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Welcome to Young Israel of Woodmere presents: "I on Israel". The following has been conceived as a "Shul-based Blog", for lack of a better term. The articles we present will cover subjects such as: lesser known Israeli personalities, travel recommendations for both adults and children, holiday related events, and a review of Israeli lifestyle in all its manifestations, i.e. religious, secular, civilian, military, political and social.

Most often our focus about Israel, resides around the familiar topics of Israeli versus Arab, Chareidi versus Dati Leumi versus Secular, and the Inbal versus the Citadel. I would like to promote Israel advocacy in our community thru a much simpler and more enjoyable prism. We should define Israel thru the events that distinguish Israel from any other location, and the people who make the country unique. The ability to say to our friends and co-workers, "this is what is really happening in Israel!" will be far more influential than any political discussion of the country's pros and cons.

I have decided to call the newsletter, "I on Israel".

- 1) most articles will be written from a personal perspective**
- 2) the similarity between "I" and "eye"**
- 3) the combination of the words "I on" to "ion", originally coined from the Greek "to go"**

I hope that additional Young Israel of Woodmere members will contribute to future newsletters, or will suggest to their friends or relatives, especially those who are living in Israel, to write an article for this blog. We will also be soliciting some guest writers, or articles that have appeared in limited release in other publications. There will be no time frame for the release of this email newsletter, and we will limit its content to between 4 or 5 posts per newsletter. If you wish to contribute please contact, joelbryk@gmail.com. Thank you for reading.

It is very difficult for Jews living in the diaspora to fulfill the commandment of "settling the land of Israel". Some of us visit Israel, some of us own apartments in Israel, and most of us support Israel financially. But all of that is not enough.

There is another way to get closer to Israel and that is by studying about the country. When we visit we often stay in a nice hotel in Jerusalem or in some of the other cities in the country. We visit museums, we shop in the stores, and we hire tour guides. We worry about the men and women who serve in the IDF. Some of our kids have served in the IDF or done National Service We read Israeli newspapers in English and Hebrew.

But most of us do not really know the country. We are not familiar with the realities of Israeli society. We do not know the social issues facing different groups of the population. We are not aware of many of the issues related to the IDF. There is so much to know that we cannot possibly know as citizens of another country.

We also must know that Israel is much more to Israel than just Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria. There are Jews from cultures all over the world. There are new immigrants and veteran citizens. There is the Negev, the Golan, and the Galil. There are Israeli Arabs, Bedouin, Druse, and Palestinians. There is so much happening in this melting pot of so many different people from so many different cultures

I want to give a lot of credit to Dr Joel Bryk, Glenn Schoenfeld, and Eli Dworetsky for taking upon themselves a new initiative on behalf of our congregation. This newsletter which is in its infancy stage is an effort to make us all aware of much about Israel that we do not know. It will take us on a trip into Israeli society and into the multifaceted complexities of Israel. It will also assist us to make future trips more meaningful. It will enable us to meet some of the interesting citizens of the state of Israel.

We hope you enjoy it and we look forward to suggestions and comments to make it better and more informative.

Rabbi Hershel Billet

Often when speaking of shul projects connected to Israel, one thinks of Israel Advocacy programs or missions to Israel. While both are vital ways to support the Jewish state, with the publishing of this Israel newsletter, our shul seeks a new horizon in fostering our connection with Israel by exposing our membership to the current trends, events and culture of contemporary Israeli society.

It is interesting to note that when Moshe acquiesced to the request of the two tribes of Reuven and Gad in settling the land on the Trans Jordan, he also placed half the tribe of Menashe on the other side of Israel. While the tribe of Menashe never petitioned for the land, Moshe divided this particular tribe in two, settling part of them in Israel and the other on the Trans Jordan.

I believe the answer of the Sifsei Kohen not only provides an answer to Moshe's action, but also hints to one of the goals of this new shul initiative. With two tribes requesting to be settled outside the land of Israel, Moshe was stricken with great concern. Perhaps over time, these two groups would grow separate from each other leading to a complete division between them. To prevent such a consequence, Moshe split one tribe into two, placing each on the opposite sides of the Jordan in order to preserve a sense of Jewish Unity and peoplehood.

For us, this initiative seeks to deepen our relationship to Israel by fostering a greater awareness of life in Israel. Please consider joining this effort to grow our ongoing connection with our brothers and sisters in Israel.

Rabbi Shalom Axelrod

An Interview with Evelyn Gordon by Glenn Schoenfeld

If you are like me, over the years you have identified certain writers, commentators and analysts whose insight you value and whose judgment you trust to help you understand developments in Israel and the Middle East. One of my personal favorites is **Evelyn Gordon**, formerly a reporter and columnist at the Jerusalem Post, now a blogger for Commentary Magazine and contributor to Mosaic Magazine. Evelyn graciously agreed to be interviewed for the inaugural edition of the YIW Presents: I on Israel Newsletter. Following are notes from our interview, in which she discusses her road to making Aliyah, how she became a columnist/blogger, and what she believes are the most pressing issues facing Israel internally and in its international relations.



Evelyn grew up in Rochester, New York. As she relates, Judaism was a big part of her family life, Israel less so. Her path to Israel began in earnest during college. She attended one of the few universities that at the time had a kosher dining room. The facility served as a focal point for Jewish students on campus, who, in addition to eating there, used it as a venue for giving student-led shiurim. Evelyn attended these shiurim regularly. In addition, she had a good friend who, as Evelyn described it, was on a constant mission to convince other Jews that they all belonged in Israel. After graduating with a degree in electrical engineering in 1987, Evelyn decided to take a year off and study in Israel, which she spent in Jerusalem, learning at Bruria.

At the end of her year of study, Evelyn decided to stay in Israel. Unfortunately, she was unable to find a job as an engineer (this was during the period before the rapid growth of Israel's high tech sector). The Lavi aircraft program had just ended and the market was flooded with experienced engineers. To make matters worse, her degree from a premier US university meant nothing to Israeli employers at the time. (As Evelyn explained, the only US college Israelis knew about was Harvard). It got so bad, that when she applied for a position with the Israeli phone company Bezek, they requested that she get a certificate from the Education Ministry substantiating that her alma mater, Princeton, was a legitimate university.

Unable to find an engineering job, she worked for two years at a small publishing house, doing editing and proofreading. She was then hired by the Jerusalem Post, where she got off to an inauspicious start. When she reported for work two weeks after being hired, she learned that the person who had hired her had quit in the interim. Moreover, none of the remaining staff knew what Evelyn had been hired for. Acknowledging, however, that they owed her a job (she had quit her prior job to make the move), she was given a variety of odd assignments until a job opened for an economics reporter covering the Histadrut labor federation. At the time, this was considered a sleepy posting, as not much ever happened at the Histadrut. Unbeknownst to all, the Histadrut would call a general strike just a few weeks later, throwing the country into turmoil. It turns out that Evelyn had inadvertently been thrown into the proverbial deep end and had to learn reporting skills on the fly and under pressure. Although unexpectedly stressful, Evelyn credits this experience with forcing her to become a good reporter in short order. Over time, in addition to economics, Evelyn's responsibilities at the Post expanded and she was tasked with covering the Knesset and the Supreme Court as well.

When Bibi Netanyahu was elected Prime Minister for the first time, he asked David Bar-Ilan, then Editor and Chief of the Jerusalem Post, to join his administration. Bar-Ilan merely took a leave of absence, as he was unsure whether he wanted to commit to the new government on a long-term basis. His leave, however, created an editorial void at the paper, as Bar-Ilan had been writing all the Post's editorials. In his absence, Evelyn was asked to join the roster of substitute editorial writers.

When she left her full time position at the Post, after 6 years, Evelyn was asked to write a weekly op-ed for the paper, which she did. Several years ago when a newspaper editor who admired her work moved to Commentary Magazine, he invited her to become a blogger at the magazine. She has been writing for Commentary ever since. In addition, she has been a featured writer at Mosaic Magazine (mosaicmagazine.com), founded in partnership with the Tikvah Fund (tikvahfund.org). Among Evelyn's many pieces that can be found on or linked to from the Mosaic website, in December of 2016, her extended-length article "Disorder in the Court," on how the Israeli Supreme Court unilaterally expanded its powers and weakened Israelis' trust in the rule of law, was featured as Mosaic's major monthly essay (<https://mosaicmagazine.com/essays/>). Evelyn's writing, including her blog posts in Commentary, can be found on her own website: evelyncgordon.com

Surprisingly, for a prolific writer, Evelyn admits that she doesn't like to write and needs to be motivated to so. When asked how she chooses her topics, she indicated that she writes about whatever is upsetting her the most at the moment.



When asked what was the most important thing American Jews should know about Israel, Evelyn responded that American Jews need to understand that Israel is a real country. Too many treat Israel as a fantasy whose primary purpose is to assist American Jews in fulfilling their ideas of the ideal Jewish country, and whose policy choices should be guided by how they will affect the comfort, acceptance and self-image of American Jews. In reality, Israel shares many of the same problems as other countries, including, among others, the challenge of sustaining economic growth (which Israel is currently doing well) and the effects of growing economic inequality. Israel also faces unique challenges, such as the integration of Haredi and Arab minorities and combatting terrorism. Evelyn said that it often disappoints American Jews that the economy (typically the number one issue for citizens throughout the developed world) is a more important issue for most Israelis than the peace process. For too many American Jews, if Israel isn't perfect, it has failed.

Evelyn also notes that there is a large gap between the way many American Jews and Israelis view the achievability of peace. She feels that large numbers of American Jews simply do not take into account events that have transpired since the Oslo accords, such as the Palestinian rejection of Barak's peace offer in 2000, or Olmert's peace offer of 2008, both of which involved returning almost all of Judaea and Samaria to the Palestinians. Or the fact that when Israel did evacuate territory, as in Lebanon and Gaza, these territories were used as terror bases. These events have changed Israeli opinion, but for much of diaspora Jewry it is as if these events never took place.

With respect to income inequality, Evelyn noted that the issue is important because Israel requires a high degree of social solidarity, given the challenges the country faces. Moreover, Israelis themselves say inequality matters. Although growing inequality is a problem throughout the Western world, and no country has yet come up with great solutions, Evelyn noted that a number of things can be done in Israel to ameliorate the problem:

First, the Israeli education system needs to be improved. In particular, poor towns and poor neighborhoods in wealthier areas need better schools, as the disparity in performance between rich and poor students is significant. As with other countries, the disparity is accentuated by the fact that richer families can afford to provide supplemental resources such as tutors. Ironically, Israel's high birth rate has created a shortage of teachers, as the growing student population keeps outstripping the supply of teachers. Moreover, the success of Israel's high tech industries has produced a shortage of math teachers, who have better economic opportunities in private sector than in education.

Second, Israel needs to put in place policies to better enable job mobility. On the positive side, health insurance is completely portable in Israel. On the downside, Israel has among the weakest unemployment insurance programs in the industrialized world – both in amount of money available and the duration of the assistance provided.

Third, Israel needs to beef up apprenticeship programs and vocational training. While there have been notable attempts in this regard (Evelyn mentioned the efforts of Israeli industrialist Stef Wertheimer in particular), they have yet to meet with widespread success.

Fourth, the Israeli high tech industry is focused on a model of start up and sell out. Few companies (Checkpoint is one notable exception) focus on long-term growth and development in Israel. More companies need to be encouraged to remain in Israel and grow, providing a wider base of employment opportunities.

Fifth, the poorest sectors (Israeli Arabs and Haredim) need to be better integrated. Evelyn is optimistic that Haredi integration is headed in a positive direction, but will still take time.

With respect to integration of Israeli Arabs, Evelyn noted that Israel can do a better job of getting them into the workforce and into higher paying jobs. (One obstacle she noted is that Arab women are stigmatized if they work outside their villages, although the stigma seems to be slowly eroding). Israel can also do better at providing transportation and other services. Ultimately, though, she is in favor of the position taken by George Deek, a Christian Arab Israeli diplomat, who advocates that Arabs preserve their own culture and religion while living as productive citizens within Israel. Evelyn further noted that most Israeli Arabs belong to moderate streams of Islam and are proud to be Israelis, recognizing that Israel is a very good place for Arabs to live. For those Israeli Arabs that dream of one day transforming Israel into an Arab state, as long as it remains an abstract, far off dream, she can live with that.



Evelyn identified judicial activism as one of the major domestic issues facing Israeli society. In expanding their power, Israeli courts are taking power away from the elected branches of government. This lessens the importance of the elected branches, which is bad for democracy. She also pointed out that expanding court power is bad for social cohesion. That is because courts tend to be zero-sum games with winners and losers. The elected branches, in contrast, often have to fashion compromises in order to get things done. Although compromise often leaves everyone at least a little unhappy, the process ameliorates stark win-lose outcomes and keeps citizens engaged in government.



With respect to foreign affairs, Evelyn is, not surprisingly, concerned with how the Palestinian issue affects Israel's image in the world. As she sees it, the challenge for Israel involves managing international pressure for a Palestinian State in the face of the practical impossibility of creating a viable, peaceable Palestinian state any time in the near future. She holds the Palestinians primarily responsible for the failure of the peace process. They are still unwilling to live in peace side by side with a Jewish state. They are unwilling to compromise. And they refuse or are unable to prevent evacuated territory from being used as bases for continued terror attacks. (For more on this subject, see Evelyn's extended-length article "The Two State Solution is a Stalemate. Here is What Israel Can Do to Prevail." Mosaic Magazine's monthly essay for September 2015. <https://mosaicmagazine.com/essay/2015/09/the-two-state-solution-is-in-stalemate-what-can-israel-do-to-prevail/>)

In parting, Evelyn emphasized that, contrary to much of world opinion, by any measure Israel is one of the best countries in the world. It is a thriving democracy. In terms of such fundamental classic liberal ideas as protection of minority rights and freedom of religion, while not perfect, Israel nonetheless excels. In the 30 years that Evelyn has lived there, the country has made tremendous, visible progress and continues to do so. She noted that to characterize Israel as a racist, fascist country is simply insane.

As noted previously, Evelyn's writing can be found, among other places, at Commentary (commentarymagazine.com), Mosaic (mosaicmagazine.com) and at evelyncgordon.com. I would like to thank Evelyn for her willingness to be interviewed, and look forward to continuing to read her cogent, articulate writing on behalf of Israel and world Jewry for many years to come.

Dry Bones



This year Tu B'Shvat fell on Shabbat February 11th. The first Mishnah in the Tractate of Rosh Hashana, teaches that Tu B'Shvat is the new year for trees. By Tu B'Shvat, the majority of the winter rains have already fallen in Eretz Yisrael, the sap is rising, and the new fruits are beginning to form. When the Torah uses the phrase in Parshat Shoftim, "Ki ha'adam etz hasadeh", "is the tree of the field a man", does it mean that we are to be compared to trees. If so, are we alone in the field, or lost in the woods. Please read the following original parable, to ponder that thought.

In truth, two roads did not diverge in a yellow wood. Just one road, just one traveler. Traveled or less traveled was immaterial, yet there is something that undoubtedly made all the difference. I sojourned down the road of life aware of my talents, capabilities, gifts, and possibilities unlocking great prosperity of purpose. I found wealth in the sense that every day became charged with meaning. My priorities were ranked appropriately in order to maximize all my potential. Even when significant growth was not overwhelmingly apparent, I struggled to remember that true potential was truly extant. Just like the sagely tree stands patiently throughout the winter weathering the elements that come its way, so too I waited unwearingly for my buds to blossom. I knew that I could not give up,

for there were too many unborn fruits of my labor that had yet to develop. And finally, when I witnessed new growth emerging from the apparent lifeless tree, I regained my focus along with my hope. And that has made all the difference.

from Rav Binyomin Hutt, Yeshivat Sha'alvim

Nachal Alexander by Joel Bryk

Walking Derech Ha'avot, climbing Masada, trekking thru the Negev, all sound familiar to travelers in Israel. The journey is related to an ancient and historical connection to the land, and the path. Recently, I discovered a more accessible byway, with an added attraction, the Alexander River Trail, and the soft-shelled turtles that inhabit the riverbank.



Nachal Alexander is a river that flows from the western side of the Shomron mountains to the Mediterranean Sea north of Netanya. The river runs 32 kilometers through the area known as Emek Hefer, past kibbutzim and moshavim, Italy Park, the River Trail, Water Turtle Park, the Samra Ruin, and the Alexander River Estuary.

The main attraction for children, are the soft-shelled turtles. The beginning of this journey, will start in the parking area near the the Turtle Bridge, "Gesher Hatzabim". From route 4 turn west at Tzomet Hefer, to the direction of Kfar Vitkin, and after about 1.2 miles, before the railroad crossing, turn north (right) to a gravel road. Follow the signposts on the river bank until the Gesher Hatzabim parking area. The water turtle park is right near the bridge, and there is a wooden observation tower with views of the entire Hefer valley. By the river side, the turtles congregate, waiting for food from the many visitors. Although it is illegal to feed the "Tzabim", they are generally found to be munching on "Bamba", thrown to them by the visiting schoolchildren. Feel free to berate the tourists throwing food, as it is hazardous to the turtle's health.

The bridge was built in the 1930's by the settlers of Kfar Vitkin, and it is one of the only places in Israel where the soft-shelled turtles can be observed. They can grow to a length of 3 feet, and weight of 110 pounds. The turtle's origin is in the sweet water lakes of East Africa, and they feed on a diet of worms, fish, and small water animals. In 1991, an unusually heavy rainfall flooded the Nachal and about 200 turtles were washed into the

Mediterranean Sea, and died. Since 1995, the Alexander River Restoration Project, and the Keren Kayemet L'Yisrael, have spearheaded efforts by a dozen environmental organizations to rehabilitate the river. Clearing the sediment has widened and deepened the river, and the banks have been shored and restored. Areas of the riverbank have been covered with rocks, so that the turtles can sunbathe and certain parts of the riverbank have been fenced off, so that female turtles can lay their eggs undisturbed by humans and predators.



It's possible to spend hours on the walkway, or on the bridge watching the turtles. Often you see their elongated snouts protruding from the surface of the water, or their entire head, when they need a dose of air. Being cold-blooded creatures they have to soak up sun in order to stay healthy. You can often find them on slabs of rock with a special slant, that the JNF placed on the banks for the turtles pleasure. Pull yourself away and head for a refreshing riverside walk, across the bridge on a path called "shvil ha'nachal". In places the river foilage is thick, so that it

obscures a view of the water. At other points, you can approach the lower banks of the river, rest your feet in the water and encounter a lonesome turtle. Follow the Israel national trail signs (slashes of white-blue-orange paint) marking the path. Kids delight in spotting each sign, which can be painted on posts, rocks, and trees. The forests here were planted in the framework of fighting swamps and malaria, and this is considered the southern border of the Hadera Eucalyptus Forest.

A nice surprise at the beginning of the path is the Vitkin winery. There is a small tasting room, in the entrance to the winery. The first kosher wines of the Vitkin label were introduced in 2015, a Shmittah year, although the winery has been active since 2002. Vitkin is a family owned boutique winery with a broad range of varieties. The location of the vineyards range from the hills of Jerusalem to the Upper Galil. The kosher wines for the 2015 season dry whites and a rose, and can be tasted and purchased at the Visitor's Center. Remember that Shmittah produce, even manufactured under the heter mechirah, are considered hekdesch, and are to be completely consumed, and not removed from the land of Israel.

Follow the Israel trail westward, to Khirbet Samra (the Samra ruin), a 19th century mansion, perched on a hill overlooking the surrounding area. Abdullah Samra was the owner of many lands in the area, and after his passing the mansion was converted to an Ottoman



Police Station and customs post, to tax the watermelon export from the Abu Zbura harbor, which was located at the river's end. The JNF purchased the Samra lands in 1940. During springtime (Pesach trips), you can see blossoming of anemones, poppies and buttercup tulips on the top of the Samra hill. Down the hill, in the direction of Nachal Alexander, some rock caves can be seen. These are remnants of an ancient quarry. On a warm summer day the hill and ruin are the coolest areas on the horizon.

When you continue on the trail, you will walk under highway 9 the Haifa-Tel Aviv road. On the left, behind a lot is the entrance to Beit Yanai Beach. Head out to the beach to watch Nachal Alexander spill out into the sea. This is a quiet beach, considered one of the best in Israel. Many kite-surfers can be seen in the water as the beach is home to a nearby kite-surfing school. Transportation home can be arranged by bringing 2 cars, parking one by the beach, and the other by the Gesher, or retracing your steps once the journey is done.

You may be wondering, who is the Alexander, who's name the Nachal honors. Like most locales in Israel, there is a "Machloket". Some claim that it is named after the Hasmonean King, Alexander Jannaeus, who seized the land in conquest. The truth may be related to a more recent history. When the first pioneers came to Eretz Yisrael, they discovered that the river was called Ascander by the local Arabs, probably after Aixander Abu Zbura, the famous watermelon merchant that built the Abu Zbura harbor, on the estuary, by the Mediterranean. Ascander soon became Alexander, when the port closed, and trains started to be used for export the local produce, in the beginning of the 20th century.

The total walk time is under 2 hours, from the Turtle Bridge to the Mediterranean, even at a leisurely, kid-friendly pace. More than enough time to get back to Netanya for the rest of the day. Additional information can be found on the Keren Kayemet LeIsrael website, www.kkl-jnf.org

The Kashrut Condition by Joel Bryk



The following is not meant to diagnose the myriad of questions and problems that have arisen in the Israeli Kashrut industry. At best, it can be a brief introduction to the complexity of the current situation. All further discussion should be left in the hands of a competent professional.

In recent articles in the Israeli press, Moshe Dagan, the Director-General of Israel's Chief Rabbinate was quoted as saying that the Israeli kosher supervision system "needs fixing" and he was "attentive to the criticism". The current construct has led to a situation in which "every local regional Rabbinate has its own Kashrut policy.

MK Rachel Azaria (Kulanu) has submitted a bill that would render the Rabbinate a "Kashrut regulator" instead of a "Kashrut provider". That would allow the Rabbinate to provide licenses to private Kashrut providers, under unifying Jewish legal standards. Chief Ashkenazic Rabbi David Lau has established a committee that will present recommendations, and agrees that "there should be two standards, basic and mehadrin" as he said, "I'm sure everyone will go along with that".

The Hotam Torah Organization, has a plan which is also supported by Kosharot, a religious-Zionist Kashrut Advisory, which recommends three levels: regular, mehadrin, and something in between. Rabbi Moshe Katz of Kosharot, states that Israel is in need of a national kashrut company that will operate according to the guidelines, set by the Rabbinate, but the company will be responsible for employing the supervisors with clear criteria that will be available to the public.

While reading these articles, I thought that the current system does have standards and different levels, such as Rabbanut and Mehadrin, or private programs, like the many "Badatz" hechsherim. Well, not exactly.

First of all, according to the 1983 state kosher laws and the amendments added in 1988, kosher laws in Israel are more of a consumer protection, rather than a guarantee that the kosher food is at the level that the purchaser is truly seeking. The Rabbinate's concern is to provide items that can be considered kosher "lekula" (a lenient psak), so that most Israelis will attain a minimal level of observance.

The development of "mehadrin" by Rabbi Avraham Rubin of Rechovot, Rabbi Betzalel Zolty zt"l of Jerusalem, and others, was meant to create a higher standard of kashrut, and not to mean

“extra kosher”. It is important to note, that the Rabbinat of a city in Israel may have a designation of kashrut, for both Rabbanut and Rabbanut Mehadrin.

In Israel, the term 'Badatz' is often used to refer to the Badatz of the Edah HaChareidis; however, it is not the title of this group, and other batei din (rabbinical courts) use the title as well. It is often used in the context of hechsherim, most notably the Eida Haredit of Jerusalem, Agudat Yisrael, Shearit Yisrael, Chatam Sofer, Machzikei Hadas of Belz, and Rav Landau of Bnei Brak.

According to the “Orthodox Union Kosher Israel Guide”, many Anglos are bothered when they come to Israel. “What does it mean if a local Rabbinat certifies one product as kosher and another as mehadrin? If something is kosher then shouldn't it be 100% kosher?” In addition, mehadrin can mean something else from one local rabbinat to another.



So, what may be some of the differences between Mehadrin (and Rabbanut Mehadrin) and Rabbanut Hashgachot?

(the following are a top 10, from a number of sites on the internet)

- 1) Avoiding heter mechira during Shmitta.
- 2) Smaller scale separation of Trumah and Ma'asrot, as opposed to doing it at the wholesaler.
- 3) How much sifting of flour, and checking of fruits and vegetables is required to avoid bugs.
- 4) Avoiding imported products which have chalav stam, instead of the majority of Israeli dairy products which are chalav Yisrael.
- 5) Avoiding various forms of animal derived gelatin.
- 6) Salting the internal cavity of chicken, before splitting it open.
- 7) Increasing the number of hours that local mashgichim are present during food preparation.
- 8) Use of meat that is always considered Glatt, and has full time supervision.
- 9) Checking that hafrashos challah is always taken by a mashgiach, or a shomer Shabbat employee.

10) Assuring that all cooking is Bishul Yisrael; and not that a Jew lit the fire, and the cooking is done by a non-Jew.

So, is that it? Yes, No, Maybe.

As Rav Yaakov Ariel, the chief Rabbi of Ramat Gan and a leading posek of the religious-Zionist movement has been quoted as saying:

“The problem is that not everyone understands the issues involved and the meaning of Kashrut L’Mehadrin. Not every product that is labeled mehadrin is indeed so. And there is no need for every product to be mehadrin”.



The dilemma has now been compounded by additional kashrut developments. The Rabbanut of Jerusalem recently added a new level of kashrut, called “Kashrut Mehuderet”. This seems to be the in between level being sought by some organizations. The new level is only being offered to meat restaurants who will comply with the bishul Yisrael requirement. In addition, these establishments will be able to purchase meat from a greater number of sources, instead of the limitations placed on the mehadrin restaurants. Currently Rabbanut Mehadrin has only a small list of approved suppliers which are certified by the Jerusalem Rabbinate or some of the Badatz organizations.

There is also another private Hashgacha, that is attempting to compete with the Jerusalem Rabbinate. Called “Hashgacha Pratit”, and founded by Rabbi Aharon Leibowitz, Dean of Sulam Yaakov, a Yeshiva in Nachlaot, it is based on a cooperative effort between knowledgeable volunteers, largely women, and kitchen staff at participating restaurants, hotels, and cafes. Recently the Israel high court dealt a blow to this alternative kosher certification by ruling that “a business is prohibited from presenting its kashrut status in writing, whether by using the word kosher or not, unless it was given a kosher certificate by the body authorized by law to do

so". Meaning that that the only body that can certify a business as kosher is a Rabbinat, or an organization that has the prior agreement of the local Rabbinat.

According to Ricky Shapira-Rosenberg of the Israel Religious Action Center, an advocacy arm of the Reform movement, "the judgement will cause disproportionate harm to freedom of an occupation, and religious freedom of business owners, and of consumers".

As the Knesset Economics Committee now discusses the ramifications of the Chief Rabbinat's supervision over kashrut throughout Israel, we are left to ponder the problem with a final quote from Rabbi Moshe Katz of Kosharot:

"When Rav Kook established the Chief Rabbinat, one hundred years ago, it was something that was appropriate for that period, when there was a trusted rabbi in each place. There were also tens of thousands of Jews in the country, while today there are millions. The situation has totally changed, and therefore we all agree that the kashrut supervision must also be changed".

Dry Bones



DryBones.com

The following is a translation of an article about individuals in Yehuda and Shomron that appeared in a major Swedish newspaper “Svenska Dagbladet”. There are a few edits and corrections, however the attitude toward Israeli “settlers”, can clearly be understood thru the tone of the article. This has been reprinted with the permission of the people discussed below, and has been provided to our newsletter by OnelIsraelFund.org

New US government allows settlers hope: "Trump, Love Israel"

Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank have once again become a world focus. In December, they were condemned by the UN Security Council and also settler-friendly Donald Trump seems to have shifted slightly. But settler Vered Ben-Sa'adon is hopeful. Love Israel, she asks Trump.



The pizzeria is just about to open for the day, a man in a knitted kippah spreads out table cloths. Within the same shopping center is a children's clothing store, a large grocery store, a hardware store and post office. There is also a shoe store, a dentist, an optometrist, two health clinics and a school. It looks like a shopping center in an ordinary suburb, but we are in fact deep inside the occupied Palestinian West Bank, the Israeli settlement of Eli. Here, a thousand families live, most with four or more children.

According to Gedaliah Blum, who lived in Eli since 2008, the creation of shopping centers is the next phase of the settlement project. The communities have become more self-sufficient, and more attractive to new residents. You no longer need to go to Jerusalem to go shopping, and the schools are excellent. He and his wife Elisheva came to Eli for the high quality of life. Home prices are lower than in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, and the social ties much stronger.

When someone moves in, we give them a cake. That is how it is in small communities. Moreover, according to Gedaliah, he believes that they live in the safest place in Israel. There is no crime or theft and our children can be outside alone without needing to worry.

Concerning Palestinian terror attacks, he is not worried - terror can happen anywhere. He had a gun, but when the license expired he did not bother to renew it. I do not like guns. Statistically speaking, it is safer not to have one.

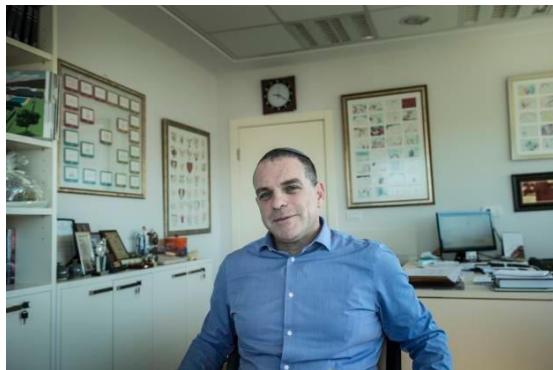
Judea and Samaria, or the West Bank, was the center of Jewish life in the times of the Bible, according to Elisheva Blum. It was our ancestors' home. It gives us a deeper meaning to our lives here because we are a link in the chain. This was and is the heartland of the Jewish people.

Together, the couple operates an online company [Dapei Katom, dkatom.co.il] a website which makes it easier for companies to establish themselves in the settlements. The idea is not just to create more jobs, but also to make the settlements more resistant to boycotts and international pressure. We are the world's most misunderstood ethnic group, says Gedaliah Blum.



This year has been 50 years since some young, religious and ideologically motivated Jews settled in Kfar Etzion, which until 1948, was occupied by Jordan. It was the first settlement.

Since then, an additional 620,000 Israelis settled within the West Bank and East Jerusalem. These settlements have become a contentious issue between Israel and the international community who believe that they make it more difficult to establish a Palestinian state in the West Bank. The Security Council adopted in December a resolution which condemned the settlements as illegal. This time, the US did not veto it.



Oded Revivi, mayor of Efrat and responsible for international relations for the Yesha Council, said that the UN decision is politically motivated and this it does not bother him. Israel's relations with the outside world are in fact good, he says. From time to time there is talk of isolating Israel and we have experienced times when we really were isolated like when we had five or six Arab armies that went to attack and no one in the world was willing to assist us.

But today the situation is different. Israel is too integrated in the global economy for a boycott to be meaningful, or even possible. Vered Ben-Sa'adon is one of those trying to convince the world that it can not do without Israel. The wines she produces in the community of Rechelim has won international prizes. They export to the US, Hong Kong, Germany and England.

She delivered two magnum bottles of her best wine to Donald Trump's White House with an invitation to visit Rechelim. She is confident that the American president will eventually come and visit. She has high expectations of his time in the White House. Trump, Love Israel, she asks. Time will tell which policy Trump will have towards Israel, says the mayor Oded Revivi.

Oded admits that there are grounds for optimism. Trump's son-in-law and adviser, Jared Kushner, served on the board of an organization that supports the Israeli army. Trump, himself, has also given money to the settlement of Beit El.

Within the Israeli right are those who believe that Israel should abandon the two-state solution and annex all or parts of the West Bank - although Israel is faced with a problem that seems to have no solution: how to remain both a Jewish and a democratic state? But the demographic issue is nothing that worries settlers of Eli and Rechelim, who show strong support for annexation.

Gedaliah Blum believes that Jews and Arabs can build something together, and that both sides would have much to gain from annexation. The world believes that if the Jews are living in Judea and Samaria, there can be no Palestinians there, and vice versa. It doesn't need to be like this, it's not a zero-sum game.

Elisheva Blum thinks that the fact that there is confusion about the status of the settlements, it's become a source of friction and that the annexation once and for all would make clear to the Palestinians that the settlers are there to stay.

Vered Ben-Sa'adon shares a similar outlook, that there can not be peace until Palestinians accept that the Israelis have as much right to be on the West Bank as they do. This despite the fact that many of the settlers, were not even born in Israel. Gedaliah grew up in New Jersey, Elisheva from Los Angeles, and Vered was born in Holland. Born as a Christian, Vered converted to Judaism after she moved to Israel. And here she intends to stay. We built our vineyard for it to be here in 300 years, not twenty, says Vered Ben-Sa'adon.



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