



Aliyah Anniversary Reflections

When my wife and I moved to Jerusalem 30 years ago this summer, TV ads were for drinking milk and eating oranges, not for 40" flat TV screens and "Fauda." Shimon Peres was on the right-wing of the Labor Party. English was the country's second language, not Russian.

Pesach and Sukkot vacations were for hiking the streams, mountains, and flower fields of the Galilee, not for shop-till-you-drop excursions in air-conditioned mega-malls or for flights out to the casinos of Greece. We danced the *hora*, not trance.

Zionism was considered the country's heroic and defining ideology, not a chauvinist and politically incorrect prejudice. Draft dodgers were people who closed their front doors when the evening breeze started. "Settlement" was not a dirty word.

"Withdrawal" was a financial term (something you did with money at the bank), and disengagement meant breaking someone's lovesick heart. Even the intellectuals were unabashedly patriotic.

The Western Wall was where Jews went to pray, not protest. The Law of Return brought Jews to Israel. The Chief Rabbinate sought to build bridges for religion with secular Israelis. The Supreme Court dealt with legal issues and left it to you and me and the Knesset to decide what is "reasonable."

Indeed, Israel has dramatically changed in recent decades, in both encouraging and disconcerting ways.

But overall, my ledger is positive and forward-looking.

Israel is nine million people strong, a poignant riposte to Hitler's Holocaust. The birthrate is well above the Western average, and Israel remains a family-oriented society. Against many expectations, religious tradition (with unique Israeli flavors) and values-education are making healthy comebacks. 1.5 million immigrants have moved to Israel since 1990, boosting the country in every way.

According to all polls, Israelis are overwhelmingly proud and happy to live in this country, even if many are hurting now because of the corona crisis and they feel the government is not functioning well.

The economy is fundamentally healthy, and fortunately, interest rates are the lowest ever. Israeli hi-tech and biotech are benefiting billions of people around the world. And despite severe underfunding, medical care in Israeli hospitals is second to none.

Israel's leadership ranks are no longer a White-Ashkenazi-Labor-Socialist preserve, but more representative of the diverse population. Many youths still want to serve their country in the best and most difficult military units, and their determination to fix the social-economic ills of the country is stirring.

Israel's universities and yeshivas are first-class, with tens of thousands of students. The good L-rd has granted this country major natural gas offshore deposits, with Israel soon to become a net energy exporter. Israel

is a world leader in desalination, which (along with this past winter's abundant rains) has largely solved the country's water problems.

In the grand strategic perspective, the regional security architecture is moving in directions that strengthen this country, where Israel is a linchpin of stability for the West and an ally for the Arabs in combating radical Islam. Only Iran and Turkey threaten Israel, and their comeuppance is coming. Israel's diplomatic horizons have never been broader. The American Embassy is finally in Jerusalem!

On a personal level, we arrived in Israel 30 years ago with one baby daughter. Since then, my wife and I have been blessed with five more kids (born in Jerusalem!), several sons-in-law and a daughter-in-law, and beautiful grandchildren. Almost all have studied in yeshiva and graduated university, including PhD and MBA studies, and even post-doctoral fellowships. Three have been senior IDF officers, two are front-line combat medics. They are proud of their long periods of service in defense of Israel.

In retrospect, moving to Israel was one of the best decisions we ever made. We thank G-d for accompanying us along the way. We feel fortunate to be part of a meta-historic, grand drama of Jewish national renewal and redemption. The next 30 years can only be even better.

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