

Yerushalayim: The First Twenty Four Hours

Wow. After over twenty-four hours on the road, we found ourselves tearing Kriyah in the Old City.

We had kept our eyes downcast during the drive in, so as not to look at the Old City walls, since our Kriyah shirts were inaccessible. After roaming through the Old City in a circle with four rolling — or rather, not rolling — bags, their wheels noisily meeting the cobblestones, and more bags slung over our shoulders, we discovered just how fallible Google Maps can be. Nothing but the help of a real local — a Jew awake at 2:00 a.m., whom we enlisted — would suffice.

So we dragged all those bags up the circular steps to our charming summer sublet, donned our Kriyah shirts, and headed down to the Kotel.

At the end of the walkway from Jaffa Gate to the Kotel through the shuk, there is an open gate that allows non-Jews to enter the Temple Mount. Through it, you can see the ground level of holy terrain, where Jews were once permitted to walk — though only in holiness — beyond which stood the Bais Hamikdosh. I began tearing Kriyah while looking through the gate, albeit from a distance, and then proceeded to the Kotel.

A city employee was sweeping a mound of papers: the fallen, heartfelt supplications that had been placed by the hands of the brokenhearted into the crevices of the Kotel. It was a powerful image, though I have not yet processed what it means.

At nearly 3:00 a.m., I was amazed at the number of women there — and at the number of real tears. Not like the ones I try to squeeze out of my eyes as I attempt to conjure a feeling of mourning for our lost Bais Hamikdosh and the exiled Shechinah. At best, I am the Memorex. They are the real deal.

A woman approached and reminded me that the inner section, the area opposite the Holy of Holies, is open to women from 3:00 to 9:00 a.m. and was now accessible. Two women were already there when I arrived. But later, when I left the area and passed by the indoor women's section above the men's tunnel shul, I was amazed to see women lining up for coffee, some saying blessings out loud.

I am still puzzled, because the time was around 3:30 a.m., but the digital information board listed Alos Hashachar at 3:48? and Netz not until after 5:00. But they were busy and I was tired, so the issue still needs to be resolved.

As I climbed back up the steps, I pondered the question: How many of these women are regulars? How many come only periodically? How many had never

Yerushalayim: The First Twenty Four Hours

been there before? It is the imponderable conundrum I think about when I join the throngs on Friday night: Am I a tourist, or the tour attraction?

Outside at the Kotel, I had seen a woman who has been collecting tzedakah there for the last thirty-seven years, dozing in a plastic chair inches from the Wall. I recognized her telltale crocheted net snood from the back, and when I saw her jerk awake, I confirmed that it was she. I gave her money and withdrew some blessings from her.

When does she go home and change? She did not have the odor or shabbiness of a homeless person.

I concluded: At three in the morning, no one goes to the Kotel because it is "the place to be."

I had planned to let my body sleep in, but I awoke earlier and more refreshed than expected. This morning was my nephew Yitzchak Brander's induction ceremony at Givaat HaTachmoshet, Ammunition Hill. Yitzchak is the youngest son of Kenny and Ruchie Brander.

I decided to brave public transportation. I grabbed my RavKav, hat, water, and Advil, (just in case) and joined the ceremony.

Seeing the crowd gathered from all walks of life was extraordinary. There were a number of large chareidi families in matching support T-shirts, noticeable in clusters throughout the area. Many, many families had custom made t-shirts, with private jokes, and words of support, all demonstrating how proud they were of their graduates from paratrooper training.

The audience was filled with mixed emotions. The moving ceremony highlighted the recognition of an incredible accomplishment, while remaining mindful of the danger these young men face.

Extraordinarily, my sister-in-law Batya from New Jersey found this ceremony listed on the itinerary for today of the Adult Birthright program she is on. So a busload of suburban New Jersey moms proudly posed with my nephew, "Yitzchak the Chayal," and as a bonus, I got to see my sister-in-law as well. Amazing HP moment!

After the lovely family reunion, I sought out Hadar Rothstein and his son Yehudah, who graduated as well. Yehudah looked cool and composed, in spite of the forty-kilometer hike they had taken through the night while carrying forty percent of their body weight on their backs. It was a proud moment.

Yerushalayim: The First Twenty Four Hours

Before leaving, I zigzagged through the reinforced trenches — so peaceful now, yet such a stark reminder of the struggle and loss that accompanied the reclaiming of half of Yerushalayim, including the Old City and the Kotel, which had been lost in 1948.

On a last-minute whim, I called Golde Goldberg, since I knew she lived only a few minutes' walk away. Hashem had gifted us with a mild and pleasant summer day — Baruch Hashem for all the attendees sitting in the hot sun that whole morning — and I was happy to be out and about.

Golde answered immediately and Baruch Hashem we were able to have a delightful visit in the front garden of Neve Amit in Ramat Eshkol. Golde's ball of positive energy uplifting me, neither of us stopped talking and smiling for 40 minutes straight.

Next, I headed to Geula to purchase a few items and experienced a first.

My purchase of a charging cable was rejected when I pulled my credit card out of the wallet attached to the case of my Motorola Android phone. Sheepishly, the store owner explained, "I am not allowed to sell to anyone whose phone isn't a kosher phone."

I was actually impressed with the consistency and conviction. Yet I promptly hid the phone in my backpack, holding on to the credit card lest I encounter the problem again.

Later, after buying Shabbos food, I headed back to the Old City to meet my husband for the celebratory dinner for Yitzchak.

Yitzchak had actually been injured during his first round of basic training. He took a desk job for the three months of rehab, and then heroically joined a new cohort midstream in order to complete paratrooper training. Impressive and rare on many fronts — most would abandon further training after an injury of that magnitude — Yitzchak finished with flying colors.

May Hashem watch over Chaim Yitzchak Amichai ben Sara Rochel Brander and Yehudah ben Rivka Rothstein, along with their entire plugot, as they heroically go forth to defend the Jewish People.

Shabbat Shalom.

Batyah Brander

Eretz Yisrael - Late Night Shmoozing at the Kotel

A Gutten Erev Shabbos from Yerushalayim!

On the pre-3rd leg (LA-SFO-FRA-TLV - quicker than a boat/ slower than ELAL) of our sojourn to EY, we stopped in Frankfurt. After ascertaining that neither my computer nor our beef jerky contained lethal explosives (two separate police visits!) we entered the Tel Aviv quarantine gate - the "special" gate reminding us that Israel is always different. It is not a critique - it is a simple point of fact. There is always heightened security for flights going to Eretz Yisrael - whether it's El Al or any other airline. Har Sinai - implies *asher bachar banu mikol ha'amim* - and *yorda sina l'olam* (Shabbos 89) - we are hated because we are chosen and special. Hard stop

Chasdei Hashem, we were able to put a mincha minyan together (with the requisite tachanun controversy - chasidim ran the minyan - can you guess how they opined?). Ten Jews who basically don't know each other - a yid from Bnei Brak, a ponytailed Jew from Berkeley, a few LA chevra, a Yerushalmi from Moshav Gimzo and we're in business! [There was actually a 2nd minyan that formed shortly thereafter.] I'll admit there is something deeply ironic and satisfying about the German security and Lufthansa staff serving Jews while we davened in a blood-soaked land 81 years after; one hears whispers of *nitzchuni banai* - *my children have won again and again*.

After landing in EY in the late 11pm hour, it was beautiful to see [for the first time in a long while] a packed Ben Gurion airport. The border control line was lengthy and slow - thus we did not get into a taxi until 1am. By the time we entered the Old City, deposited our bags, walked to the kotel, *tore keriyah* - Batyah and I were hovering close to 3am.

My maariv minyan chances looked bleaker than the Knicks winning a championship.

Even the (Amshinover!) Chassidim had davened. Everyone I asked gave me an Israeli tsk or a hand motion moving forward to backward - indicating they had davened a while ago. Special Jews were already setting up their shacharis minyan by moving the chairs and laying rugs for the kohanim to duchen. At 3:01am, it was just me - somewhat emboldened by a few people who said, there is still a chance. Another fellow showed up - and now we were a minyan of two. Soon, three chevra with ear piercings and halachically inappropriate haircuts make their way to the kotel - I ask: *have you davened yet?* They had not [I am fairly certain had I asked them if they had davened shacharis or mincha, the answer would have been the same] - but they were willing and knew how to daven.

Eretz Yisrael - Late Night Shmoozing at the Kotel

Two minutes later, a few Chassidim came and our 3:06am minyan was happening Bchasdei Hashem! Two hour later I had the privilege to daven neitz in the churva shul. Can't remember if I have ever had such a short break between maariv and shacharis.

Who were these three chevra? - Shalev, Nachman and Yishai had recently returned from their post army trip. We did not have a deep dive conversation, yet it felt warm and familiar - maybe like family. They were traveling from Ohr Akiva - an hour and a half commute - to pray at the Kotel. Maariv was not in their plans. After ma'ariv, they resumed their plans, which was to talk to Hashem - in their own nusach. Rambam (Tefilla, 1:3, 4,10) talks about not letting the set nature of prayer impede on real connection and communication with Hashem. One yid helping another yid to talk to Hashem. Who knows why these chevra came? Maybe they were davening for friends, family or maybe for themselves. *Something inside of them said it was worth a three hour round trip to speak to Tatty to daven.* I yearn to do that as well. It feels very real.

We are blessed to be here. It takes me time to feel it. Frankfurt to the Kotel felt like going from formal kalt-keit to family warmth. Our nephew, Yitzchak Brander and Yehuda Rothstein graduated basic training today and my wife went to be *mechabeid* their tremendous mesirus nefesh. She also visited our good friend Golde Goldberg - who is doing wonderfully well.

A Gutten Shabbos from Eretz Yisrael

Bvracha
The Branders