrote the Declaration. Roderick Balfour spoke very movingly, and could not prevent his own tears from falling as he told of the final meeting between Chaim Weitzman and his great-great-uncle.

Alan also took the opportunity to pass onto me a suitcase he had brought containing some of my possessions from London. My living room is now enhanced with the Daniel Sacks Award Shields, my discus painted by four times Olympic gold medallist Al Oerter, and my Rolls Royce Silver Cloud.



09-11-18

To pick up on the questions that occurred to me on November 5 ("Is it that they believe that the House of Lords is a den of money launderers? Or is it more personal than that?"):

On October 31 I initiated a transfer of funds from my UK bank to my Israeli bank, to meet an apartment rental payment due in November. The following day, Transferwise, the company I was using for currency conversion and transfer, notified me that my documents had been accepted, my cash had been received, and the funds would be in my Israeli bank account on November 5. But when I checked on November 5, the funds had not been converted or transferred. I chased up the reason, and received this email:

Dear Brain,

Hope you are well!

In order to comply with the financial industry regulations we need to ask additional information from you. Due to your relation to Jonathan Henry Sacks, Member of the House of Lords, we're required to collect your source of wealth and the reason for your transfers.

Please reply back to my email with the following:

- 1) What is your source of wealth – i.e salary; sale of investments, property, company; inheritance etc
- 2) General transfer purpose – short description explaining how you will use TransferWise i.e.
 - Who will your recipients or the senders of transfers to you be and what will be the reason for payments?
 - What are the amounts you are looking to send and receive and what will be the main currency routes?

Thank you for your help with this. If no response in 2 working days, we will cancel and refund any amount we have received from you.

Best wishes,
Wairimu
TransferWise

The happy ending to this story is that finally, on November 9, I am told that the money has been transferred, to be in my Israeli account on November 12. Having made a trip to my bank branch a fortnight ago with evidence that the money has been legitimately earned, reported and taxed, I can only hope that I won't face further problems on the Israeli side next week.



While on the subject of legitimate earnings, reporting and taxing, I will make mention of a BBC Radio 4 programme that I listened to last week, which exposed benefit fraud in parts of the Stamford Hill Haredi (that is, Ultra Orthodox Jewish) Community.

The programme absolutely cut me. I really admire my niece-by-marriage Eve Sacks' fortitude in fighting the good fight against all that is wrong in the Haredi community, and in fighting to help people escape. Heaven forbid that anyone would associate me or any of my family with the practices of the Haredi community (or parts thereof) as alleged in the programme. Those practices cause anti-semitism and also let anti-semites off the hook, because any left-wing politician can shout "Israel is an apartheid state that has no right to exist" and then say "Of course I'm not an anti-Semite, I fight for the rights of the Stamford Hill Community".

I posted this on Facebook:

Now the Haredi community has made me so uncomfortable that I feel I have to lose all dignity and shout this out: For the record, both my parents earned the Defence Medal for

their National Service during World War II, and they taught us above all to be honest citizens.

I am totally opposed to the beliefs and practices of the Haredi community.

10-11-18

As life settles down into more of a routine, what can I say about this Israeli weekend, Friday and Shabbat? Just that it is a joy to spend Friday evening with Jessica, David, Tzviya and Amit; and invigorating to spend an hour at the outdoor gym on Saturday evening, working out under floodlight with the ultra orthodox, keeping in time with the beat of the music pounding into my ears.

11-11-18

I have ordered an oil-filled heater, to keep me warm and virus-free at night. It has cost more than twice the equivalent price in the UK. Food and manufactured goods are expensive in Israel, not helped by the relative weakness of the pound. But there are financial swings and roundabouts in play. My phone contract costs 30 shekels a month, just over six pounds, and includes 50 GB of data. Using my phone as a Wi-Fi hotspot means that I have no need for any additional internet service. Also, up to this point, the solar boiler has provided all my hot water. But approaching winter means that this cannot continue, and a workman is coming on Tuesday to repair the electric boiler timer clock.

13-11-18

460 rockets and mortar shells have fallen in southern Israel in 25 hours – by far the heaviest ever bombardment by Hamas. I saw a video of a continuous minute of this onslaught and it resembled a New Year firework display, one rocket straight after another, with the regular boom of the interception by the Iron Dome missile defence system. Yet, if I hadn't been in touch with the news, I would not have known anything about it. Life continues undisturbed here in central Israel, for now. But it does jolt me into a keener awareness that I should ask about the safe shelter in this building.

Facebook is of course full of argument about it all. But it is upsetting that there is such acrimony in threads even where all the contributors are on the same side.



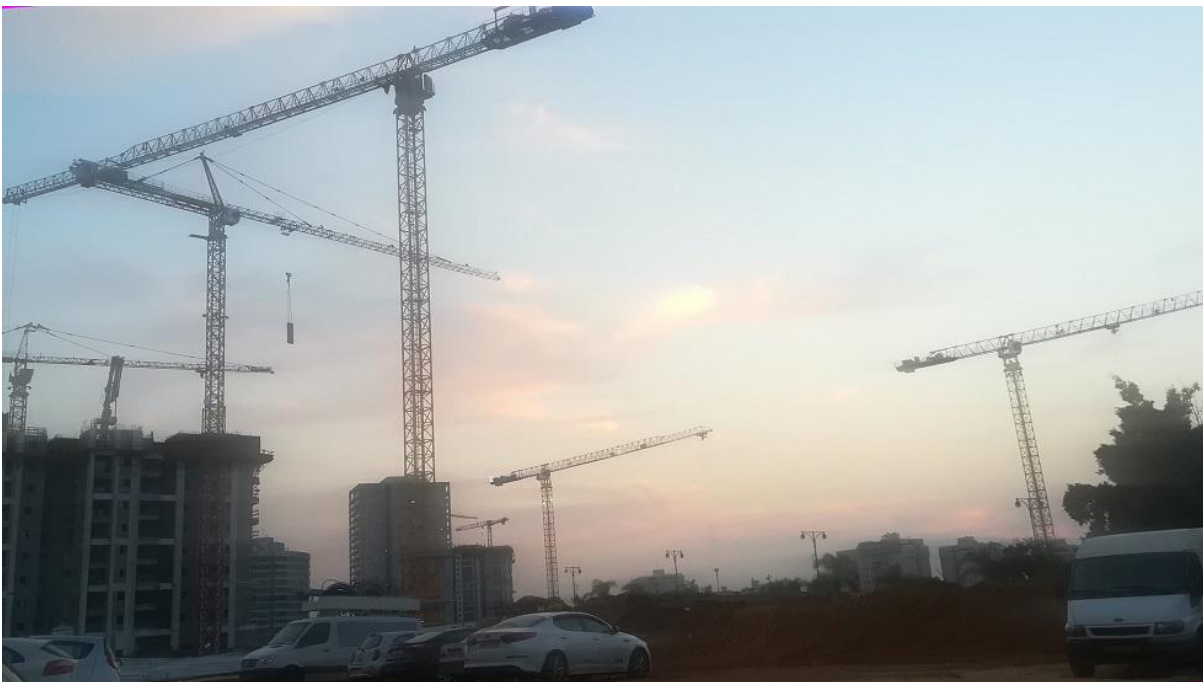
In learning Hebrew, one difficulty I have been encountering is a consequence of written Modern Hebrew not including vowels. It means that many words and verb forms which are uniquely specified when written with vowels in Classical Hebrew, become ambiguous and by no means unique when the vowels are removed. Modern Hebrew compensates for this by tossing in extra "filler" letters. The equivalent in English would be to toss in 'tt' instead of 't' and 'll' instead of 'l'. This rubs up against my sense of Classical Hebrew purity, but I need to swallow this sentiment and recognise that if I don't go with the Modern Hebrew flow, then people will simply think that I can't spell. Of course, a rather more major problem is that – and Mrs Google told me this – it takes a knowledge of 10,000 words to be proficient in any language; and I find trying to fix words in my brain at this age is like trying to play darts on a dartboard made of solid steel.

A third difficulty occurred to me just today, as I finished a three-hour stint of babysitting (Tzviya and Amit were delightful, they made it very easy). I was relieved in my duties by Efrat, who speaks only in Hebrew. Tzviya started jabbering away to her in Hebrew even though Jessica and David only speak English at home. So Tzviya has picked up Hebrew really quickly just from playgroup. As she was speaking I recognised that children learn to speak in simple, short, direct sentences. By

contrast, I think in long, convoluted sentences, which I try to translate, and fail. So, for example, I could write the preceding 270 words. Tzviya would simply say, "You are not good at speaking Hebrew". And she would have hit the nail on the head.



On the walk back from Amit's playgroup: the topiary still looking good in mid-November....



.. while directly across the road, most of land between David and Jessica's flat and my flat is being built upon; the nearside to become apartments, while all the land across the road is part of the Bar Ilan campus.

14-11-18

I woke up with a day's plan of a dual-purpose trip to Petach Tikva: combining a visit to the Ministry of Absorption with a trip to collect my suitcase which had been damaged in flight and had now been repaired courtesy of El Al. Those two aims quickly became three because I was rung up by the Ministry of the Interior and was asked to come to their office as there was a problem with my passport application. Conveniently, the two government offices were close to each other, in the Shuk Ironi area, a sort of grubby and downmarket Petticoat Lane combined with massive food market.

I have remarked previously that my Health Clinic offered its "Know your Rights" leaflet in three languages: Hebrew, French and Russian. The Ministry of Absorption went one better, offering its annual calendar in Hebrew, French, Russian and Amharic. But again, as confirmed by my enquiry with the reception, there was no English version.

It might be better to gloss over the fine details of my visit to the Ministry of the Interior and simply say that next time, I would be better advised to have more sleep the night before. Once I finally secured a numbered place in the queue, I was helpfully handed a slip of paper which, when translated, said that the average wait time was two hours. So I made my trip to reclaim my suitcase and returned to await my number coming up.



No English here

The problem with my passport application was, it seems, my fingerprints. The images that they had taken when I applied for the passport last week were unsatisfactory. This time, all six fingerprints (the two main fingers plus thumb on each hand) were taken several times, and then two people pored over the images for considerable time before I was told "that's it".

One of the items on my Shuk Ironi shopping list was an apron. I found it in the "One shekel" shop - a campaign goodie from a municipal presidential election in Central Mexico!



18-11-18

I spent the weekend in Jerusalem, taking up a long-standing invitation by my younger brothers Alan and Eliot. On this occasion, I enjoyed the excellent hospitality of Judith and Alan.

As I travelled into Jerusalem on Thursday evening, the results of the city mayoral election were just in. It was an extremely close contest. From the point of view of an intelligent and moderate voter, the wrong candidate won. Alan told me that he had been in a two-hour meeting with the new mayor, and came out with the assessment that he had no coherent vision for Jerusalem as a city for all its inhabitants. I reflected that if even a very small proportion of the residents of East Jerusalem had voted, rather than boycotting the election, they could have secured a victory for a candidate who would be rather more concerned about improving conditions in their part of the city.



Brian, Dan and Matar's older sister Ori

Friday was another troubling day politically. After Avigdor Lieberman's resignation as Defence Minister on Wednesday, the Jewish Home party left the government, leaving it with a precarious majority of 1. The mass desertions from the government were in protest against Benjamin Netanyahu's acceptance of a ceasefire agreement with Hamas. Netanyahu stated that his decision was on the basis of knowledge that he could not share with the public; it is presumed that this was that Iran would transform the conflict into one in which Israel confronted both Hamas, with its 20,000 rockets, in the South, and Hezbollah, with its 120,000 missiles, in the North. Both of these terrorist organisations are controlled by Iran: Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon and Syria. Meanwhile, the day's headline is shown in the screenprint alongside. And in other news on Friday: the United Nations passed nine resolutions targetting Israel, and none targetting any other country.

On Friday morning I joined family and friends in celebrating the birth and naming of Tehilla's and Dan's daughter Matar. Matar is now the eighth grandchild of Dan's parents Judith and Alan. Matar means rain, which is considered a blessing in Israel, especially in the Negev Desert that constitutes 50% of the land mass. Rain does not often conjure up the same feelings of hope in England!

THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

Hamas Gaza chief to Israel: Don't test us again, next barrage will hit Tel Aviv

By TOI STAFF





A walk around Jerusalem on a cool and damp Friday morning: All buildings in Jerusalem are, by law, covered in Jerusalem Stone. "Bring and Take" communal book cupboards are common throughout Israel.

21-11-18

Having virtually not slept at all, I decided to utilise my state of wakefulness at 8 AM by taking myself to the Health Clinic for another blood test to see whether I am still anaemic. Walking through the Bar Ilan campus under hazy blue skies and with no one else around, I was struck again by its beauty.



At the Health Clinic, again, two identical stands each urged their customers to know their rights – so long as they are Hebrew, French or Russian speakers.



No English here – again

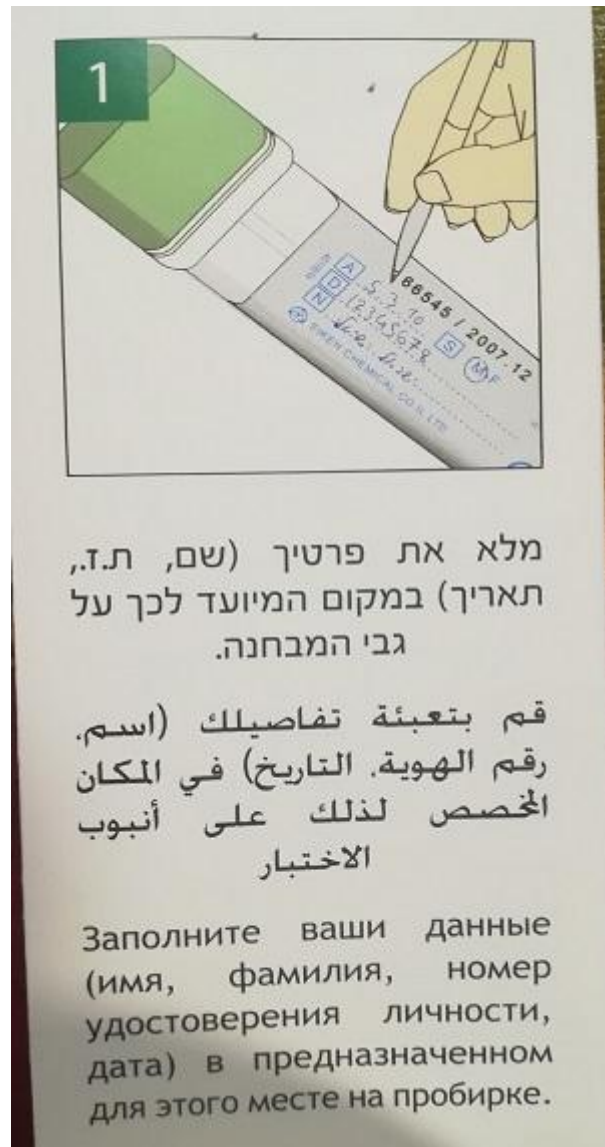
I returned to the flat to find that there was no working electricity at all. Luckily, the landlady sorted for an electrician to come fairly promptly. He has diagnosed a faulty box that controls the electricity supply to the flat, and he's going to get hold of a replacement. The problem seemingly also involves faulty connections and problems in the supply by the electricity company. But as the electrician just speaks Hebrew, I can only nod, partly pretend that I understand, and partly admit that I don't. It's a bit like being back in a maths supervision at Cambridge (a.k.a tutorial anywhere else).

Now reporting minute by minute in real-time: partly assisted by Google translate on my phone, he has told me that he has replaced the faulty box, and is returning to working just a few doors away in the same road; the electricity company should restore the electricity in a couple of hours, and he will look in after that, also checking on a light fitting which independently had been giving me an awful lot of trouble. Or as Lyn has been telling her friends, "Brian is living in the house that Jack built!"



As the electrician had stated, the electricity did come back on in a couple of hours, and he returned to fix the dodgy light fitting. On a less upbeat note, a couple of hours after that, I negotiated the Health Provider website for my blood test results, and my anaemia is no better.

Now that a diagnosis of anaemia has been confirmed, I can no longer escape confronting a test pack that I was given three months ago. On opening the envelope, I see that, this time, the instruction leaflet is printed in Hebrew, Arabic and Russian. Being of a somewhat squeamish disposition, I did not really enjoy making sense of the instructions.



This diary keeps me cheerful. I am no Phil Collins or Woody Allen; I can't turn a disappointment into a song or a movie. But at least it will give me something to write about!

22-11-18

Tel Aviv is a very young, vibrant and crowded city. Its streets are full of young people zooming around on bicycles (both pedal-powered and electric) and motorised stand-up scooters. But very few of those vehicles are on the road; almost all of them are on the pavements. I have always felt that it is only a matter of time until someone rides into me. Several times a day somebody will speed by on the pavement within inches of me. But today I had possibly my nearest miss, or at least the one that startled me the most. As I stepped off the bus in Tel Aviv to attend my Ulpan language course, a cyclist stormed by, overtaking the bus on the inside.

As I say, Tel Aviv is a young city. But also a city that has its dangers for the not-so-young.

23-11-18

[Lightning over Tel Aviv early morning 23-11-18](#)

23-11-18

If one spent any time listening to Israeli radio this week one would be struck by two things:

1. there is no "a"-as-in-"cat" sound in Hebrew
2. how bizarre it is that advertisers think that there is something persuasive in a voice that sounds as if it belongs to a crazed lunatic dosed up on amphetamines.

And you would certainly know that today is Blek Friday!

25-11-18

Another walk to the Health Centre in Old Givat Shmuel, again enjoying the early morning beauty of the Bar Ilan campus under blue skies. The roundabout separating the Clinic from the Town Hall a few yards away has this rather pleasing statue in its centre.



The buses of Tel Aviv are self-evidently several decades old, with corresponding deficiencies in suspension and smoothness of ride. And their drivers seem habitually to be acting out a fantasy of racing in Formula 1. Also, my route home from language class seems to diverge particularly sharply from uniform motion in a straight line. Having suffered from a queasy stomach all day, I was more than usually sensitive to the excesses of three-dimensional relative motion I experience on that ride: being tossed up and down as the bus charges over ramps occasioned by the constantly-changing building work going on; lunging forward and back as the driver stamps his foot on the accelerator or brake; and being thrown centrifugally as he races around a corner.

27-11-18

I enjoyed a splendid afternoon with Tzviya and Amit: picnic lunch and much playing in the park, and a bag of Bamba. A friend saw us and enthused, "Bamba, that's the best Israeli invention. It's the reason why no Israeli children have peanut allergies." And yes, a Google search of "Bamba peanut allergy" shows the fair degree of truth lying behind that claim. The snack is 50% peanuts, and almost all Israeli children eat it from as soon as they can take solid food. In other words, Israel has gone completely against Western thinking on peanuts, and the result is that peanut allergy is almost unheard of in Israel. Bamba might even find a useful place in my diet: plenty of protein, vitamins and iron.

In the evening I went to a showing of the award-winning cult film "Zero Motivation", which was followed by a Q&A with one of its stars, Nelly Tagar. It was a very enjoyable event, taking place in a new-to-me Tel Aviv language school. But as I looked around the audience of a hundred or so, I realised that again I was more than twice the age of almost every person there.

28-11-18

Taking advantage of both insomnia and a favourable weather forecast, I decided to enjoy a day of sunshine at Bograshov beach in Tel Aviv prior to doing a bit of walking and shopping at sunset.



At the top of the beach is this poignant memorial. The inscription reads: About 120,000 illegal Jewish immigrants reached the land of Israel by breaking through the British blockade. 2800 of them died on their way.



Looking northwards along Tel Aviv beach and promenade



A zany mix of styles on the promenade and seafront road



The Hassan Bek Mosque, surrounded by traffic, close to the boundary between Tel Aviv and Jaffa. The Mosque was built in 1916, and in the 1980s it was substantially enlarged and the minaret was rebuilt at twice its original height. Its architecture presents a sharp contrast from the high-rise hotels nearby.

02-12-18

The start of December represents two milestones in this new stage of my life: four months in Israel and three months in my rented flat. Also, after 20 sessions at Level 4 on our Hebrew course, we have moved onto Level 5.

Tonight was the first night of Chanukah, the Festival of Light, and for the first time I lit the candles with Jessica, David, Tzviya and Amit. Facebook has also reminded me of a topical post from eight years ago, in which I wrote of a debt that Judaism owes to yet another ruler of an empire (see my earlier post of November 3)

On a different note: If I were an athletics coach in Israel, I would make use of everyday experiences here to illustrate points in racing tactics:

To not ease up until you have crossed the finishing line: Just as if you were running for a bus where, no matter that the driver is aware that you are sprinting wildly, no matter that you are just one metre short of the door, he will not wait a split-second before driving off

To always visualise the race as continuing for twenty metres past the finish: Just as if you were on one of the buses that doesn't have a "stop" button; in which the bus will certainly sail past your stop until you and your fellow passengers have yelled loudly and continuously enough to rouse him from his reverie.



Brian Sacks

1 Dec 2010 at 09:06 · 🌐

As you read this (for next little while) it is Chanukah in New Zealand, but not yet in Jerusalem. So which great Rabbi fixed the Jewish Calendar in this way? Let us honour the great Rabbi Charles ben Charles (also known as King Charles II), who commissioned the Greenwich Royal Observatory in 1675, granting New Zealand, at around 175 degrees east of Greenwich, the distinction of seeing in Chanukah before Jerusalem.

03-12-18

Back to Kiryat Ono, where I started in August, for a doctor's appointment in the Maccabi clinic in the Mall. As in Givat Shmuel, this clinic also runs a Rights Lottery. Today's winners, now entitled to know their Rights at Maccabi Healthcare are: speakers of Russian and Amharic!

To me it is reminiscent of the Eurovision Song Contest, and Grand Bretagne's habitual 'nul points'.

Meanwhile, across the road, Maccabi have their own pharmacy, equally hospitable to non-Hebrew speakers. On entry one has to make a selection for a place in one's appropriate queue – see alongside. The top button translates as "Regular queue". The bottom button could mean "To the queue without orthopaedic prescription" or it could mean "Do not queue without orthopaedic prescription"; the Hebrew word "אל" can mean "to" or "do not", depending on its vowel. And the vowel is not shown.

Leaving that minor detail aside, the newcomer is left to wonder whether there is perhaps an orthopaedic practice attached to the pharmacy, or whether "orthopaedic prescription" is synonymous with "doctor's prescription" in Israel.

Anyway, one thing I learned during the course of the day was that one of the most useful sentences you can learn in Hebrew is something along the lines of the following:

רק כי כשהתחלתי לדבר בעברית לא הצלחתי להבין את הטלטלה של הפיצוץ בעברית בתגובה אלי לא אומר שאתה יכול לפעול כאילו אני פגום נפשית

It means: "Just because when I started to speak in Hebrew I couldn't understand the torrent of Hebrew blasted back at me in response doesn't mean that you can act as if I'm mentally defective".

And counterbalancing all of the above, my family doctor is probably the best that I have ever had, with excellent people skills, even for people such as myself. Well worth the trip to Kiryat Ono Mall.

And in the Mall, Chabad were lighting Chanukah candles and handing out doughnuts! It was almost enough to make me become a believer in their Messiah (see entry of November 3).

At the Ulpan - the Hebrew Language class - we finished the session with a "pick a card and answer the question in Hebrew" game on the theme of Chanukah. The traditional children's game for the festival is the dreidel, the spinning top of the Don McLean song:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N8wWsnCWFsQ>



One of my fellow students picked a card on the theme of the dreidel, and her question was "Talk about something you have done, or will do, that has spun your life around". Her answer was simply moving from Slovakia to Israel last year.

Two generations back, most of her family had been killed in the Holocaust. She grew up being told to always keep it a secret that she was Jewish. To not let anyone know of her involvement in Jewish communal life. That when she was asked why she was wearing her best clothes, she should answer "I am going to church" or "I am going to the theatre". As she grew she decided that when she was an adult she would not live this way.

That is why last year she left behind all her family and friends to move to a country where she knew no one. And her reason for moving was not economic, not religious, not Zionist. It was simply that she was not prepared to live a double life any more.

06-12-18

Yesterday was a frustrating day. I waited in for the delivery of a radiator: "It will come between 2 PM and 6 PM. You will be rung by the driver half an hour before he arrives." Well, no phone call, no delivery. Having worked my way through an automated customer support line that Kafka would have been proud to have designed, the automated message at the end of it was: "Our support agents are available between 8 AM and 6 PM. Goodbye!" - all of the preceding in Hebrew of course. So I turned to the online system and left two detailed messages. Each resulted in an immediate text message providing a link to my online status. Sure enough, my online status was "delivered".

So this morning I chased it up again via the Kafka-esque Customer Service line. I was eventually told that it will be delivered today. A further phone call linked me to the relevant branch manager, who told me, "We had a problem with the truck yesterday."

Anyway, after every Shabbat or festival meal, observant Jews sing Psalm 126, which has the line, "Turn things around for us, Lord, like flash floods in the desert!" Well, sure enough, there are flash floods in the streets outside my window today, with accompanying thunder, lightning and a monsoon downpour – and I have a new radiator!



The view out of my window today towards Tel Aviv

08-12-18

35mm of rain yesterday made it a perfect day for staying in and working on the ninth annual Daniel Sacks Awards. With the downpour reduced to a mere 10mm today, I was able to go for my usual Saturday evening workout, having a newly and naturally washed outdoor gym completely to myself.



A giant Chanukah candelabra atop a faculty building casts its light over Tel Aviv-bound traffic passing under Bar Ilan Bridge

09-12-18

Living in the suburbs in Givat Shmuel rather than in the big city of Tel Aviv, I am lucky that, to walk anywhere involving crossing a road, I generally do not have to suffer extended waits at junctions for the green light for pedestrians. However, it does mean that on my walks I am crossing the Israeli equivalent of zebra crossings at frequent intervals. It has often seemed to me that my presence on a crossing has an effect on oncoming motorists akin to that of a red rag to a bull, or a dangling hand to a shoal of piranha. But it occurred to me today that the difference between England and Israel in this matter is not just one of driver attitude (or, perhaps, how he gets his kicks). In England there are flashing beacons at a zebra crossing to alert the motorist ahead of time, and, perhaps, to make the subliminal suggestion that the authorities would prefer him not to mow down a pedestrian at that point. In Israel, there is no similar warning to the motorist, and I infer that the message to the pedestrian is "Are you feeling lucky today?"

Update after further observation: In many, but by no means all, instances, there are road signs warning motorists of a pedestrian crossing ahead. There are no flashing, or otherwise lit, beacons, nor traffic lights to control a crossing that isn't part of a junction already controlled by lights.

10-12-18

Yesterday in language class we were asked to write about someone who had especially influenced us in life. It set me thinking. I recognised that some of the people who have had the greatest influence in my life have, by virtue of their exhortations and the example they set, induced me to move in precisely the opposite direction to the one that they intended. Also, some of the incidents that have had the most influence on my life were instances of pressure or fear of failure. Pressure to deliver a lesson of a Jewish nature led me, twenty years ago, to obtain and work through a lecture on the British Mandate in Palestine, and that led me to a much deeper and more passionate appreciation of Zionism. The best piece of work that I ever did in my professional career was a direct result of overhearing someone saying "They are setting Brian up as the project scapegoat".

But moving on to positive influences: When I was about 17, my brother said to me, "Before you say something, think whether it is constructive or destructive. If it is constructive, say it. If it is destructive, don't say it." I have tried to stay true to that formula.

When I was young, part of my religious education led me to learn parts of the Five Books of Moses, and I was impressed by verses, written 3000 years ago, such as Deuteronomy 22:8:

When you build a new house, then you shall make a parapet for your roof; that you bring not blood upon your house, if any man should fall from there.

Leviticus 23:22

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corner of your field, neither shall you gather the gleaning of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor, and for the stranger: I am the Lord your God.

Later in life my religious knowledge became more eclectic, and to quote just two influential verses out of many that I could from the New Testament:

Matthew 7:3

Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?

Mark 2:27

Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath".

And I owe a debt of gratitude to the Buddhist monk Ajahn Brahm for teaching me how to let go and forgive.

I have been my own man. There have been, and are, wonderful, good people in my life. I just hope that a little bit of their influence has rubbed off on me.

11-12-18

I spent this afternoon in the park with Tzviya, and took this photograph:



It captures the character of the "new" part of Givat Shmuel: high-rise apartment blocks, ever increasing in number, and a central park with excellent play facilities for young children. The one thing missing from the picture is the modern, pedestrianised shopping mall area, specifically geared towards luring children into emotionally blackmailing their parents into buying.

Jessica wrote this description: "Take Hampstead Garden Suburb. Make it high-rise. Pave over all gardens leaving only ruler-straight flower-beds policed by maintenance companies who are charged with pulling out all flowers before they finish flowering and replacing them with new ones. Then remove all traces of quaint, hippy influence, history and environmental consciousness. Substitute Hebrew for all other languages but French. Right - that's Givat Shmuel".

But, by way of defence, I would point out that Givat Shmuel is catering for a very significant population increase each year, and also that it provides an environment where young children are free to play, unsupervised, unrestricted, and safe.

12-12-18

Another Givat Shmuel – the part that I live in, with Bar Ilan University across the road. I took these two photographs today from the same spot:



The block that I am living in is one of the ones on the left of the top photo, on the right of the bottom photo. To quote [Passenger](#), "a little bit faded, a little bit jaded". But, for at least the next eight months, home!

I read recently, "You can't be a true Tel Avivian unless you love dogs". That was illustrated for me today by this canine refreshment stand that I saw at the Dizengoff Centre.

Another incident today gave me further warning of the dire consequences of coming between a Tel Avivian and his dog. I was at a bus stop, looking up to check that my desired bus stopped there, and someone shouted at me, "Don't look up, look down! There is a dog here!" Yes, there was a miniscule dog – and there I was, daring to look up and endanger the life of that defenceless creature.





It seems that however often I go to the Dizengoff Centre, it becomes no easier for me to find my way around. I suppose it doesn't help that, at any given time, one's current floor number is not simply a positive integer, but a real number (possibly irrational) in the range zero to three.

17-12-18

Recently I seem to have been rewarded with fine weather each time a Health Clinic appointment has induced me to be up and out of the flat early in the morning. Today, rather than taking the bus, I walked to the Kiryat Ono clinic, along roads that I had never traversed before. Clear blue skies and relatively traffic-free, tree-lined roads can gladden the heart even ahead of a less-than-sweet morning at the clinic. I should point out that this round of tests speaks of the thoroughness of the Israeli health system rather than of any deterioration in my own personal health.

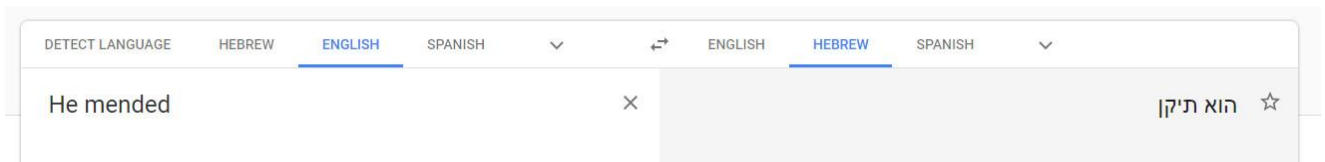
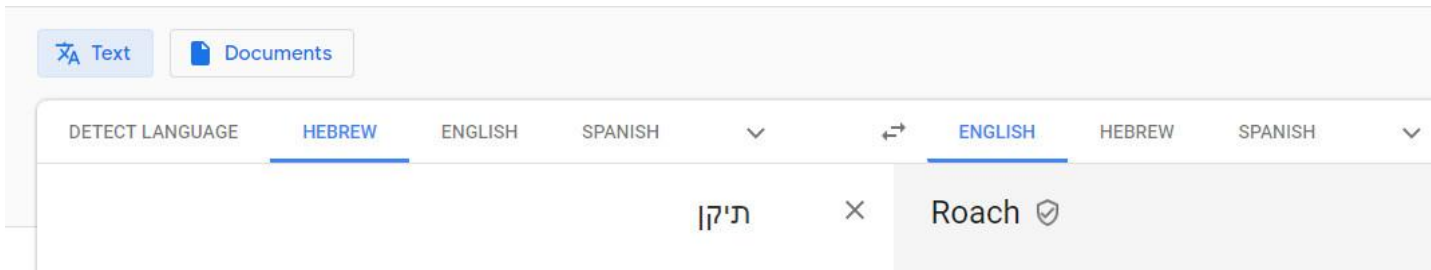


19-12-18

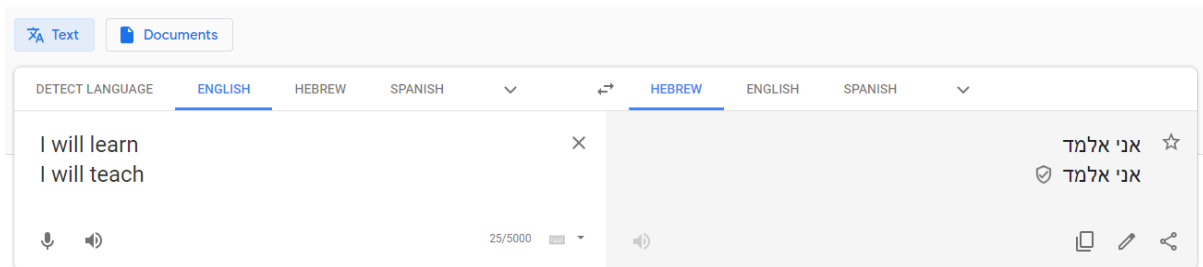
The Joys of Hebrew

Inbox HebrewPod101 Word of the Day - 12/15/2018 - HebrewPod101.com Your Hebrew word of the day is: תיקן...

The other day I saw the header for my daily "Word of the Day" email and thought to myself "I know this – Tikan - that's a cockroach!" Then I clicked on the message and saw "Tiken" – "he mended". Both words sounding different from each other but having the same consonants, and so the same written spelling. Or as illustrated by Google Translate:



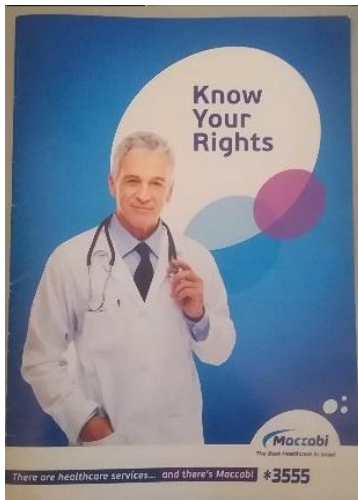
Another example of the consequences of written Hebrew not having vowels is that "I will learn" and "I will teach" are written exactly the same:



All of this brings home to me how amazing is a young child's brain. Israeli children initially read with vowels included, but from third grade, or age 7 to 8, they are reading without vowels, taking in their stride all the resulting ambiguities. By this time they will have picked up a vocabulary in excess of 10,000 words. Oh to have the brain of a four-year-old!

20-12-18

Persistence, in the form of a letter to the Deputy Medical Director of Maccabi, has paid off, and I now have the English Language version of "Know your Rights". I was somewhat bemused, however, by the notice on the last page, which I invite you to read for yourself.



24-12-18

A Christian friend of mine asked me what impact Christmas was making here. So far, I have seen nothing at all.

But Christmas had its impact on me, growing up and today. During my childhood, not necessarily on Christmas Day but within a few days of it, my mother would make a Christmas pudding, full of currants and Golden Syrup. My brothers and I would re-watch "Help" or "Hard Day's Night" on TV and suffer my father's exhortations to re-watch "Mary Poppins".

Skipping over a little more than half a century to today: From my point of view it is coincidental, but over the last two evenings I have watched two movies from 1941, both with a strongly Christian theme: "Meet John Doe", and "How Green was my Valley". I would recommend both; each can be currently found in good quality on YouTube.

The Christian theme running through "Meet John Doe" was how the world could be transformed if we all made an effort to befriend and watch out for our next door neighbours, and how we might find that that cranky, crusty neighbour was actually a fragile but pleasant person.

"How Green was my Valley" is a story told by a man looking back on his childhood in the late 19th century. It is a portrait of a Welsh mining village community, in which life was essentially transcribed by the family, the church and the coal mine. As a man, you had work, a meagre livelihood, and a reason to get out of bed if you had a job that day at the coal face. And that was dependent on the whims of the mine owner.

Christianity, for better and for worse, was portrayed through the eyes of the village preacher: the hypocrisy of his parishioners, going to church on a Sunday to earn brownie points for the afterlife, and merciless in casting out the "sinner"; and his thoughts on prayer, told to the story narrator in his boyhood: "And by prayer, I don't mean shouting, mumbling, and wallowing like a hog in religious sentiment. Prayer is only another name for good, clean, direct thinking. When you pray, think. Think well what you're saying. Make your thoughts into things that are solid. In that way, your prayer will have strength, and that strength will become a part of you, body, mind, and spirit".

It is sobering for me to think that if I had been born a century earlier, in a valley in Wales, then instead of receiving an education and earning my living through my mental talents such as they are, I might be coughing out my lungs and shortening my life down a coal mine. And across time and across place and across upbringing, human spirit is the same.

In the last few days I watched another video on a not-too-dissimilar theme. Again, it may or may not be coincidence that it was published at this time of year:

<http://rabbisacks.org/rabbi-sacks-home-build-together/>

One slight adjustment to the opening sentence of this diary entry: as we left this evening, our language teacher wished us "Happy Christmas!"

25-12-18



Spending the afternoon with Tzviya, enjoying blue skies and warm sunshine in the park, streets and malls of Givat Shmuel, I did not see a single indication that December 25 was anything other than a normal weekday. But I did collect one gift at the post office today, from the State of Israel itself...



26-12-18

At 10 o'clock this morning a loud siren of alternating pitch began to sound outside. It took me some moments to weigh up the possibilities in my mind. I knew that Israel had carried out a raid on Iranian installations in Syria overnight, angering Russia in the process. So I thought that the siren could well be a warning of an imminent attack. As against that, looking out of the window, I could only see one person in the street, and he did not seem to be exhibiting any signs of panic.

I prepared to leave the flat and seek shelter in the safe room on the ground floor – a room with a huge iron door that I have only ever seen locked with a forbidding padlock. But then the siren ceased, I rang my daughter, and she told me that it was a test that "people in the know" were aware of in advance. That had not included me. There had been no notification in my letter box, I don't have a TV or listen to Israeli radio, and my Hebrew is too weak to actually learn anything from those sources anyway.

I was glad that I was in no way panicked by the event, realising that even if it was a real attack, my chances of coming to grief were significantly smaller than my chances of being run over by an electric scooter on a typical walk on the streets of Tel Aviv. But the event does reinforce an awareness of my need to learn more about the safe room, and to try to obtain a key for its padlock.



Moving on from the risks of Tel Aviv to its rewards, as I walked to a restaurant in Habima Square this evening, I felt that I had to stop and take this photo:



31-12-18

Continuing with the theme of the rewards of Israeli life:

The vista as I stepped off the bus yesterday to attend a wedding in Tel Aviv:



and the walk through Bar Ilan to the Health Centre this morning...

while at the Health Centre, it seems that my letter to the Deputy Medical Director has paid off!



31-12-18

Last day of 2018, and the completion of five months in Israel: a suitable time to take some stock.

Two significant aims in coming to Israel were to become more of a part of my grandchildren's lives, and to put myself in a learning environment, with a specific objective of learning Hebrew. So these five months have been advancing those aims. The Hebrew lessons are sometimes frustrating, such as when the incomplete understanding of a text message results in one attending an appointment on the right day but the wrong month, or visiting the wrong post office to pick up a package. Both of these have happened to me within the last week.

I came here with three suitcases, whose contents have now been augmented by basic purchases of a few plates, a microwave and a vacuum cleaner, and other necessities and niceties as already written about in this diary. I have no car or dishwasher or washing machine, nor even the use of a launderette - I am limited to handing over my washing to the laundry service in the local shopping centre and coming back a day or two later to pick it up. So I am certainly living a more basic, student-like lifestyle in comparison to life in London, but this, of course, is part-and-parcel of the adventure.

I was asked what do I most miss that is available in London and not here. Some of the things that stand out are:

- streets that are not strewn with thrown out washing machines and the cardboard and polythene packaging of replacement washing machines. Dog mess is also fractionally less prevalent on the streets of London
- supermarkets with straight-line aisles more than thirty centimetres wide, and supermarket checkouts that do not involve endless waits due to product codes not scanning, combined with the effects of Murphy's Law
- the cinemas and shows in London, and the ease of obtaining tickets to attend them.

I have not yet integrated into a community at large here. Certainly an objective adviser to a sixty-something-year-old single Englishman would probably suggest that he live in a community such as Netanya or Ra'anana, where, again it is suggested, he might find others of a similar age and background. However, the aforesaid objective adviser probably would not realise what an atypical Englishman he has on his hands in the person of Brian Sacks! All things considered, I am in an excellent location here, less than fifteen minutes' walk from Jessica, David, Tzviya and Amit, and with excellent transport links to Tel Aviv. I have been maintaining good telephone and written contact with friends in England, and delight in spending half an hour or an hour a day talking to and seeing Lyn on WhatsApp.

Wishing us all a Happy and Successful 2019!

06-01-19

I can see that I will be writing in this diary less frequently this year, as I gradually become more accustomed to Israeli life. But I am sure that there will continue to be happenings that frustrate, delight, surprise and shock.

It took the fierce winds of Storm Norma for it to really register with me that there are orange trees outside of my building. Today the windfalls were plentiful.



15-01-19

Tel Aviv can be cold, windy and very wet during the winter, but then there are days like today..





19-01-19

Yesterday, for the first time, I walked to Tel Aviv and back – just under 10 miles altogether. The event at Tel Aviv was a Friday night meal for 'Olim' - immigrants. My table comprised three South Americans, two South Africans, a married couple hailing from Greece and Austria respectively, and myself.

Much of the dinner table conversation revolved around the Israeli manner and way of life – non-existence of customer service, directness and lack of politeness, living day-to-day and in debt, and the like. Should we accept it and 'go native', or should we try to change it?

One lady explained that she had been taught that in Israel one doesn't signal if one wishes to change lanes while driving. One simply changes lanes, aggressively and without notification other than the blaring of one's horn. She also told that the back of her car had been driven into while she was stopped at a traffic light, and there was no telling the offending driver that it was not wrong to have stopped at the stop signal.

As for me, in this new year, I do need to become more accepting of the Israeli manner. It is a young country that has been threatened by war for its entire existence. National service is mandatory and gruelling. More than half the Jews in the country originate from Arab or African countries, they or their parents having come as refugees. And this is why my diary entries are becoming less frequent. It is no longer desirable for me, or interesting for anyone else, to relate more instances of poor service at shops or at the bank. It is better instead to go with the flow, learn the language and find pleasure in family, friends, the pleasant climate and the beauty of the country.

01-02-19

I have been in Israel for exactly six months!

Notable happenings in the last few weeks have been: having nineteen tooth x-rays taken one after the other at my first dental appointment in Israel; presenting the ninth annual Daniel Sacks Awards for Outstanding Young Athletic Achievements via Skype-link to London; and choosing last Wednesday to make a beach-and-shopping trip to Tel Aviv.

Unbeknown to me until it was too late to change course, Tel Aviv was gridlocked that day. Hundreds of Ethiopian Israelis were protesting against police and institutional racism, and much of the centre of the city was cordoned off to road traffic. The protest was sparked by an Ethiopian Israeli having been shot dead by a police officer earlier in the month. The police state that the victim was shot as he charged towards the officer with a knife.

I jumped off my bus as soon as I could see that it could make no further progress at beyond a snail's pace. I walked the rest of the way to the coast to a deafening accompaniment of car horns. As I walked I tried to analyse what role the car horn exactly plays in the psyche of the typical Israeli driver. I first thought that he was principally using it as an instrument to express road rage, but then realised that Israelis, shown in survey after survey to be some of the happiest people on the planet, cannot spend their entire time behind the wheel in a state of rage. So it is presumably closer to the truth to state that Israelis love to blast their horns as a form of greeting, or sometimes to express mild irritation, or to indicate direction or lane change as would be signalled, in any other Western country, by the use of direction indicator lights.

As I walked down Arlozorov Street I noticed, in the distance along a side street, a white painted building shaped with dramatic Art Deco curves. I walked up and found that it was even more stunning at close quarters. This was the Hechal Yehuda Synagogue.



Hechal Yehuda Synagogue as seen from Ben Saruk Street



Gates of the Hechal Yehuda Synagogue

The front of the building was too imposing, in relation to the limited size of its courtyard, to capture with a single photograph. Instead I took a video, which I have placed [here](#).

When I finally reached the coast, the sunset made the lengthy, noisy walk to reach it worthwhile.



15-02-19

The last fortnight began with a pleasing renewal of my acquaintance with the famous athlete David Bedford. The chain of coincidences leading to this began with another David, namely David Stone, winning the Under-17 South of England cross-country title. David is the son of my long-time friend and neighbour Sheldon, and his victory means that he is now the reigning Under-17 cross-country champion for both the South of England and All England.

In talking to Sheldon after the race, David Bedford's name came up. Leaving out some of the links in the chain, suffice it to say that Sheldon passed to David Bedford a Jewish Folk Tale that I had written. I think it is fair to assume that my Jewish folk tale is unique in having David Bedford as a central character. Anyway, I'm pleased to say that this one-time world record holder enjoyed the story, and as such I have incorporated it into my website [here](#).

I also carried out another exercise in keeping my website skills fresh, by publishing the pictures from last month's Daniel Sacks Awards presentation [here](#).

I lost the best part of a week suffering a heavy cold. It seems that one is as susceptible to winter infections in Israel as one is in England, seeing as flats are built to dissipate heat in summer rather than to retain heat in winter. Freed by my infection of any guilt for not doing something more productive, I watched a few youtube films, and particularly enjoyed Tiger Bay and the performance by 12-year-old Hayley Mills. Once over my cold, I joined friends for my first cinema visit since arriving in Israel. We saw "The Green Book" and I highly recommend it.

22-02-19

The Na-Nachers (the followers of Rabbi Nachman) made a valiant attempt to liven up a damp, grey Wednesday afternoon at the Shuk Ironi market, Petach Tikva. With music blasting out from the loudspeakers mounted on their car roof, they made brief attempts at their trademark dance, which consists of bouncing up and down like band members of "Madness" (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ny2s9TIG0Us>). But I did not see anyone else joining in.

And the car was certainly striking, plastered over with their trademark graffiti (Na, Nach, Nachma, Nachman) and, this a new one for me, the multicoloured "Granddad, the King". The poster in the back passenger window proclaims "King Messiah, Rabbi Nachman". So this is a different Messiah from my 03-11-18 entry. I am reminded of the line in Dire Straits' "Industrial Disease": "Two men say they're Jesus, one of them must be wrong".



A rather more gentle song is pumped into the air each Friday afternoon where I live, with words "Welcome, Sabbath Angels; come in peace, bless me in peace, go in peace". I recorded a snippet this afternoon as the sun was setting over Tel Aviv to usher in a day of rest:

http://www.briansacks.com/assets/Bar_Ilan_Street_shalom_aleichem.mp3

For a more distinct and beautiful version of this song of welcome to the Sabbath, click [here](#) . Or if you prefer a stronger beat and a touch of the oriental, click [here](#) .

02-03-19

I, and I suspect many Israelis, am not sad to see the back of the month of February. While England has been enjoying unseasonably balmy weather, it has been cold and wet in Tel Aviv. For the last week I have been fighting, without success, a cold/sore throat that just does not seem to want to clear up. I would guess that my anaemia is part of the problem, together with the newcomer's lack of built-up immunity to Israeli bugs. It does not help that there is no such thing as central heating, or wall insulation, or double glazing in Israel, and most certainly not in my flat.

I'm also finding the seasonality of certain foods a problem. I am not a meat-eater, and the only frozen fish I seem to be able to buy at the moment is so unpalatable that I need to drown it in soy sauce and then wash the taste away with a glass of Diet Sprite afterwards.

On a brighter note: Jessica, David, Tzviya, Amit and Givat Shmuel are featured in this video produced by Focolare, an Italian Catholic Organisation: [The Holy Land: Stories of Dialogue](#). I suspect that this video location is temporary, so if I am informed that the link no longer works, I will upload the video into my own web space and make it available that way.

14-03-19

Having spent a number of weeks with a cold that waxed and waned between being a real annoyance and merely being an irritant:

In my lower moments, I started thinking about my level of existence over the last several months: somewhat hand-to-mouth, with only basic cutlery and crockery, no washing machine, no dishwasher, no car; and, most keenly felt in recent times, very inadequate means of keeping my living area heated.

I am a great fan of spartan living. If one makes friends with spartan living, one need never be trapped in one's current situation, and one has freedom of choice in how to change that situation. But I can only be really comfortable with spartan living for a limited time. I have started to feel that it is time to trade away some of my rootlessness. As I have written previously, there are several new apartment blocks being built between where I live now and where Jessica, David, Tzviya and Amit live. They have intended completion dates ranging between one and three years' time. There has been a lot of related advertising material posted through my letterbox.

I am tempted.

15-03-19

At yesterday's Hebrew language class, the focus changed. It was the 61st session out of 64. The previous 60 sessions comprised Levels 4, 5 and 6, each level consisting of 20 sessions. The final four sessions will be preparation towards a Ministry of Education exam taking place in early April.

The session was also exceptional in quite a different way. Halfway through it, the air raid sirens sounded continuously in the street for a period of minutes. The course tutor gradually realised that we needed to take refuge in the designated air-raid shelter. She also realised that she did not know where that shelter was. Being a late-night class, there was nobody else in the building to ask.

Anyway, as we dithered in the classroom, a boom was heard, a shockwave felt, and the sirens stopped. It was the first time since 2014 that rockets had been fired from Gaza towards Tel Aviv.

The joys of Hebrew continued

When trying to make sense of articles in newspapers, I have found myself sometimes making the basic mistake of thinking that a word begins with its first letter. It has then dawned on me that in fact the first letter of the word that I'm trying to decipher is a prefix, and the basic word that I need to translate begins with the second letter.

If you ever see a book that contains Hebrew together with its English translation, you will note that the Hebrew is much more compact than the English. This is because a word in Hebrew often translates to three words in English, as the Hebrew word may include a prefix and a suffix which each themselves correspond to a word in English. As I was walking in the street a few days ago I

did a mental count and found that of the 22 Hebrew letters, a full 11 of them have meanings as prefixes. Here is a tabulation:

Hebrew Letter	Meaning as prefix
א	I (in future tense of a verb)
ב	in
ה	the
ו	and
י	He (in future tense of a verb)
כ	Like, as
ל	to
מ	from
נ	We (in future tense of a verb)
ש	that
ת	You / she (in future tense of a verb)

19-03-19

A friend, who states that he recently emerged from a three-year depression, asked me whether I suffered from depression in a similar way. I replied no. I described how my state of mind diverged from being perennially equable, but pointed out how different that was from depression as he described it.

However, yesterday I was definitely in a subdued mood; partly because of my sleep being foreshortened and disrupted by the need to get up early for a meeting, and partly because that meeting represented a significant decision point in my life.

Then, in the evening, there was a Purim party in my Hebrew Learning Centre, but no one I knew turned up until an hour late – and I'm not too comfortable in parties where I know nobody.

In the evening (I use that word figuratively; to be exact, at around four o'clock in the morning) youTube prompted me to watch a couple of video interviews of Brian May (I have been in a Queen mood – at least according to youTube – since seeing the film *Bohemian Rhapsody* a little over two weeks ago). And Brian May talked about depression in those interviews.

So depression and life-changing decisions were definitely sitting in my mental space when I finally went to sleep. And during the night I was reminded of what depression is for me, and how I deal with it. For me, depression is associated with lack of sleep and with those decision points in life that used to bring me migraines; thankfully I have grown out of the migraines. And I deal with it by sleeping and by dreaming my way out of it.

In the academic year 1982-3 I was studying for an MSc in Computer Science, and the post-exam period of mid-June to the end of September was to be devoted to a major project. As I was entering the last ten days of July I still hadn't decided between two suggested projects, and was walking the streets giving myself a migraine trying to choose. Then one night I literally dreamed my project.

"She said, 'Why don't we both just sleep on it tonight, and I believe that in the morning you'll begin to see the light', and then she kissed me and I realized she probably was right, there must be fifty ways to leave your lover". Thus wrote Paul Simon in a totally different context.

I slept late today, and feel all the better for it.



Purim party at La-Inyan Learning Centre, with fellow students Orli and Erica, and tutor Eden

21-03-19

I enjoyed an evening of cultural diversity at David and Jessica's Purim meal. I was talking to a Christian who is over here from America for four years, studying for a Ph.D. at Bar Ilan University. The subject of his thesis is in the domain of the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek (the Septuagint) and subsequently from Greek into English. His specific focus is the Construct state – see https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Construct_state. He gave as an example the phrase translated into English as "the God of my righteousness". The Classical Hebrew Construct state leaves the relationship between "God", "me" and "righteousness" as ambiguous and open to interpretation. Apparently, a Ph.D. can be built around investigating such biblical instances and how they have been translated or mis-translated.

Meanwhile, his wife told me that she was fully occupied with looking after their four children, aged between three months and four years. They are being raised quadri-lingual, to speak English, Hebrew, Ghanaian African (from the father) and Korean (from the mother).

Today's Hebrew oddity: a message left by a neighbour on the building WhatsApp group used the word שתינו, which I translated as "we drank" when trying to decipher the message. And that is a correct translation. However, it left me mystified as to the meaning of the message. Google Translate, being rather more intelligent than I am, correctly translated the word as "the two of us". The fact is, there are two different words for "the two of us", depending on whether "us" are male or

female. If "us" are female, the word also means "we drank". If "us" are male, the word also means "we repeated".

Benny Hill could have a field day.

01-04-19

In recent days I have been working through test papers for the Hebrew exam that I will take this Sunday; and this is certainly an instance where you can have too much of a good thing.

However, it has had the positive spin-off of taking my mind off of worries (as hinted at in my entry of March 19) and the news which seems equally depressing in both Israel and the UK.

Also, it has been a learning experience, because my Hebrew Language class has concentrated totally on speaking and vocabulary, with virtually no writing or grammar. Working through the test papers has been resetting the balance. Our class teacher has been apologizing that the level of the exam is far above the level of our sessions; but what will be will be.

In terms of available marks, the most significant part of the exam is a short essay. The test papers mark out fifteen lines for the written answer, so I am guessing that 120 words will suffice. I wrote out today an answer to the test question: What is Israel in your eyes? What is special about Israelis? My answers, in English and in Hebrew, are here (the answer is brief and limited in scope and the English is quite trite, but I have to restrict myself to vocabulary that I can translate into Hebrew under exam conditions):

In my eyes, Israel is the vision of Theodore Herzl as a home and a refuge for any Jew from anywhere in the world.

Israel is parks filled with the sounds of children playing and elderly people being wheeled in wheelchairs.

Israel is cafés full of enthusiastic young people; Israel is people walking their dogs or riding their bicycles on the pavement, all the while talking on their telephone.

Israel is streets filled with the sights and sounds of new buildings being constructed.

Israel is the small country, the Start-up Nation, that sent a spaceship to the moon.

What is special about Israelis? They do not lack self-confidence; it doesn't matter if a person with a different opinion is their boss or is a subject expert, they know that they themselves are right. They will push in front of you in the queue at a bus stop or the bank; but they will always help you if they see that you need help.

3000 years ago Moses said: I have set before you life and death, the blessing and curse; therefore choose life.

What is Israel in my eyes? Israel is life.

בעיני, ישראל היא החזון של תיאודור הרצל כבית ומקלט לכל יהודי מכל מקום בעולם.

ישראל היא פארקים מלאים בילדים משחקים וקשישים בכסאות גלגלים.

ישראל היא בתי קפה מלאים צעירים מאושרים, ישראל היא אנשים אשר צועדים עם כלביהם או רוכבים על אופניים במדרכה תוך כדי שיחת טלפון

ישראל היא רחובות מלאים במראות ורעשים של בניינים חדשים שנבנו.

ישראל היא מדינה קטנה, העם הסטארטאפ ששיגר חללית לירח

מה מיוחד בישראלים? הם אינם חסרי ביטחון עצמי; זה לא משנה אם אדם עם דעה אחרת הוא הבוס או המומחה, הישראלי יודע שהוא צודק. הוא (או היא) יקפץ לפניך בתור בתחנת האוטובוס או בבנק; אבל הוא תמיד יעזור לך אם הוא רואה שאתה צריך עזרה.

לפני 3000 שנים אמר משה:

החיים והמוות נתתי לפניך, הברכה והקללה; וברכת, בחיים

מה ישראל בעיניך ישראל היא החיים

Having worked through that, I braved the rain for a shopping expedition, and on the way back felt that I must capture, to set down in this diary, the actualisation of the choice that Moses presented more than 3000 years ago: the choice between life and death, the blessing and the curse.

In Tehran, a clock is counting down to the death of Israel:



Like 5.4K Share Tweet Email Print 69 Comments

Jun 26, 2017 Iran has begun its 25-year countdown to Israel's destruction, preferably at its own hands.

Related:

iran

Islamic terror

Khamenei

Quds Day

Iran unveiled a digital clock in Tehran's center counting down the days to what it says will be the destruction of Israel in 2040.

The event took place as part of the annual al-Quds Day celebration, during which millions of Iranians marched under the banner, "Death to Israel, Death to America."

The timeframe appears to stem from comments made in 2015 by Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who vowed there will be "nothing" left of Israel by the year 2040, the UK's *Independent* reported.

In September 2015, Khamenei proclaimed, "You [Israelis] will not see the coming 25 years and, God willing, there will not be something named the Zionist regime in next 25 years."

He later tweeted in broken English that Israel "will not see next 25 years; God willing, there will be nothing as Zionist regime by next 25 years. Secondly, until then, struggling, heroic and jihadi morale will leave no moment of serenity for Zionists."

Whereas, all around me, Israel is looking to the future with confidence. At a point midway between where Jessica lives and where I live, I took this video by rotating around almost 360°

http://www.briansacks.com/assets/Building_work_in_GS_01_04_19.mp4

03-04-19



Bar Ilan University and Givat Shmuel: Faith in the Future

07-04-19

Letter to the administrator of the "Ulpan La-Inyan" Hebrew Language School, sent immediately after my Hebrew exam today (Misrad Hachinuch is the Ministry of Education):

Dear Rena

I wish to thank Misrad Hachinuch for my final lesson at Ulpan La-Inyan. It was indeed an education - a real-life experience of an exam in Israel. Coming from England, I am accustomed to exams in which the invigilators are silent, always present in the exam room, and try to maintain the silence of that exam room. How refreshing to learn that none of that applies in Israel! Animated conversations between an invigilator sitting in the exam room and a boisterous Frenchman in the corridor certainly add colour to this quintessentially Israeli experience. Also, once I was the only examinee left in the room, and the invigilator was joined by other colleagues, their conversations liberated me into feeling that I could recite my answers as loudly as they were talking – and speaking does help me think.

Just a couple of other points:

Preparing several answers for possible essay questions was a very useful and enjoyable learning experience, and my sincere thanks go to Eden for her help. It was worth it for the sake of the practice alone – which is just as well because the essay question was missing from the paper (Paper ב). As such, I think, the available marks only add up to 80. I hope this wasn't a mistake. Someone who submitted a perfect paper - and that certainly is not me - would be rather miffed to receive a mark of 80% instead of 100%

I would also offer some free careers advice to the teacher who twice promised to bring me some blank paper and never did: don't take up waitressing!

With thanks again, and kind regards

Brian Sacks

On the subject of those essays, I actually prepared ten essays, expecting that one of them would turn up in the exam. All ten are topics from test papers provided by the Israeli Ministry of Education.

So that they not be lost to posterity, I have preserved them [here](#) in both Hebrew and English. (There are one or two cases where Microsoft Word has made alphabet soup out of the Hebrew - cutting and pasting in a language that reads from right to left has its dangers). If anyone were ever to express an interest in them, I would suggest looking at numbers 1 (which in fact I posted in my diary entry of 01-04-19), 4, 5 and 10; 4 and 10 are short pieces of fiction, 4 being based on observation of how many of my age group have gone through a divorce later in life, and 10 being "borrowed" from W. Somerset Maugham.

08-04-19

The saga continues, as Brian learns that attempts at humour do not travel well...

Hi Brian!

Thank you so much for your feedback! We really appreciate it! I am glad you had a pleasant experience and will pass it along to the people who send the proctors. I heard from a few students about the essay question missing, I will find out what happened and what Misrad Hachinuch plans on doing.

Best,

Rena

and so Brian switches to deadpan and blunt..

Dear Rena

I am afraid that another necessary element of my Israeli education is appreciation that English attempts at humour are not always understood in Israel. You were correct in your interpretation of my "essay" paragraph, although perhaps I should have added that it was extremely galling to work hard preparing for the essay, and for this to have actually been wasted time if looked at from the point of view of exam performance.

But please see the rest of my email as my way of saying that it was VERY far from satisfactory. I know that other candidates in the room were also disturbed by, not just what I wrote about, but also by the invigilator munching on Bamba, and by the balagan at the start when we all had to change rooms. I would appreciate it if this message is also passed to the people who send feedback to the proctors. With thanks,

Kind regards

Brian

10-04-19

Elections over and Benjamin Netanyahu re-elected. I will set down two observations.

Firstly: I found this message from Nas Daily (see my entries for November 1 and November 2 in [www.briansacks.com/Israel Diary Nov to Dec 2018.docx](http://www.briansacks.com/Israel_Diary_Nov_to_Dec_2018.docx)) admirable and inspiring. He posted it in English, Hebrew and Arabic:



Nas Daily ✓

April 8 at 8:32 PM · ⚙️



Dear Israel,

This post is visible only to you.

I came back home to vote in the Israeli elections...only to realize that this time...there is no Israel.

We need to admit: there is no Israel. There are 6 different Israels in one country:

Israel for the Jews.

Israel for the Arabs

Israel for the Ultra Orthodox

Israel for the Tel-Avivians

Israel for the Ethiopians

and Israel for the tourists.

Each of these Israels has its own economy, opportunities, and population. They don't interact, and they don't mix well. They are not equal.

Israel is divided and some politicians are happy about it.

I hope you vote tomorrow.

Vote for whoever you want, but I hope you vote for those that unite this country...not those who divide it. From the rhetoric, it's easy to see who divides and who doesn't. But ultimately, the choice is yours.

We don't need 6 Israels.

We need only one Israel....for everybody.

Thank you for watching the videos and for giving me your time.

Secondly: Leaving aside the undue influence of the Ultra-Orthodox Haredim, and resisting the temptation to expand that into a rant, maybe the ultimate casting vote in the elections went to the residents of Gaza. They elected to fire rockets at Tel Aviv and its environs, for the first time since 2014, during the election campaign. One of those rockets completely demolished a house at 5:30 in the morning. Only by a miracle did the human occupants, spanning three generations, escape, one member of the family having been woken by the air raid siren. The household pets were killed. That electoral choice by the Gaza population ensured that the Israeli election would be fought on the issue of security, meaning that there could be only one winner.

18-04-19

Today I attended a ceremony at which my nephew received his stripes as a non-commissioned officer. In the UK he would be called a sapper - unexploded bombs, landmines, "Big Bangs 'R Us". It was quite enlightening to walk around his base, and especially through the reconstructed Hamas tunnel network - and yes, I banged my head.

It took my mind off frustrations regarding the transfer of significant sums of money to go towards payment for my flat, which is due to be completed in a year's time. Payments had been delayed for several days because of – presumably – "additional checks", and then, separately, it turned out that the transfer company had a temporary technical problem receiving transfers from the UK. Not surprisingly, their Customer Service Department staff did not know what was going on and only offered erroneous and worrying explanations. It is all a bit nerve wracking, when funds seem to disappear into the ether, and there is no £85,000 Financial Services Compensation Scheme guarantee.

I am rushing against a deadline of a few days time, for obtaining quotes and specifying kitchen design changes before the contractors build to default standard.

And tomorrow is the beginning of Holy Week, for Jew and Christian alike!

23-04-19

Over the weekend, I watched a video of Olympic Champion and world record holder for the marathon, Eliud Kipchoge, talking together with David Bedford at the Oxford Union (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tc00mDtzlJU&t=1531s>). I had already watched one or two profiles of Kipchoge prior to this. I have found him very impressive: humble, focused, and with an admirable take on life, and especially on the value of teamwork.

I then watched one or two more videos of Kipchoge and, for old times sake, David Bedford.

I make time wasting an art form. Literally. Although it must be said that one man's art form is another man's time wasting.

On Monday, for the first time in a long time, I wasted time making a poster designed to stop me wasting time. It is pretty topical too - the quote is by Eliud Kipchoge, who made headlines as depicted in the photo, and might make headlines again in London on Sunday.



29-04-19

Normal life restarted in Israel yesterday after the Passover. Midway through that week-long break, a deadline passed for me to make personalised choices for various items in the flat that I am buying. Most importantly, I needed to choose any variations that I required from the standard kitchen specification. Being unable to schedule a design meeting during the Passover break, my first outing yesterday was to the kitchen suppliers.

"Yes, back to normal again", I cheerfully said to myself as my bus sailed by, oblivious to my frantic signalling at the bus stop.

But it was a good day all in all, marked by a signed contract for a kitchen design and by a satisfying victory for Eliud Kipchoge on the streets of London.

Normal life intruded again today, as I made the trip to the Post Office to collect an undelivered item of mail. It was a registered letter from the Tax Authority. Ever since the Authority has known of my existence, I have inhabited two Tax Universes and I receive letters from the Authority in pairs. In one universe, the Tax Authority is happy that I have fulfilled my requirements for the year, having paid 6000 Israeli shekels as agreed (on my part, in the expectation that I will receive a refund when end of year accounts show that I have overpaid). In the other universe, the Authority demands 60,000 Israeli shekels for the year.

Today's letter was another demand from that alternative universe. As such, I have written to my accountant:

Dear Binyamin

I had to waste my time going to the post office to collect another registered letter from the Tax Authority (see attached). Is it possible for you to put a rocket up whoever it may concern so that they finally sort out this mistake that is now well beyond a joke?

With thanks and kind regards,

Brian

02-05-19

The responses I received from my accountant were, "It's been overridden, as previously advised" and "They already did correct it". However, that has not prevented a payment book arriving in my letterbox from the Tax Authority today, with counterfoils for monthly payments totalling the 60,000 shekels..

02-05-19

Today was Yom Hashoa, the Holocaust Memorial Day, which takes place each year in Israel on a calendar date related to the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. A siren was sounded for two minutes, throughout which the entire country stood still and silent. Two years ago, I was present in Israel for the other calendar day in which a two minute's silence is observed: Yom Hazikaron, the Memorial Day for Fallen Soldiers and Victims of Terrorism. It was a moving experience, which I captured in [this video](#).

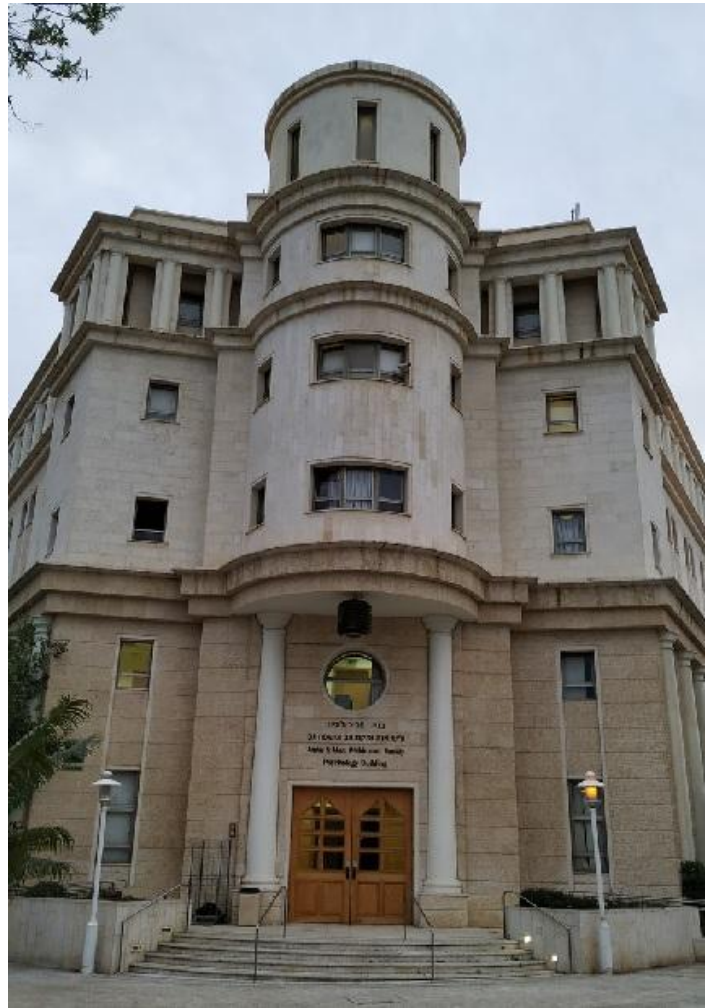
I did not expect to refer to Yom Hashoa in this diary. But as I was walking around the Bar Ilan campus this afternoon, I noticed the names Anna and Max Webb on a vast glass wall of benefactors.



The road in front of my building is Max and Anna Webb Street, and it extends for almost a full mile to left and right.



I had also noted on my earliest walks on campus the imposing Anna and Max Webb Psychology Building.



But I had never found out anything about Max Webb until seeing his name on the benefactors wall prompted me to enquire this afternoon. This account is courtesy of Wikipedia.

Max Webb died six months ago. He was 101 years old. He was born in 1917, in Łódź, Poland, and had five sisters and a brother. He grew up in a poor family and stopped going to school at an early age.

During World War II, he was deported to the Auschwitz II concentration camp in 1943. He survived the Death March of 1944, as well as twelve labour camps and six concentration camps. Both his parents as well as four of his sisters were murdered by the Nazis. Webb was liberated on May 8, 1945.

In 1951, he stayed on Coney Island for ten months to get a visa for the United States. By 1952, he had moved to Los Angeles with his wife and brother-in-law, and started a career in real estate development. His company became one of the largest real estate development companies in Southern California.

His philanthropy, so self-evident in and around Bar Ilan, extended on as great a scale to Tel Aviv University and to the Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles. He was a founding donor of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

On August 22 last year, after my first walk around the Bar Ilan campus, I wrote, "The faculty buildings of the campus are set amongst flower gardens with benches and sculptures. Virtually every building, garden and sculpture bore the name of a benefactor, who typically donated in memory of a parent or a relative who had died in the Holocaust. An emotionally mature, admirable and touching response to tragedy."

I still feel the same awe for Israel's response to tragedy.

06-05-19

For the first time in three nights, I will be able to go to sleep without keeping one ear open for an air-raid siren. If it had been sounded, and I had heard it, presumably I would have tried to make my way to the stairwell, seeing as the building's air-raid shelter is below ground level while I am on Floor 5. In 48 hours over the weekend, 690 rockets were fired at Israel from Gaza, which clearly has money for what it sees as its main priority. When I take possession of my new flat some time next year, I will be able to switch to sleeping in the safe room in similar circumstances.

On a lighter note, 65 years ago today Roger Bannister became the first man to run one mile in less than four minutes.

07-05-19

Carrying out errands on the day before my first trip back to the UK, I felt this very keenly: the unjust way in which Israel is portrayed in Western media, with Hamas claims being printed as fact without any attempt at verification. The day's news provided a typical example.



Brian Sacks

May 7 at 1:50 PM · 🧑🏻 · ▼

I hope that Jonathan Sacerdoti doesn't mind me sharing his text:
Just to underline the key points here:

- According to this report, the Jihadi terrorists now ADMIT themselves that the mother and baby were killed as a result of their own explosive device malfunctioning.
- Israel was NOT responsible.
- Worldwide media outlets already unquestioningly published the unsubstantiated claims by the terrorists that Israel was responsible.
- The terrorists explain that the device exploded prematurely in the house of the mother and child. WHY WAS IT IN THE HOUSE OF CIVILIANS WITH A CHILD in the first place? This is very important.
- The report also explains that the terrorists told the family that their dead child would be classed as a "martyr" if they perpetuated the lie that Israel was responsible for the deaths.

That's how many media outlets spread false news, whilst also neglecting to mention the true salient points of a story (weapons kept in civilian homes next to babies; bribes and lies in return for "martyrdom"; attempts to slander Israel as child killers; use of human shields by terrorists; reliance on unreliable, unsubstantiated local sources... etc)



JPOST.COM

Islamic Jihad admits baby, pregnant woman killed by their own rockets

20-05-19

I returned today from twelve days in England, the dates of the trip set so that I could attend Ari's Barmitzvah – Ari is my brother Jonathan's grandson. I began the trip with a thoroughly enjoyable reunion of college mathematicians in Cambridge – and my great thanks go to hosts Shannon, Joel, Julie and Jeff. After the barmitzvah celebration, Lyn and I went down to Margate for five days and were blessed with blue skies throughout (photos with musical accompaniment [here](#)).

The whole trip was a very pleasant break from ever-present worries about wars current and future. It was nice to return, however briefly, to life lived at a normal pace, in a language that I could read, write and understand; to expanses of cliff-top grassland; and to getting behind the wheel of a car (albeit learning an expensive lesson in how hire companies pile on the unexpected charges).

So today I return to my life choice of being able to enjoy, at close quarters, my grandchildren growing up. My life seems to consist of a series of choices reminiscent of Luke Reinhardt's "Dice Man". The decision-making process for each major choice is clouded by mammoth anxiety and awfulizing, combined with major worries about "being seen to be a good bloke" and "doing the right thing". As such, my major life decisions are seldom taken coolly. The effect is that I never feel to be on a straight and level road to a peaceful and happy future. I was born to run, though now it seems also to slow to a walk; but I was certainly not born for sitting. But maybe that's what keeps me young.

23-05-19

Lamp-posts and bus stops smothered with these "charity" boxes are the norm in Bnei Brak, the ultra-Orthodox district to which I try, as much as I can, to give a wide berth.

But this lamp-post is not in Bnei Brak. It is adjacent to the bus stop that I use most frequently, immediately outside Bar Ilan University. I took the photo partly because of the lamp-post's incongruity with its location.

The large, ground level donation box has the legend "City Cash Desk – Bnei Brak" above the photo of the elderly, white-bearded personage. The box that he is opening has printed on it, "Charity for thousands of needy families". Below the photo is the message "Donate and see salvations".

Moving to the two smaller donation boxes on the left-hand side: The lower one is for "hungry children" and makes the identical claim, "Donate and see salvations". The upper one, collecting for a "Rabbinical committee for charity" proclaims the message "For blessing, success, salvation, for healing".

But my attention was really caught by the box on the top right (see below for an enlarged picture), for an organisation called "Yad L'Achim" (literally, Hand for Brothers").

You will notice arrows left and right pointing to the slot for donations. Below that is a wider slot intended for pieces of paper.

The message between these slots reads, "Insert here names for blessing at Amuka, for proper pairing soon."

I was intrigued.

My thanks go to Jessica and to Wikipedia for enlightenment as follows: "Amuka, in Northern Israel, is the place where Rabbi Jonathan ben Uzziel was buried around two thousand years ago. Beginning in the 17th century, a practice arose to pray at the grave site for a good marriage partner, for children, a good livelihood, health and happiness. Many unmarried men and women pray there for a match. Doing so is considered a "segula" (propitious remedy) for finding one's mate within the coming year."

For good measure, below the phone number, the message reads: "Donate to Yad L'Achim and, with the help of God, see salvations".



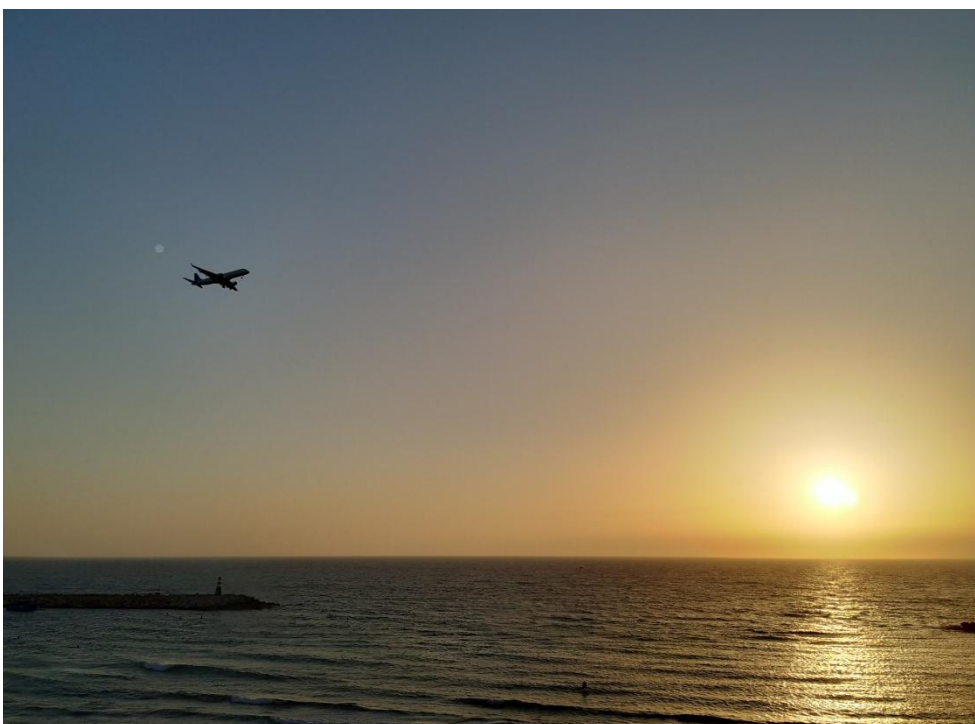
28-05-19

The first of three days illustrating the joys and consolations of living in Israel:



Need I say more?

29-05-19



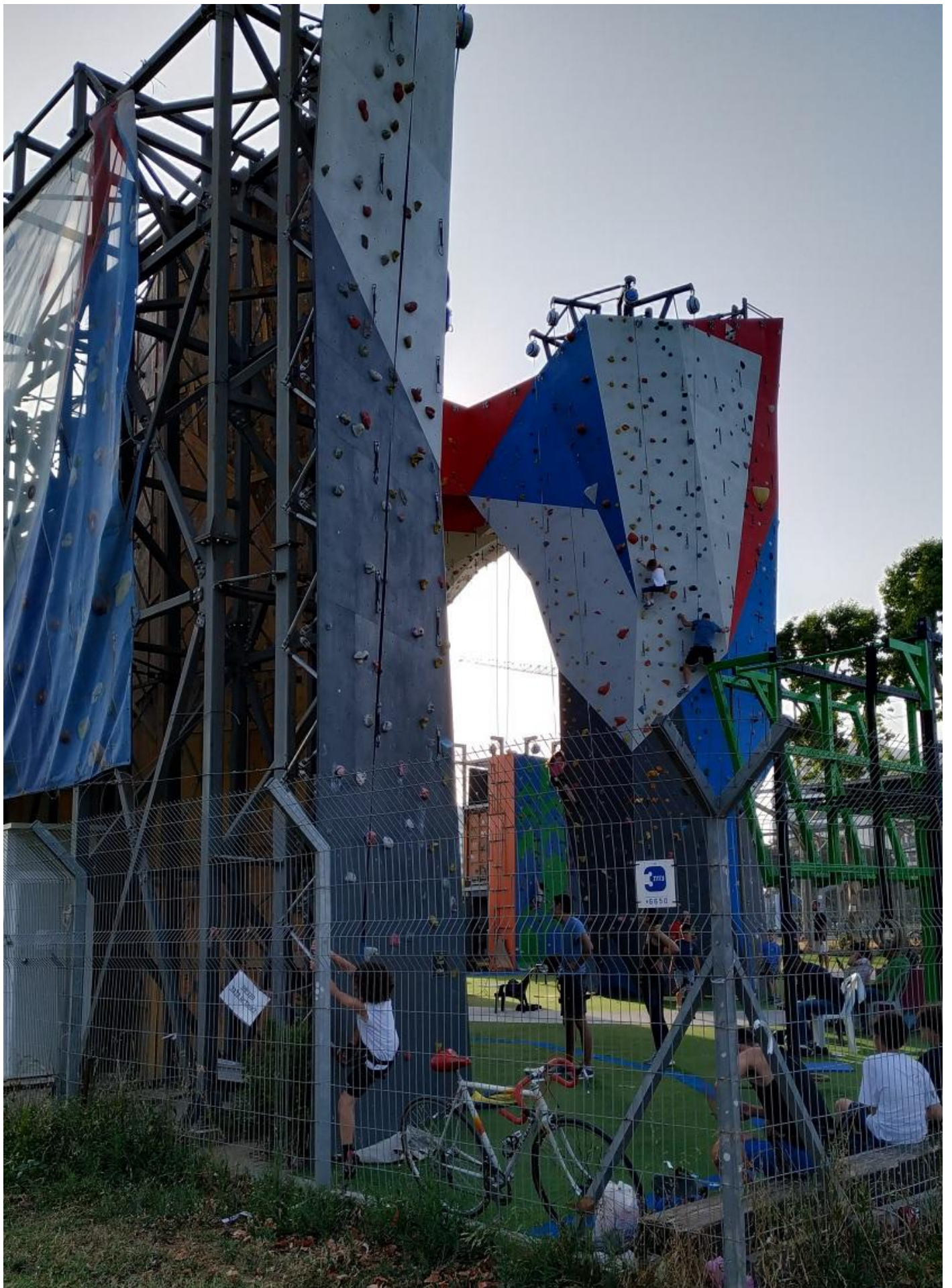
Sunset over Tel Aviv beach

30-05-19

A walk in Hayarkon Park, North Tel Aviv:







01-06-19

I finally got round to piecing together my model of Leonardo da Vinci's self-bearing bridge, made and sold by an Italian toy maker at the Nachalat Binyamin market.

Perching on the side of the bridge are its architect and his cat.

Together with the same toy maker's da Vinci flier, and violinist balanced atop a logarithmic spiral, they make for quite a satisfying toy shelf.



04-06-19

As we approach the 75th anniversary of the D-Day Landings of June 6, 1944, last week I spent some time learning about the barely imaginable heroism, sacrifice and tragedy of those landings. I also gained some appreciation of the technical brilliance that contributed to the success of Operation Overlord; in particular, the design of the Mulberry Harbours, the temporary deep water harbours that were created off the Normandy coast. Individual sections, called caissons, of what were to be the harbour walls, were constructed in various English locations. They were then floated a hundred miles across the English Channel. At Normandy these caissons were "scuttled" by opening a hole near their base, allowing seawater to fill them and cause them to settle into the seabed. These sections, lined up, formed the harbour walls.

I spent today in Caesarea, the magnificent port city built by Herod the Great between 22 BCE and 10 BCE, and discovered that this was the first man-made deep water harbour in the world. To my mind, which I must admit is untrained in engineering matters, the methods used by Herod seem very similar to those used at Normandy almost two thousand years later. As with the Mulberry Harbours, Herod assembled the harbour walls from individual floating sections. His sections were rafts, each topped with an empty enclosure, or pen. When each raft was in position, the pen was filled with a volcanic soil which hardened like concrete, and the raft settled into the sea bed. As with the Mulberry Harbours, these sections, lined up, formed the harbour walls. Remain of Herod's harbour walls can still be seen today.

[Caesarea Picture Album](#)

11-06-19

Musings on the day's trip to Tel Aviv

The trip started at my usual bus stop, at the exit to Bar Ilan University where the lamppost offering a blessing for finding your life partner stands adjacent to the road sign from which King Messiah Menachem Mendel Schneerson waves benignly. (See diary entries 23-05-19 and 03-11-18 respectively). This spot, a major hub for buses, is at a busy and congested road intersection. Being an exit from the University, it is also a point where drivers frequently stop to pick up their student friends. They do this Israeli-style of course, which means without signalling nor drawing particularly close to the kerb, and oblivious to the fact that they are thereby preventing buses from drawing into their stop. But the blaring of car and bus horns does not perturb driver or student passenger, or disrupt their warm smiles of greeting. The Israeli psyche is captured here in microcosm.

An hour or two later I found myself wondering why everyone in Tel Aviv has a dog – until I turned a corner and found that I was wrong: some of them have two dogs.

I wondered why. I tried to put myself into the mindset of a dog lover, and my guess is that he feels: a dog loves you unconditionally; it is always there to talk to, and even though it can't speak, you can speak to it and it understands you and appreciates and empathises with what you are saying.

Coming back to Givat Shmuel, where I live, there are slightly fewer dog lovers, but a higher proportion of God lovers. For the exercise, I tried to put myself into the mindset of a God lover, and my guess is that he feels: God loves you unconditionally; He is always there to talk to, and even though He doesn't speak to you, you can speak to Him and He understands you and appreciates and empathises with what you are saying.

(The above is an extract from my forthcoming book, "How to lose friends and alienate people". But being a fantasy, please don't take it too seriously)



Homage to an English authoress



Let tsunamis be Tel Aviv's biggest worry



At Allenby Street

16-06-19



At the Weizmann Institute of Science, Rehovot

Top: Dr. Weizmann's laboratory and portrait

Bottom: The grave of Weizmann and his wife, and the Presidential car given to him by Henry Ford. It was one of just 18 cars of its type, manufactured according to specifications drawn up for the President of the United States.

The Weizmann Institute, originally called the Daniel Sieff Research Institute, came into being as a result of Chaim Weizmann's efforts. Weizmann was a towering figure in 20th century Zionism, and the first President of Israel. His scientific work (in the manufacture of acetone through the fermentation of bacteria) was a significant contribution to the Allied victory in World War I.

My thanks to Prof. Peter Rez for the tour.

20-06-19

I took advantage of an offer of a week's health club membership at a promotional rate, and this is taking me beyond my usual stamping grounds. Here are some street adornments on my walk to the club:



Incidentally, at the club reception yesterday, I was privileged to see a replay of a famous scene from "Fawlty Towers". I was being served at reception when another gentleman butted in with a request. The receptionist replied, "*Rak rega*" - "Just a minute". He responded, "*Efo rak rega*" - "What's this, just a minute?"

The old lady from the Fawlty Towers episode may have passed on, but her spirit still lives. Here is another scene from the same episode: <https://youtu.be/tcliR8kAbzc>

26-06-19

I ventured to within five miles of Gaza, down the coast to Ashkelon. That is where three thousand years ago Samson fought his battles against the Philistines, only to fall prey to the wiles of Delilah.

As one walks from the Central Bus Station down to the sea along the street 'Sderot David Ben Gurion', the story of Samson and Delilah is told in stone and plaque – see the photos [here](#). A few more snaps I took once I reached the coast are [here](#).

06-07-19

One of the many rounds of the radio programme "Just a Minute" that I have enjoyed listening to was on the subject of "The double-whammy". This week I felt the sting of my own personal double-whammy: the tumbling of the UK housing market combined with the plunging of the UK pound - Israeli shekel exchange-rate. I find myself caught at the wrong end of both of these crashes, needing to sell my London flat in order to pay for the flat that I am buying in Israel. But equally, this stark realisation forces me to reflect on how relatively unimportant all of the above is. Yes, at age 67, health, family, loved ones and friends comprise what matters and what is to be cherished.

07-07-19

Intriguing to see that supermodel Naomi Campbell paid homage today to the Messiah of my Bus Stop, Menachem Mendel Schneerson (see entry for 03-11-18).

Universal Love seems to be a common message of more than one man revered as Messiah. I guess that the Messianic Age will be when that message prevails - at least in one place, at one time..


← Tweet




Naomi Campbell 
@NaomiCampbell



#TheRebbe #25Years 

naomi Today, is the 25th anniversary of the passing of #TheRebbe, Rabbi Menachem Schneerson. An inspirational leader, scholar, and teacher, the Rebbe taught that we are all inherently good and we each have the potential to change the world for the better, one good deed at a time. I have personally learned so much from his wisdom and teachings, and while I never met him, I've visited his resting place in Queens to gain blessing and inspiration. With so much discord and division across our society, the Rebbe's words are more relevant than ever, and we so desperately need to take them to heart and learn from his example to always see the good in others, even those with whom we may disagree. Today I rededicate myself to the Rebbe's life-long mission of creating more light and goodness, and making a better future for ourselves and all of humanity. 



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5:15 AM · Jul 7, 2019 · Twitter for iPhone

66 Retweets 242 Likes

14-07-19

It may be two and a half thousand years old, but Zeno's Paradox still has its present day relevance.

When one buys a new flat in Israel, still under construction, one pays for it in stages. At any time, the outstanding balance is subject to indexation, up to the current month's Construction Index figure. However, this figure is only published on the first day of the following month.

Hence, if one clears one's balance at any time, one finds, at the start of the following month, that in fact one's payment didn't clear the balance, because it was not up to date with the index - which was only published after the end of the month of one's payment.

Thus one still has a balance to pay...

And so on ad infinitum...

in much the same way as Achilles could not overtake his tortoise two and a half thousand years ago.

10-08-19

August 1 was the first anniversary of my arrival in Israel. Much as I might have been tempted to celebrate and to spend time looking back over the year, I was instead pre-occupied with preparations for temporarily leaving Israel. Any celebratory mood was rendered almost impossible by the continuing haemorrhaging of the pound's value against the shekel, which is correspondingly ramping up the amount I owe on the flat that I am buying.

On August 6 I was to move out of my rented flat in Givat Shmuel and move back into my Finchley flat, newly vacated by its tenants. The plan is to stay in Finchley until I succeed in selling the flat, and then return to Israel in late 2019 or early 2020. I should receive the keys to my new Israeli flat in late April 2020. Beyond those details, nothing is fixed.

Back to my situation in Givat Shmuel on August 1: Within the first six days of the month I needed to move all my possessions out of my rented flat and into a storage room in David and Jessica's building, 1300 metres away. Of course in England, this would be a simple matter of a few trips by car. In Israel I have no car, and feel less inclined than I would be in England to look for "a man with a van". As such, I carried most of it across on foot, taking just a few bus journeys for the more unwieldy loads. As I sweated through temperatures that were well into the 30's Celsius most of the time, I reflected that, while some people climb Kilimanjaro or cycle from John O'Groats to Land's End, at least my physical challenge had some practical purpose to it.



My possessions now carried across to storage

Stepping onto the plane at Ben Gurion airport represented an End of Part 1. Stepping off at Luton was the Start of Part 2. I knew that I was returning to a flat that was literally empty apart from furniture, and I included in my luggage a toilet roll, some liquid soap, a hand towel, a blanket and a pillow slip, all representing a survival kit until the new day dawned. Flight and bus delays meant that I arrived home at around 3:25 AM.

When I surfaced on the afternoon of August 7, I was faced by the need to make a big supermarket trip without the use of a car. I remembered that, in my mother's final years, her carer used to use her suitcase as a shopping trolley, so I decided to do the same. I weighed it on my return: full suitcase 22 kg, plus an additional 4 kg in shoulder bags.

I now had the laborious job of bringing my UK possessions out of my garage - again by muscle power alone. But this time the separation between storage area and apartment building was less than a hundred metres.

Coming back to England reminded me of the tricks that muscle memory plays: I have to relearn that, in England, pressing the bottom of an electric switch turns the power on, not off!

10-08-19

I was taken by surprise by an incident that happened on my second trip to Tesco's on my first day back, August 7. It was just before midnight, with very few customers left in the store. I noticed someone with a T-shirt bearing the legend "אני אקטן". I asked him why he wore the Hebrew message "I will become small", and as he turned I saw that the front of his T-shirt read "שהוא יגדל" - "so that he will become large". It also sported a Star of David. He explained that they were the words of John the Baptist, heralding the greater One who was to come after.

23-08-19

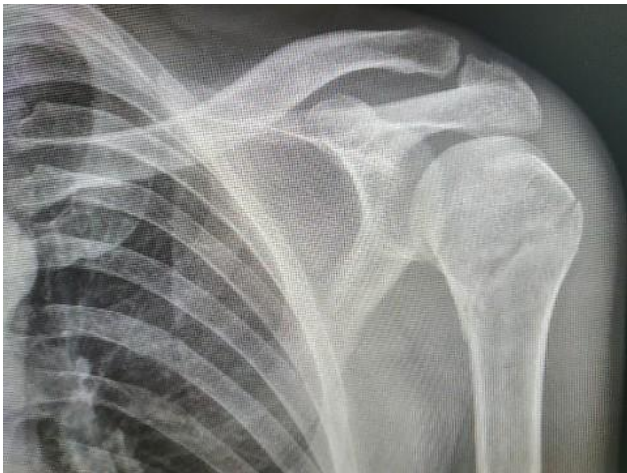
In the late afternoon of Monday, August 12, I wanted to get to my solicitor to hand over the lease of my London flat and other documents. These had been requested by my prospective purchaser's solicitor some weeks previously, but they were locked in my garage in Finchley while I was living in Givat Shmuel more than two thousand miles away. My solicitor's office was due to close, and so when a bus went by I sprinted to catch it. This was not a wise move. I went splat on the pavement.

The bus waited for me to pick myself up and stagger aboard - something that would be perhaps unlikely to happen in Israel. I had the meeting with my solicitor and he then tried to call a minicab for me. But none were available, so I made my way to the Royal Free Hospital Accident & Emergency Department on foot and via Underground.

An x-ray showed that my left humerus was broken at the top into two pieces. But the pieces were, and so far continue to be, well aligned, and so hopefully the bone will heal without needing an operation. I am lucky that it was not a worse break. I must keep my left arm supported in a collar and cuff that I wear all the time except when showering and when, four times a day, I do basic exercises to maintain mobility in my hand.

So I am now restricted to only using my right hand – and I am left-handed. I am living in interesting times.

The x-ray below was taken on August 20, eight days after the fracture happened. The specialist was pleased that the bone alignment was excellent. The mirror-image selfie was taken at the house of my brother and sister-in-law, with whom I stayed for the first two days after my fall.



In terms of the impact of my current situation on my daily living, I will only mention the biggest inconvenience: I cannot put any garment onto my upper body by myself. This means that whatever I am wearing at any time on my upper body is what I will be wearing outdoors, indoors and in bed until I next meet Lyn. So every two days I shower, every two days I change my upper body clothes.

Having thought that it was only a matter of time before I would be mowed down by an electric bicycle or a scooter on the pavements of Tel Aviv, I came to grief on the relatively safe and vehicle-free pavements of Finchley. As a professional-level worrier, there is a moral in the incident for me: Cheer up, yes it will happen, but "it" will be something completely different from what you spent all those days and weeks worrying about.

03-11-19

I have now been back in Israel for a few days, having returned on my birthday. It is delightful to be back with the family, and my grandchildren Tzviya and Amit are overjoyed that I have returned to them. My London flat is sold, and the proceeds enabled me to pay for the flat that I have been buying in Givat Shmuel. It looks as if it will be ready on schedule, for handover in April 2020, or possibly even earlier.

I have arrived at an airBnB that is a fifteen minute walk away from the family. It is astonishingly nice and reasonably priced, and I am the first person to ever stay here. Almost everything about it is brand new; the towels, the cutlery, the crockery, the washing machine and much else besides have never been used before. I think I will be lucky enough to stay here for almost all the time until the keys of my new flat are handed over.

I flew into Tel Aviv not directly from London, but from Budapest, where I enjoyed five full days of sightseeing and unseasonably pleasant weather. Photos at <https://photos.app.goo.gl/baBtbBHoTwddpfao6>.

It is now close to twelve weeks since my left arm came crashing down on pavement and fractured. I needed to wear my 'collar and cuff' for four weeks and I then moved on to physiotherapy sessions, at which I was prescribed three-times-per-day exercises. The arm has been improving well both in terms of strength and in terms of range of movement. I do experience some pain, especially during the night. The exercises themselves, in which I am trying to extend my range of motion, seem to contribute significantly to the pain. But it is manageable, and if I do take a pain killer it is only once or at most twice a day. If my mind is properly occupied or I am in company I forget about it.

It has been quite a learning experience. So many habitual tasks of daily living become significant challenges when one has only one arm that works, and that being the non-dextrous arm. A day or two before I flew to Budapest I tied shoelaces for the first time since my fracture. It had taken weeks for me to be able to wash my right underarm with my left hand, rather than with my right hand gorilla-fashion. Even now, that operation represents the very limit of my left hand's range of motion.

24-11-19

I return to my AirBnB tomorrow for another forty-eight day stay, having been compelled to temporarily make way for a prior booking. But I have enjoyed these ten days, dividing my time between Jerusalem, Mitzpe Ramon and Eilat.

It was a long-awaited first visit to Mitzpe Ramon, the world's largest erosion cirque (thank you, Wikipedia – and no, I had never heard of the term either). It is a place of beauty, quiet and solitude, provided one is dogged enough to keep walking on until voices are no longer heard.



By contrast, I have been to Eilat at least eight times before, probably more. I used to come for winter holidays during the nineties, when Eilat was a popular destination for Britons seeking winter sunshine. Then, during the early years of this century, the regular flights to Eilat from the UK stopped and the resort became tatty and appeared to cater just for Israelis. But it has definitely revived, and has much to recommend it. The weather is beautiful, warm and dry. The light blue waters of the Red Sea lap placidly, surrounded by mountains that turn red as the sun sets. The pace is calm and unhurried, and in place of the constant clack-clack-clack of the Tel Aviv matkot (that is, bat-and-ball) there is the sound of gentle, and often pleasing, music drifting across from the promenade public grand piano.





Stumbled onto Donald Trump Square in a rather downmarket part of Petach Tikva today..



01-12-19

The hottest topic locally in Givat Shmuel is the light rail, proposed for linking Givat Shmuel and other suburbs into Central Tel Aviv. Passions are high in favour of and against the proposed route and stations. Apparently it looks as if a compromise might be reached, moving the most controversial station to a street where there are no current residents to object - namely the street where I have bought an apartment.

I was somewhat amused by this placard that I spotted on my way to babysitting for my grandchildren:



Against the red background it reads: The train to Hell!

While below, it declares: A moment before our lives become hell, we must change the route!

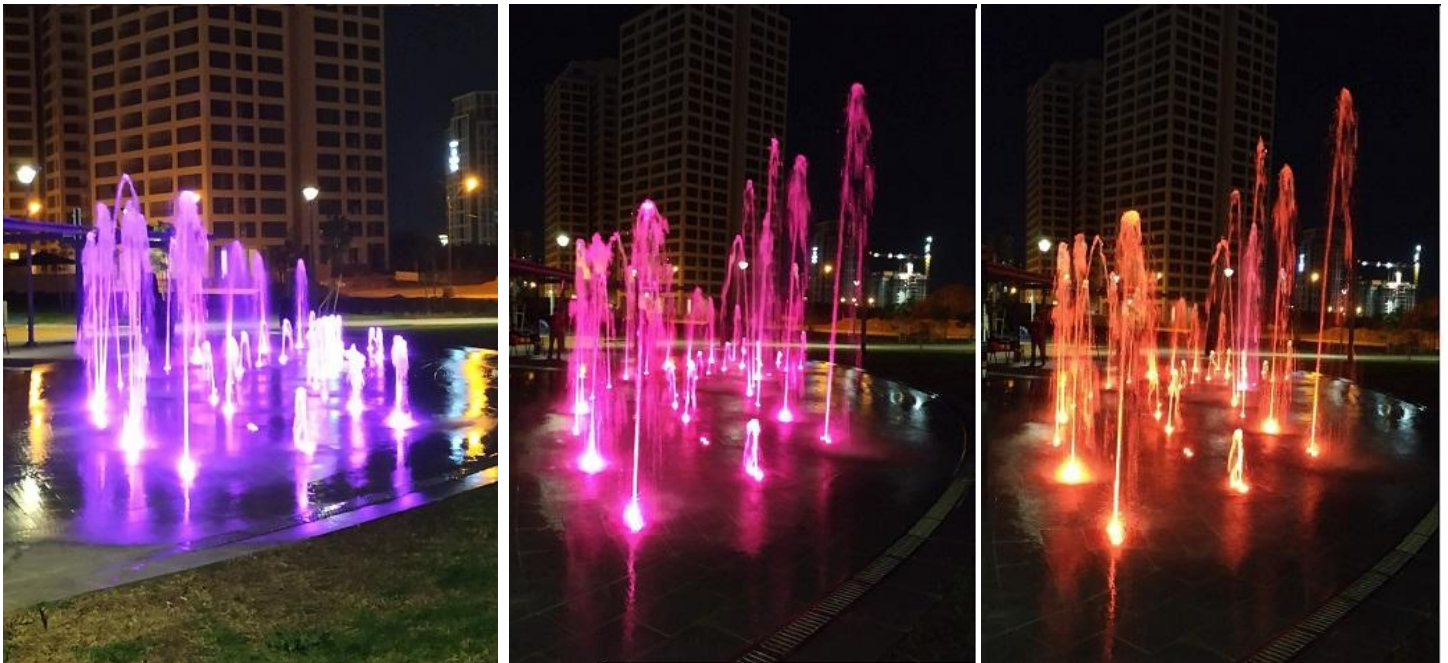
24-12-19

As I have written previously, I am the first person to ever stay in my AirBnB, and almost everything in it has been brand new. But there have been one or two teething problems, as one might expect with a brand-new apartment. Also, it is a basement flat, meaning that there is no telephone reception, and I only get a clue as to the weather once I get myself out and up to ground level. It's funny how something can seem perfect to start with, and then, slowly, slowly, awareness grows of the imperfections of reality. (Yes, you may make your comparisons with falling in love. As Francis Urquhart would say, I could not possibly comment).

Interesting things have been happening in the last week or two regarding trying to improve my Hebrew. First of all, Gideon, who was my landlord last year, wanted me to teach him English so I agreed so long as it was a relationship in which we each taught each other our own native language; and that has been going well. Also, my daughter told me of a website and an app called Tandem, which links up people who wish to learn each other's language. That is also showing a lot of promise.

The grandchildren are delightful. Tzviya is kind and protective and big-sisterly towards Amit, although of course they both do have their moments. I spend quite a lot of time with them. And in four months' time Jessica is expecting baby number three!

My laptop has died and I'm surviving (and writing this) using my trusty old Windows tablet, which was on 8.0 when I bought it but is now up to the latest release of Windows 10. I will hold off from replacing things until I am in my own flat, which will possibly be within the next two months. The flat is halfway (that is, on the tenth floor) up the left hand building of the two that can be seen in the background of the photos below.



The United Colours of Givat Shmuel – Part 1



The United Colours of Givat Shmuel – Part 2

(whose residents have disunited views on the new attraction, other than agreeing that the S is upside down)

15-01-20

I am sitting out on a balcony in Eilat, bathed in hot sunshine. It is quite a contrast from a few days ago, when a record-breaking week of rain throughout Northern and Central Israel began with a record-breaking day of the same:

04-01-20

I took myself out for a five mile walk at 1:30 a.m. for two reasons:

- The first, my nocturnal nature: I am most active after dark - though some people reduce that to an acronym.
- The second: two straight days of Noachian deluge were forecast. Anticipating being holed up in my basement flat for those two days, I thought I ought to get my exercise in while I could.

Throughout those five miles on the streets, I saw just one other pedestrian. I returned to my flat at around 2:45 a.m.

So a late night was followed by a late morning, and I awoke to find my basement flat underwater. Luckily I sustained very little property damage, but it took my AirBnB hosts the best part of two hours to squeegee away the flood. Meanwhile, videos were circulating online of cars being washed away on the streets of Tel Aviv, and two people tragically drowned in a lift.

01:53 36%

← Brian Sacks 04/01/2020 01:27

Google Share

WALKING

1:11'21 Duration
5.00 mi Distance
4.2 mph Avg speed

THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

Two die in flooded elevator as downpours hit central Israel, streets inundated

Videos on social media show submerged cars in Tel Aviv and surrounding suburbs; man in north electrocuted to death by heater; 2 treated for hypothermia in other cases

By TOI STAFF
4 Jan 2020, 2:24 pm | 5



Divers seen inside a Tel Aviv building where a man and woman died Saturday due to the flooding of a basement level (Channel 13 screenshot)

25-01-20

What is a fellow to do when he is only able to think, and work, standing up, but the only surface in his holiday apartment is a low coffee table?

He struts the coffee table across the armchair and stands his tablet computer atop an upturned cooking bowl.



At the Royal Suites Eilat, my home for eighteen days on another temporary move from my Airbnb. Somewhat basic inside, but it does have an excellent balcony for enjoying the afternoon sunshine!

07-02-20

On Thursday, January 23, I was listening to a talk online in which the name "Hugh of Lincoln" was mentioned. I knew of Hugh of Lincoln from of old, not least because of the "Little Sir Hugh" song by Steeleye Span. But the mention in the talk led me to look into the story further. One thing that I found disturbed me immensely, namely the logo and school uniform badge of St Hugh's School, Lincoln. I discussed it with my younger brothers Alan and Eliot. I wanted to write a Comment piece about it for the Jewish Chronicle, but Eliot suggested that I should write to the Headmaster of the school. I felt that was a good idea, except that I was concerned to get the story out promptly, to coincide with the 75th anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz on January 27. I started writing the piece, and quickly decided that the subject was anyway well suited to being constructed as an open letter to the Headmaster. I sent it to the newspaper in the early hours of Friday morning.

I did not hear back from the Jewish Chronicle until Monday, the actual 75th anniversary. They wanted to treat it as a news item rather than a comment piece, to which I was agreeable. But I also sent the letter to the Headmaster as I wanted him to see it on that day in particular. I reproduce it here:

Dear Mr Wyld

As the world remembers the Liberation of Auschwitz this day 75 years ago, many people will reflect on the thousand year history of European anti-Semitism that culminated in the Holocaust. One of the most pernicious manifestations of this unique hatred was the blood libel, the canard that Jews murder Christian children to use their blood in religious rituals or in making the Passover unleavened bread. Perhaps the most famous blood libel myth is that of Hugh of Lincoln - the "Little Sir Hugh" of the Steeleye Span song and the "Sir Hugh" as sung by A L Lloyd. Both of these are based on the Old English Ballad "The Jew's Garden / (Little) Sir Hugh".

Wikipedia contains an impressive article on your school, founded in 1925 by Mr and Mrs Forbes. I reproduce a section here:

The school is named after Saint Hugh, Bishop of Lincoln but also Little Saint Hugh of Lincoln. Little St Hugh was a child whose alleged murder by Jews in 1255 formed one of the most well-known and persistent anti-semitic blood libels. The Church of England formally apologised for the Little St Hugh allegations in 1955. In some ballads retelling the story, Hugh was playing with a ball, which he lost over the wall of a neighbouring Jewish family, and was murdered after being invited into their garden to retrieve it. Mrs Forbes was familiar with the myth while Mr Forbes asserted that this story should remind his boys to maintain control, both of the ball and where they were allowed to play with it. The story and its moral are represented in the school badge, which shows a ball flying over a wall.

Your website is also impressive. The school badge crowns its home page, above a photograph of young pupils proudly posing in school uniform.

But, in my opinion, the badge is no more and no less than a symbol of the blood libel, memorializing Little St Hugh. In the year 2020, the suggestion that the badge represents a reminder of where children should play football is, I would suggest, laughable.

Again from Wikipedia:

In 1955, the Church of England placed a plaque at the site of Little Hugh's former shrine at Lincoln Cathedral, bearing these words:

By the remains of the shrine of "Little St Hugh".

Trumped up stories of "ritual murders" of Christian boys by Jewish communities were common throughout Europe during the Middle Ages and even much later. These fictions cost many innocent Jews their lives. Lincoln had its own legend and the alleged victim was buried in the Cathedral in the year 1255.

Such stories do not redound to the credit of Christendom, and so we pray:

Lord, forgive what we have been,
amend what we are,
and direct what we shall be.

We live in an age where we aspire to harmony, respect and sensitivity across boundaries of race, religion and sex. We educate our children in those values, in the hope that they do not maintain the hatreds of the last millennium. They should not be wearing a symbol that memorializes the blood libel.

With great respect, may I ask you to strongly consider replacing the school badge.

Brian Sacks
Givat Shmuel, Israel
Formerly of Finchley, London

Some references

St Hugh's School wikipedia article:

https://en.wikipedia.org/w.../St_Hugh%27s_School,_Woodhall_Spa

The Jew's Garden / (Little) Sir Hugh

<https://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/eng/child/ch155.htm>

Steeleye Span version

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FhW1iZQvqIA>

A L Lloyd version

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-PPU5R8sN2g>

Little "Saint" Hugh

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Little_Saint_Hugh_of_Lincoln

The Headmaster replied to me, with courtesy and solicitude, within half an hour of my sending him the letter. The following day, the Jewish Chronicle informed me that the Headmaster and School Governors had agreed to change the badge.

EXCLUSIVE
BY ORLANDO RADICE

▶ A LINCOLNSHIRE school is to drop its 95-year-old logo after it was pointed out that the emblem symbolised an antisemitic blood libel.

The St Hugh's School insignia, which features a ball flying over a wall, represents the story of 'Little Saint Hugh' who, according to 13th century mythology, was murdered by a Jewish family after he lost his ball over their wall and was invited to retrieve it.

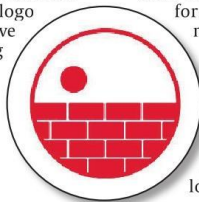
According to former staff member Hugh Martineau, Joan Forbes, one of the school's founders, "was familiar with the myth while [her husband Ronnie] Forbes asserted that this story should remind his boys to maintain control, both of the ball and where they were allowed to play with it".

The Forbes family established the school, whose former pupils include television journalist David Frost, in 1925.

Blood libels — false allegations that Jews murdered Christian children in order to use their blood as part of religious rituals — were common in medieval Europe.

Headmaster Jeremy Wyld, who took up his post this academic year, told the *JC* he had discussed the issue with the school's governors and had their agreement that the logo would be changed to remove the circle while retaining the bricks "to reiterate the significance of the educa-

The insignia, which represents the antisemitic myth about 'Little Saint Hugh'



School drops blood libel logo after 95 years

tional building blocks".

This change, he said, would be applied to the website "as soon as possible" and then to the school uniform, signage and printed material, including the prospectus. This would, he added, "apply to future school branded material".

Mr Wyld said: "I can entirely understand how the circle on the logo could be inflamma-

tory... We base every element of the education that we offer on fundamental British values and we hold dear the principles of mutual respect and inclusivity."

Brian Sacks, a retired athletics correspondent, tipped off the *JC* about the logo. He said: "When looking into the 'Little Saint Hugh' blood libel I found out about the school and was deeply upset to see its badge. I wrote to the *JC* and to the headmaster asking him to change it."

Mr Wyld said that part of the school

programme "includes a visit to the National Holocaust Centre and Museum in Nottingham which complements the work done in school in RE, PSHE lessons and tutorials".

He added that he hoped "our remedial action emphasises the gravity with which I and the St Hugh's community view this matter. I also wish to stress that there is no place for discrimination of any kind at St Hugh's and any upset caused is deeply regretted."

▶ SEE P40, 42 AND BACK PAGE

The story was also picked up by Lincolnshire Live,

LincolnshireLive NEWS IN YOUR AREA SPORT WHAT'S ON LINCOLN CITY FC SPECIAL FEATURES ENVIRONMENT

JOBS BOOK AN AD FOOTIES VOUCHER CODES MOTORS MARKETPLACE DIRECTORY FUNERAL NOTICES PUBLIC NOTICES DATING ADVERTISE WITH US

News Local News Education


School to change 95-year-old logo over anti-Semitic myth connection

It represents the story of 'Little Saint Hugh'

SHARE 122 SHARES COMMENTS By Danielle Hoe Reporter 13:27, 31 JAN 2020

Enter your postcode for local news and info

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Privacy



British school to change logo referencing anti-Semitic blood libel

Symbol for St. Hugh's School recalls 13th century myth of boy murdered by Jewish family after chasing a ball that went over their wall

By CNAAN LIPSHIZ

1 February 2020, 7:48 am | 2



170 shares

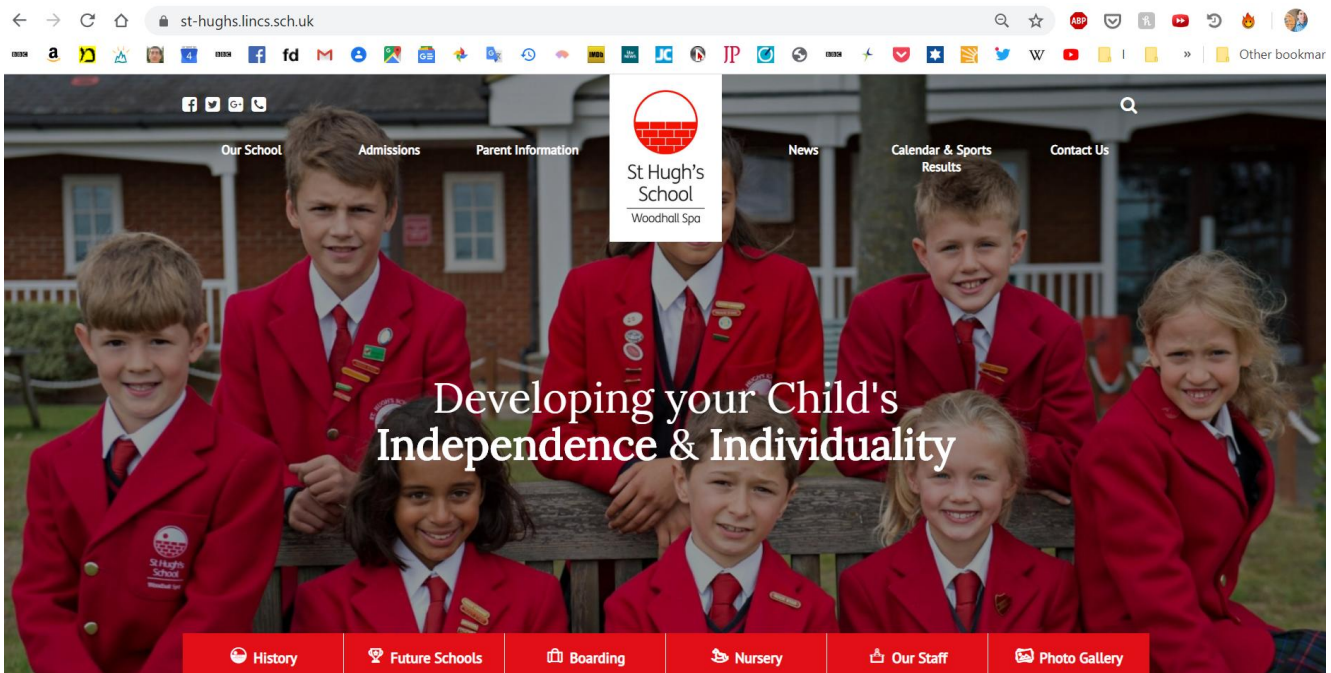


<https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-first-temple-era-judah-another-massive-temple-was-in-use-outside-jerusalem/>

In the Comment section below the Times of Israel online article, someone had written a post along the lines of "Too little, too late". That, to me, was very unfair, so I added this comment:

The headmaster was new to the school having only joined in September. Yet within a day of my letter he had obtained agreement from the School governors and confirmed the decision to change the badge. One has to give considerable credit for that. Although one might have wished for a complete redesign that left no trace of the original, at least the removal of the ball breaks the connection to the "Little St Hugh" myth, allowing the school name to now be only associated with the other – legitimate – St Hugh (a completely different, adult, historical figure).

I have looked at the School website today, and this is its Home Page now:



I have written to the Headmaster, again expressing my thanks to him and to the School Governors.

07-02-20

On a lighter note:

A friend asked me which eight songs I would take to a desert island. A list of the music and artists that I enjoy would be very long and probably similar to the corresponding list for most of my contemporaries. So I thought it would be more interesting to provide a list of my musical "crushes" over the last decade.

There have been several minor crushes in the last couple of years: Duffy (2018), Circ (2018), Avicii (2018), Queen (2018/19), Mark Knopfler and Dire Straits (2018/19), Anastasia (2019).

My big 'flings' in recent years have been Eva Cassidy (2011), Passenger (2017) and Adrian Von Ziegler (2019). A common factor amongst my major flings is that they are all such nice people. I do find that enhances my appreciation of their work.

I discovered Adrian Von Ziegler in my search for pleasant and relaxing music to play while I performed tedious physiotherapy exercises for my broken arm. And if I still needed to do those exercises on my desert island, Adrian von Ziegler would be my number one choice.

07-02-20

On a lighter note still:

The joys of Hebrew (continued)

I found out a few days ago that the word for "pesticides" is the same word as the word for "commandments" (as in the Ten Commandments): הדברות. Rhetorical and satirical question: Is there a connection between a commandment and a pesticide?

Another friend commented: "Different vocalization. t's nt sy t rd wht's wrttn f thr r n vwls".

12-02-20

Today is exactly six months since I sprinted for a bus, fell splat on the pavement, and split my humerus into two pieces. So here is the six-monthly report:

The best news is that pain is no longer significantly impinging on my quality of life. But I can still only sleep on the "good side" and my left arm cannot comfortably support a heavy duvet, so it must lay above the bulk of my copious winter night-time covering.

My range of left arm movement plateaued after about eight weeks, without much subsequent improvement. In most directions it is at about eighty percent of the range of my right arm, and adequate for everyday purposes. But it is extremely limited behind my back.

I do my exercises every day, mixing and matching the different ones I have been shown by the four physiotherapists I have seen in England and Israel. With the lights off and Adrian Von Ziegler music playing, it doubles as a relaxation session.

My DEXA bone density scan showed that I have osteoporosis, to add to the anaemia that I learned of soon after moving to Israel. But, at my age, I guess news like that comes with the territory.

But yesterday marked a different and happier milestone: I learned that on February 25 I should receive the keys to my new flat!

16-03-20

Today was definitely an Israeli day. I had two appointments in the diary: the first, at 9 a.m., for a fitter to come from Ikea to assemble the cabinets that I bought last week; the second a "shoulder club" physiotherapy appointment at 5 p.m.

At 10:50 a.m., when Mr Ikea had not arrived, I rang customer services, who put me through to the fitter himself. This triggered a repeating loop that seemingly lacked a limiting condition:

/start loop

Fitter: "I rang you twelve times yesterday. Why you no answer?"

Brian: "I had no reception on my phone all day. I did not receive any calls. But I had an appointment. I had paid in advance. I had not cancelled. An appointment is an appointment."

/body of loop

Fitter: <raise decibel level> "But I rang you twelve times yesterday. Why you no answer?"

Brian: <likewise raise decibel level> "I have already told you. I had no reception on my phone all day. I did not receive any calls. But I had an appointment. I had paid in advance. I had not cancelled. An appointment is an appointment."

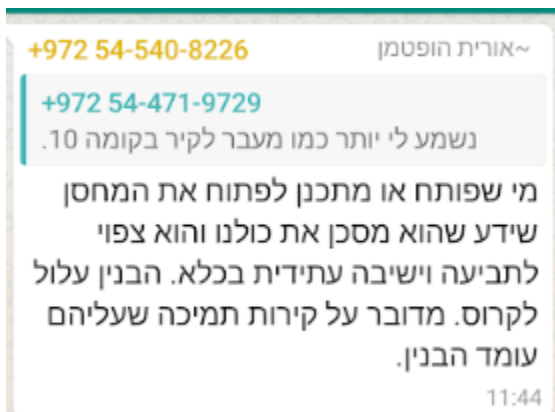
< Return to /body of loop >.

After about ten iterations, Fitter broke out of the loop and said "You want I come in one hour? You be there in one hour?" And so he came, actually within twenty minutes.

Which led to the next problem: the neighbours. Straight away a neighbour on the same floor came round, raising Cain. Thankfully I was largely able to leave her to have a true Israeli yelling match with the fitter. But here is a choice specimen taken from the several posts on the subject on the Whatsapp group for the new buildings:

Post

Translation



Anyone who opens or plans to open the store room (adjacent to the apartment) knows he is endangering us all and is likely to be prosecuted and face future jail time. The building may collapse. These are the support walls on which the building stands.

to which my response was

+972 54-540-8226

מי שפותח או מתכנן לפתוח את המחסן שידע
שהוא מסכן את כולנו והוא צפוי לתביעה
וישיבה עתידית בכלל. הבנין עלול לקרוס. מד...

הרעש מבנין 13, קומה 10 הוא בדירה
שלי. זה האיש מ-איקאה שמרכיב ארונות.
אני מתנצל שהפרעתי לכם, אבל זה לא
יהיה הרבה יותר זמן.
לא לו מכם שחוששים שהבנין יקרוס,
ושתצטרכו לבקר את השכן שלכם בכלל,
הקידוח הוא על ארונות, ולא נניח אצבע
על הקירות.

13:02 ✓

The noise is mine. It is the man from Ikea who is putting together some cupboards. I am sorry that this disturbs you, but it won't be for much longer.

To those of you who are concerned that the building will collapse and you will be required to visit your neighbour in jail, the drilling is on cupboards and not a finger will touch the walls.

In later posts I was forced to say that the drilling in the building was no longer mine and, as with Richard Nixon in 1972, "you won't have me to kick around any more". I was also induced to point out that several of the entries in recent days and weeks on the group have been requests for recommendations for builders and handymen, so any expectations of monastic silence are probably going to be dashed. I did refer to my sin in calling in Ikea, but stopped short of saying, "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone".

In some ways it was a welcome relief to get out for the half-hour walk to the shoulder group, but on arrival I was told that the group had been cancelled. "We rang up everybody yesterday!". It was a mistake, I was told, that the only SMS I received from the health provider, actually this morning, was to remind me of my appointment on Thursday. All the more of a mistake given that the clinic is closed for at least a month.

Finally, on arriving back at my AirBnB - thankfully I am now in the last three days here - I was terrorised by the hosts' new dog, and couldn't enter the property for five or ten minutes until the owner came out to subdue it.

All in all, an Israeli day.

21-03-20

The age of Corona virus begins.

It is now mandatory to stay indoors, other than for a few specified reasons including buying groceries, visits to the pharmacy or for medical treatment. Short local walks only are allowed. We all feel pretty much under house arrest.

Three evenings ago I moved into my new apartment. The previous day my shipment from England had arrived, and the following day my son-in-law David brought around much of the stuff I had accumulated last year in Israel, which had been sitting in his storeroom. So since then I've been frantically trying to create order out of chaos, which certainly takes the mind off of Corona virus temporarily.

24-03-20

I am taking things one day at a time; each day is different. Last week I had various early starts for deliveries (washing machine, tumble dryer, dishwasher). Yesterday, apart from a brief sleep in the early morning, I stayed up all night to go for the "60+ only" session at the supermarket, from 7 – 9 AM. It was a mistake that I will not make again. It was extremely crowded, no-one was keeping their distance, and I was in the distinct minority of people not wearing masks. I felt vulnerable. If I do physically go to the supermarket again during this crisis, it will be just before the 10 PM close, or I will venture further afield for an all-night branch.

But the spinoff was that I was up to see dawn breaking and I was able to take a reasonably brisk (though too short) walk in very pleasant sunshine at 6 AM. Another spinoff was that today I slept for 9-plus hours straight.

A significant chunk of my day, on most days, is spent working through the "Whatsapp" group for my new building and its identical twin next door. Each building has 106 flats, although a fair proportion are as yet unsold. There are hundreds of Whatsapp messages each day, all in Hebrew, and I find it very important to work through them to keep up with what is going on. It also gives me very useful Hebrew practice.

I'm somewhat limited in furniture at the moment, but am making prolific use of the packing boxes from my shipment from the UK. I have one table formed from three of them, a workstation from four of them, and several others being utilised as ottomans or stands. But in some ways I have been extremely lucky with my timing - up to 7 days ago I was living below ground, whereas now I have a spacious balcony with a panoramic view to the south.

31-03-20

All shops are now closed by government regulation, other than food suppliers and pharmacies. We are restricted to a 100 metre radius of our home, unless we are venturing for food shopping or to collect prescriptions. When I ventured out this afternoon, it felt as if I had stepped into a ghost town. With the building sites around me uncannily quiet, but the warm breeze stirring up the sand, one almost expected the "Fistfull of Dollars" theme to start up and Clint Eastwood to emerge into the foreground.

I have now been living in my new flat for almost a fortnight. A lot of my shipment from England, and the stuff accumulated last year in Israel, remains in boxes and bags, because I do not have the shelves and cupboards to accommodate them, and will not until this lockdown is over. There are many other challenges to do with lack of usable hot water (the tank being in the boiler room some distance away from the flat), and needing to buy most white goods and bathroom fittings.

What with all of this, up until a couple of days ago, rather than feeling bored, I was feeling swamped by so much needing to be done. But in the last couple of days, a feeling of tiredness, especially muscular, has overtaken me. A good part of this must be the effect of the confinement at home.

Meanwhile Jessica is coping very well, with both children at home all the time, and now into her final month of pregnancy. I speak to them through WhatsApp, and Tzviya remains happy that she is not going to her kindergarten. Lyn, in London, is of course not enjoying things. She tries to be a support to all the local sufferers of Parkinson's, and the news she hears isn't good.

05-04-20



Queue to enter the supermarket

I arrived half an hour before closing to avoid the crowds. Strange times we are living through.

25-04-20

The leash has now been loosened to the extent that one can move up to 500 metres away from home so long as it is by means of a sporting activity. But David tells me that, as a senior citizen, I remain under house arrest. Although I Whatsapp Jessica, David, Tzviya and Amit almost every day, I haven't seen them in the flesh for virtually two months.

23-05-20

One month on from my last update, and several happy events and milestones have occurred. First and foremost, Jessica has given birth to Ya'ara Adina, a baby sister for Tzviya and Amit. Jessica wrote and spoke very movingly about the choice of names: Ya'ara meaning 'honeysuckle' or 'honeycomb', and Adina meaning 'gentle' or 'refined'. Adina was chosen to remember Ada, who lived with my parents from 1954 until the end of 2010 and epitomised the attributes captured in the name. The start of Jessica's labour was the event that plucked me out of lockdown isolation and into two and a half days of heavy-duty babysitting - thankfully everything went well.

During the fortnight previous to the birth, I wrote a full-page article for the JC on the Jewish History of the London Marathon. It was published for the weekend during which this year's event SHOULD have taken place. It was an enjoyable exercise, although it will probably be unrewarded financially, given that the Jewish Chronicle is currently in receivership.

Coinciding with the nine months' anniversary of my broken arm, I had my first physiotherapy appointment since lockdown, and was discharged; I am now officially healed!

Israel has now come out of lockdown to a very considerable extent, though the wearing of masks out of doors is mandatory. I travelled on a bus for the first time two days ago, and was very pleased that the journeys were uncrowded. I have now resumed Friday night meals with the family, and likewise they pop round to me.

01-08-20

Today is the second anniversary of my "Aliyah" – my becoming an Israeli citizen.

At the time of my first anniversary, I was heavily engaged in preparing for my move back to London, where my task was to sell/donate/transport my possessions and to sell my flat. So it was not a time to sit back and take stock.

I am in a very different situation now, one year further on. My new flat is still a work in progress, but bit by bit it is becoming very comfortable and satisfying. Every week my previous landlord, Gideon, visits for one and a half hours so that I can teach him English and he can teach me Hebrew. Every Friday evening I eat with David, Jessica and their three children (Ya'ara is now three months old), each Shabbat afternoon they come round to visit me, and once a week I look after the two older children for a few hours. All this is thanks to us living within a ten minutes' walk from each other. On the other hand, due to the corona crisis (as it is known here – "corona" trips off the Hebrew tongue much better than "Covid-19") I have not been able to visit my brothers in Jerusalem for six months.

This second year has also been a year of recovery from my upper arm fracture. I have made an almost-full recovery; certainly the arm does not trouble me in normal daily living. I am forever grateful for the care (mainly physio) received in London and Israel; and for the music of Adrian von Ziegler in making my daily exercise sessions relaxing and enjoyable.

One of the motivating factors of moving to Israel was to put myself in a position where I would learn Modern Hebrew. I wistfully wondered whether I would learn it effortlessly like a child acquires language. There is no point in putting myself down, but let's just say that I am not a natural linguist. My brain is certainly not as retentive as it was fifty years ago. I am grateful for all the classical Hebrew that I learned in my teens because that knowledge is definitely the main hook I utilise in trying to catch and keep hold of new words.

Life in Israel continues to confound from time to time. The postal service is highly unreliable, especially internationally. Exercise bands that I ordered from abroad had not arrived by the time the three months' delivery window had expired, and the price I paid was refunded, only for the bands to arrive the following day. The banking system is almost ante-deluvian. This is well illustrated by my recent desire to have a cheque book for my new bank account, which was occasioned by my changing bank branch on moving to my new apartment. To request the cheque book entailed booking an appointment with a bank clerk and

paying for that appointment. Unsurprisingly (other than to people who have experienced banking in other countries) one has to pay for the cheque book; and one has to pay for the bank appointment to pick the cheque book up. If one wishes to actually write cheques, again unsurprisingly (caveat as previously) one pays an item charge for each cheque. In other words, to actually use cheques, one pays four times over. Ah well, in Israel, one takes the rough with the smooth.

Do I feel Israeli? No. Language difficulties are a significant barrier to feeling comfortable and integrated in the public space. So much of the time I have to respond to questions with "I don't know, sorry". I feel a little bit like an interplanetary explorer, stepping his way through an alien environment, protected not by a space suit but by my own sense of separateness, and my life supported not by an oxygen tank but by Google Translate on my phone. My response to this feeling of disconnectedness is to simply take things day by day – as I suppose people are doing around the world at this time. And I have felt different all my life anyway, and needed to be different to survive.

Another small element of my motivation was to "do something out-of-the-ordinary". I had always looked on with some awe at people who did things like "renting out their house for a few years to go and live abroad". When people expressed it in just a few words like that, it gave the impression that, to them, it was relatively straightforward and natural. And yet to me it sounded way beyond my comfort zone. Well, now I can tick those things off on my bucket list. My life has not been boring.

In summary, I passed my first anniversary during a period of movement, uncertainty and change. Today, on my second anniversary, I feel I have arrived. It is indeed the end of a chapter.