

## Israel

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**Note:** My photographs that go along with this travel log can be found on

[marcmehlman.smugmug.com](http://marcmehlman.smugmug.com).

**Friends and Family,**

**8/25/19**

”Ten measures of beauty descended to the world. Jerusalem received nine and the rest of the world received one.” – Talmud Kiddushin 49b

I arrived after a long day traveling last Monday. I had to get up at 4 am in Uzbekistan (1 am Israeli time) for my direct Uzbekistan Airline flight to Ben Gurion Airport. I was so excited I didn't even feel sleepy until I crashed later that night. The last time I was in Israel was in 1999. Israel is one of those countries that changes every few years so I knew there would be changes from my last visit. In fact there were probably at least two different Israel's that I missed in the twenty years since I was last here.

The first change I noticed was Ben Gurion Airport. It was no longer just “functional”. It was beautiful, huge and efficient. Ben Gurion Airport is the dream target of every demented anti-Semite yet security screening was faster and less invasive than in the United States (hint: they use profiling and other common sense methods). Unfortunately, I was also impressed with the prices of taxis to get to Jerusalem (about 300 shekels or \$90). Instead, I found a sherut (a large Mercedes Benz shared ride van) and took it instead - it cost me one American \$20 bill. It took longer and dropped other people off all over Jerusalem before dropping me off. This was actually a plus since I got to see more of Jerusalem and its environments - all included in the price!

Israel is now a wealthy, people-friendly nation. It is much more built up than before and there are more people here per square kilometer than in India or Japan. The buildings are well built, tasteful and beautiful. Israel has mastered the architectural skill of mixing the ancient with the modern to achieve something uniquely divine. The above Talmudic quote may very well be true!

The downside of living/visiting here is that the cost of living is quite high. The major problem is the cost of housing. However as expensive as housing is in Jerusalem, it still is not at Manhattan or San Francisco levels. Food also is expensive. Still, the locals can afford to feed the 300,000 feral cats that live in Jerusalem. You see food and water left out for them everywhere (and some of the cat food is actually quite delicious). Public transportation is cheap and abundant. I like walking everywhere even though I now have a Rav-Kav card for buses, light rail and trains.

Looking around, it is obvious that this is one of the happiest places in the world. There are lots of children here and they all seem happy, be they secular, ultra orthodox, or Arab. It is a very safe and family oriented place. I go walking at night, when the temperature cools down, with no worries. There are many people out late, eating dinner, consuming ice cream, socializing and taking walks (though it is Tel Aviv that has the reputation of having an exciting night life and many bars).

I have run into the seventh circle of technological hell since being here. T-Mobile told me my phone was unlocked, but it wasn't. Furthermore, I could use my phone with wi-fi, but when I was out of my airbnb, my phone was a brick. It took two days talking with T-mobile before I (not their technical staff) figured out how to unlock it. Soon afterwards I learned that Israeli SIM cards wouldn't work in my LG phone. Apparently, Israel conforms to international standards for smartphones better than the United States. Why is not having a working smartphone with roaming abilities such a big deal? First, Jerusalem is built like a maze, perhaps to stymie invading armies. It seems that they even use special nano-frequency radio wave jammers to jinx my infallible sense of direction. So when I go out, I inevitably get lost. I have no Google maps to get me to where I want to go or to find my way back. I have no phone to phone my cousin, Emet, for help or to tell him I will be late when we've arranged to meet. The last time I was here I had never owned a cellphone. Now I am totally dependent on them in so many ways.

I finally decided it was stupid to spend so much time to get my American smartphone to work here even though it had worked fine elsewhere overseas. I bought an Israeli smartphone (they cost almost exactly twice as much here as in the United States). I now have a permanent Israeli phone number. Now I need to find some Israeli friends to call! Throwing money at a problem seemed the right thing to do, but it just gave me new problems. For instance, many of social media apps I use to communicate with friends in the United States and overseas are device centered (like texting, WhatsApp, Line and WeChat) so I can't transfer my accounts to my new device. The solution, I discovered, was to use Facebook Messenger and/or Telegram,

which are web based and not attached to any phone number. So everyone reading this, sign up for either Facebook Messenger or Telegram so I can phone/text you for free while roaming!

Another problem is that T-Mobile can't guarantee that my new unlocked Israeli phone will work with T-Mobile when I get back to the States. Oh well, if worse comes to worse I'll just have two phones - one for the USA and one for Israel (the Israeli phone has no monthly charges when not used and is cheaper than T-Mobile for those months I do use it).

I have much more to tell - about my trip to the Old City and the Kotel, about my cousin's daughter's Israeli/Irish wedding and much more. I decided that I would try write updates every two or so days, so it is best to save something for future updates. Besides, the longer I am here the more I will have to write about.

Doing well,  
Marc

Emet is my cousin. Emet and his wife, Ann, (a talented artist) have a daughter Hannah, who is now living in Jerusalem. Hannah met a fine lad named Daniel, who comes from Cork, Ireland and now lives in Jerusalem too. Starting a few days ago, Hannah and Dan share the same address. Their wedding, six days old, that Dan promoted as the “wedding of the century” wasn’t. I take “wedding of the century” as the last 100 years, since most of the current century isn’t in the books yet. But “wedding of the century”? Why not “one of the top ten best weddings of the last century” without arguing how the top ten are ranked? I would go for that. There were about 200 guests from all over the planet. It was essentially held on the grounds of a castle looking over the walls of the Old City. The ceremony had everything. It was traditional, yet sweetly personalized. It had Jewish music and dancing, but also had some of the great music from America. It had the great joy and celebration that characterizes all Jewish weddings. And the food was fantastic and abundant with special mention for the passion fruit tarts, complete with seeds, that was part of a giant dessert array (truth be told, I ate no more than a fourth of all the passion fruit tarts). Dan’s friends from Cork were both very much Irish and Jewish. The Irish part showed in their genuine charm - which they had in an abundance. I found them bright, engaging and enjoyed our conversations. The next night, in Emet’s and Ann’s airbnb across the street from Bibi Netanyahu’s heavily guarded home, we all celebrated our Shabbat dinner with the leftovers from the wedding (sadly, no passion fruit tarts were left over). Late at night Jewish families were still quietly strolling the traffic-free streets and the Irish contingency sang Irish hymns with enthusiasm fueled by homemade beer from the wedding.

I have ended up walking everywhere, despite the distances, the heat and the excellent public transportation. I like walking, but I return to my airbnb in the evening pretty worn out.

The next day I walked to the Old City to see the Kotel before Shabbat ended. I stuck to the Armenian and Jewish Quarters (I plan to see the Christian and Muslim Quarters at a later date). The narrow corridors of the Armenian Quarter were filled with shops catering to tourists. It is a clean, friendly and very charming part of the Old City. The Jewish Quarter however has changed. While the Hurva Synagogue has been rebuilt, at first glance it seemed like not much else had changed. But a lot has. The changes have been made carefully and with great taste as not to change the character of the Quarter. In short, one sees a successful effort to breath life back into a Jewish Quarter that had been Judenrein for the two decades of Jordanian Rule

and where much was vandalized. The Jewish Quarter is now populated by Orthodox Jewish families, with their numerous and happy children. Like other Quarters of the Old City, it has its share of tourists and Jews in a hurry to get to the Kotel, but they have little or no effect on the current residents of the Jewish Quarter.

Coming to Israel I was struck by how many children there are here. They are everywhere. When you are a young adult, happy and the future looks bright, you have children. Israel is a happy, optimistic place and that is a force in its own right. One of my friends mentioned to me that it was irresponsible for the orthodox to have so many children (Israel is unique among the developed world in having high population growth rate among both the secular and religious). I asked her why and she said the children could not be happy sharing their parents with so many siblings. Perhaps this makes sense on some level, but reality, as always, wins out. Laura had five brothers in her happy family. Love and guidance does not only flow from parent to child, but also between siblings too. One only has to look at the Jewish children of the Jewish Quarter to realize they are happy, loved and well cared for.

The Western Wall is the same as I remembered it with the only real change being the rebuilt Mugrabi (Moroccan) Gate which is a covered wooden ramp that grants entrance to the Temple Mount for non Muslims. The other ten entrances to the Temple Mount are for Muslims only. The plaza in front of the wall has changed plenty. First you have to get through TSA-like security just to get to it. There are now ample and clean bathrooms; There are also tours of the tunnels that riddle the area around the Temple Mount. Multiple-story homes and shuls have been built surrounding the plaza in such a fashion that they look like they have existed from Herod's time.

After leaving the Old City through the Jaffa gate, one goes down into what looks like another of the corridors lined with the shops that one finds in the Old City. It manages to have the same feel, but this uncovered pedestrian corridor is wide and ultra modern. The "shops" that line the underground corridor are avant-garde boutique stores selling the latest in fashion and expensive jewelry. There are posh restaurants and interesting works of art. Very swank and very tasteful. Following the pedestrian walk, one emerges in the middle of modern Jerusalem. Later I would find that this modern, but very tasteful addition to Old City is called Mamilla.

Yesterday, I hiked to the The Israel Museum and spent a large amount of time there. It is one of the world's best museums, no doubt. It has archaeology artifacts, Jewish history, art, the Billy Rose Sculpture Garden, the Dead Sea Scrolls and a large

outdoor model of Jerusalem at the time of the Second Temple. And like everything else in Israel, it is kid friendly too. I took some photos (that's what I do) and they are now on [marcmehlman.smugmug.com](http://marcmehlman.smugmug.com) with a new gallery devoted to indigenous art.

Afterwards I hiked (I use the term "hike" accurately) to Nachlaot, one of the older neighborhoods of Jerusalem. Newlywed Hannah used to live there. It is characterized by long narrow alleyways lined with homes filled with young families and small shuls. It seems that all noise and hassle is limited to Nachlaot's lively main avenues (now with Jerusalem's light rail) and a large nearby park called Sacher Park. The population of Nachlaot is both secular and religious. The homes manage to be both ancient and quite up to date at the same time. It is apparent the residents love Nachlaot enough to take good care of her. In the middle of Nachlaot is the Jewish shuk, the Mahane Yehuda Market. It is full of fruit, food, baklava, drink and falafel shops. Just about anything can be bought here and it is noisy and crowded. It is also an excellent place to eat. It reminds one that Israel is a Middle Eastern country. One would never find such a place in modern day Europe or in the States. Think of a permanent farmer's market with barkers multiplied by one hundred.

I have lots more plans on what more to see. Jerusalem is not running short of points of interest, but I am running out of days in my airbnb. After Jerusalem I am renting a car (\$11 dollars a day) and driving south to Kibbutz Latran outside of Eilat to see Timna National Park (where King Solomon's Mines are). On my way south I will visit Be'er Sheva and spend two nights, one day, at Mitzpa Ramon to explore the Ramon Crater and Ein Avdat National Park near Ben Gurion's Kibbutz, Sde Boker. On my way back to Jerusalem, and I will explore Beit Guvrin-Maresha National Park (home of the ruins ancient Maresha from the times of the First Temple), I will spend the night and then head back to Jerusalem. After returning the rental car, I will then take the high speed train (currently high speed part of the way) to Tel Aviv, where I'll stay for a week, before saying a temporary goodbye to the Promised Land.

I plan to be back in CT by the 10<sup>th</sup> of October, with a stop over in Rome for a few days, though I still don't have any airplane tickets yet.

Marc

The last few days have been pretty busy, but fun. Friday, during the day, I took two tours of Jerusalem. One was of the Old City and the other was of the Mount of Olives adjacent to the Old City. We visited all four Quarters of the Old City (Armenian, Christian, Muslim and Jewish), saw a lot and learned a fair amount of history. One longtime misconception of mine was corrected. I always thought Herod build the giant retaining walls (the western part is called the Kotel or Western Wall) around Mount Moriah and then used landfill to level off the top to create the foundation for the Second Temple. In fact, he built arches within the retaining walls and then put a roof over the arches to form the foundations that the Temple was built on. In the vaulted area below the Temple Mount is where Solomon's Stables (ancient underground parking?) were for many, many centuries. Recently the Muslim Waqf, who control the Temple Mount, built a huge new mosque in what was once Solomon's Stables. I had always thought Solomon's Stables were next to the Temple Mount, not underneath it.

The view of the Temple Mount and the Old City from the Mount of Olives is nothing less than spectacular. There are a number of famous churches that have much meaning to Christians and have very interesting histories. A tremendous amount of ancient Jewish graves can be found on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. Many modern day Jews are still being buried there (when they die). According to the Jewish religion, when the Messiah finally comes, the Jews buried there will be the first to arise from their graves and will pass through the New Gate to the Temple Mount to greet the Messiah. However, the Mount of Olives was under Jordanian rule for the nineteen years between Israel's War of Independence in 1948 and the Six Day War in 1967. They created a large Muslim graveyard in front of the New Gate, knowing Jews, in the presence of the dead, become "impure" and can not ascend to the Temple Mount. The Jordanians also forced all the Jews (many who had lived there for many generations) out of the territory they conquered, destroyed all the synagogues and vandalized the Jewish graves on the Mount of Olives (using ancient Jewish gravestones to pave roads and for latrines used by their British trained army).

Our tour guide also supplied us with a joke:

A Rabbi visits his friend, the Pope, in the Vatican. He notices a solid gold telephone on the Pope's desk and ask what that is for?

Pope: "That is my direct line to G-d."

Rabbi: "Could I use it."

Pope: "Sure, but don't stay on long. It is very expensive."

The rabbi uses the gold phone for a short conversation. A few months later the Pope is in Jerusalem and pays a visit to his friend, the rabbi. The Pope notices a solid gold phone on the rabbi's desk and asks what the phone is for.

Rabbi: "That is my direct line to G-d."

Pope: "Could I use it."

Rabbi: "Sure, talk as long as you want."

Pope: "I don't want to use up all your money."

Rabbi: "Don't worry, it is a local call."

My friend Tova and her husband, Joel, invited me over for lunch on Shabbat along with a bunch of her family and friends. I first met Tova in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, but since then she and her husband made aliyah (moved to Israel) about twenty years ago. As is Tova's nature, she arranged for me to be invited to a Shabbat dinner at the home of one of her many friends the evening before her brunch. I had a very nice and interesting evening. Everyone was orthodox there (except me) and I was envious of their knowledge of all the prayers and songs. The Modern Orthodox have always struck me as happy people and they are happiest during Shabbat. Besides the prayers and songs, they spoke in English for my sake. Their home was about a 40 minute walk from where I am staying. Jerusalem, being the maze it is, there was no way for me to get around without Google Maps. This is a violation of Shabbat Laws, but what I am to do?

Shabbat in Jerusalem turns out to be a wonderful thing, even if you are not Orthodox or even Jewish. Everything comes to stop and one has time to rest, contemplate, enjoy friends and your surroundings. There is no public transportation, no stores and very few restaurants open. There is extremely little traffic on the streets. Families, friends, lovers and me stroll the streets just enjoying the city and each other. Since working is prohibited (by the Jewish religion, not the government) there is no pressure to accomplish anything. I didn't even miss my computer (too much). It is much more easy to observe and enjoy Shabbat in Jerusalem than any other place I have been.

Lunch at Tova's place the next day was very nice. There were a large number of Tova's and Joel's friends and family at the lunch. It was a wonderful lunch, good

company and food. The people at the table were interesting, intelligent and good people and the food was delicious. A number of the teenagers, upon learning I am a mathematics professor wanted to discuss math with me. We had a great time. They were quite interested in what I showed them.

There is a large Anglo community here (people born in English speaking countries). Members of the Anglo community speak very good English (of course), but so do most Israelis. A minority of the Anglo community get by without learning Hebrew, but this puts them at a disadvantage. The Anglo community is well integrated into Israel society. I did notice that many of the friends of members of the Anglo community are other Anglo community members. Often they they will speak Hebrew to each other, so it isn't a language thing. Native born Israelis (sabra) are quite friendly, so that is not a factor either.

My theory on why American Jewry is not as Zionist as I would expect is that those attached most with Israel make aliyah, leaving behind in America a population less attached to Israel.

Israelis love their country, be they religious or not, be they from the left or the right part of the political spectrum. There is an important election coming in less than two weeks. There is a lot at stake and everyone has strong opinions, but I don't detect the divisive hatred here than has cursed America as of late.

Neither do I detect anger between Israel's Muslim and Jewish citizens. Israel's Jewish and non-Jewish citizens enjoy the same legal rights. Many work together and live together as neighbors in the same neighborhoods. One often sees Muslims (young couples holding hands, for instance) in the Jewish area dressed in Western attire and enjoying the same music and food that everyone else is enjoying. I think there is a segment of the Muslim Israeli society that appreciates the freedom that living in Israel affords them. Others very much enjoy their peaceful lives in the Middle East's only democracy. And some identify with Israel's enemies. Life is never simple in Israel.

On Wednesday I went to the Hadassah University Medical Center to visit the twelve famous stained glass windows in the hospital's synagogue created by Marc Chagall. Each of the twelve windows represents one of the twelve tribes of Israel. They are extraordinarily beautiful and interesting, well worth seeing. I now have a gallery on my smugmug website with a photo of each window. The hospital itself is huge, modern and world famous. Half of all Israel's medical research is done here (and

Israel does an amazing amount of medical research).

Getting to the Chagall Windows is not easy without a car. Fortunately a friend I made at Tova's lunch told me of a fantastic app for my phone. It is called "moovit" and it is much better than Google Maps (which is not bad) for getting from one place to another using public transportation. It is truly amazing and is suppose to work worldwide. All I know is that it is indispensable now for me in Israel. One interesting thing is that Moovit and Google Maps often sends me through parks and pathways completely independent of the road system. It is really nice this extensive footpath network away from car traffic exists and that these two apps direct me towards it. Another pleasant surprise from Jerusalem.

I canceled my side trip to Rome to stay in Israel a bit longer. I now have purchased all my airline tickets and have all my airbnb reservations. I will be returning after the High Holidays on the second day of Sukkot (October 15<sup>th</sup>).

I still have a long list of things to do and see while in Jerusalem. Life continues, full speed. Thank G-d for Shabbat.

Marc

On Wednesday I took a tour of Rachel's Tomb and of Hevron. I took this same tour in 1998 with my parents and friend, Reinhardt, but there was no stop at Rachel's Tomb then. On the way to Hevron we traveled in a bulletproof van along with a very enthusiastic van guide who talked the entire time seemingly without taking a breath. Despite the number of places we passed on the way to Hevron, the distance is quite small - its like driving from Santa Monica to Woodland Hills in Los Angeles. Our van guide had biblical stories for each of the towns we passed, but she never pointed the towns out with her finger or said what side of the van they were on. She used Hebrew names so it was only later that I figured out that Bet Leem (House of Bread) was Bethlehem (the road safely tunneled under Bethlehem so to avoid going through it). Worse, she did not point out who lived in the towns we passed, Palestinian or Israeli. Neither did she explain the present day significance of these towns. She did not pause long enough for me to sneak in a question. It was frustrating.

Rachel, Jacob's favorite wife, died near Ephrath, giving birth to Benjamin. Her tomb is located between Bethlehem and Gilo and is visited by ten of thousands of Orthodox Jews each year who come to pray. The tomb is separated from Arab Bethlehem by a very tall concrete wall that is part of the Separation Barrier that protects Israel from the Palestinian terrorist sniper attacks of which unfortunately were not rare before the wall was built. especially around Rachel's Tomb.

Hevron is the site of the first land owned in the Holy Land by the Jews. The land was bought from Ephron the Hittite by Abraham to bury his wife Sarah. The land contained the Cave of Machpelah (Machpelah means doubled in Hebrew). Eventually all the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) along with their wives, the Matriarchs (Sarah, Rebecca and Leah) were buried in this cave. Rachel, whose tomb we visited earlier that day, is the only wife missing. Many Jews believe Adam created the cave and both Eve and him were already buried there before Abraham had purchased it. Hevron is the second most holy city (Jerusalem is first) for the Jewish people. Herod built a huge building with six foot thick walls above the cave that is currently the only fully intact Herodian structure. Centuries later Muslims made additions to convert it into a Mosque and forbid Jews and Christians from praying there (the Christian Crusaders did the same thing later).

There has been a continuous presence of Jews in Hevron since Abraham with the exception of only a few years due Crusader expulsion and later due to an Ottoman pogrom. In August of 1929, the local Arabs massacred sixty-seven Jews (women and

children included) in well organized, planned assault with passive British consent. The blood letting would have been worse but for a local Arab neighbor who hid thirty-three Jews and protected them from the rioting mob. The purpose of riot was to rid Hevron of all Jews and it succeeded. When Jordan gained control of Hevron in 1948, they razed the Jewish quarter, desecrated the Jewish cemetery and converted the ruins of Avraham Avinu synagogue into an animal pen in an effort to erase any evidence of any Jewish connection with Hevron. In the 1967 war the Israelis regained control of Hevron (without a shot being fired), but the hatred of local Arabs remained. Even Arab Christians were forced to flee Hevron and there are no remaining churches in the city. In 1972 Kiryat Arba, an Jewish community adjacent to Hevron, was established and in 1979 eleven families moved back in the old Jewish quarter of Hevron, a move opposed by the Hevron Arabs, the Israeli Left and most of the international community. The eleven families are now seventy, but they are still only about 500 Jews in sea of 120,000 Muslims eager for another pogrom.

In 1996 Israeli Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, and PLO Chairman, Yasser Arafat, signed the Wye River Accords which gave the Muslim Waqf control of most of the Cave of Machpelah, including the room devoted to Isaac and Rebecca where the only known entrance to the cave exists (Jews are allowed to visit this room ten days out of each year). In 1997 the Hevron Agreement was signed stipulating the withdrawal of Israel forces and control from 80% of Hevron (Part H1) and Israel would retain control of the remaining 20% of Hevron (Part H2) which consisted of a few hundred Jews and about 18,000 hostile Muslims. Furthermore, Jews would be banned from Part H1, but Muslims would have complete freedom to travel back and forth between Parts H1 and H2. During this time the Jewish families living in Hevron continued to suffered casualties from terror attacks including snipers from the heights above them. Through all of this, the Jews living Hevron remained determined remain in their in their sliver of the city despite believing they had been sold out by the Israeli Government.

The following are my observations on how the situation has changed between my first visit to Hevron in 1998 and my latest visit on Wednesday.

1. The Jewish presence has grown slightly. They have been allowed to occupy two or three more buildings. Buildings that Jews had bought and owned before the 1927 pogrom and that they bought again from the local Arabs who occupied these buildings after 1927.

2. The hatred of Jews by the Arabs of Hevron has not abated.
3. The community of Kiryat Arba has grown greatly and is now a community of 8,800 Jews.
4. The Arab part of the city is now filled with very nice modern buildings and looks well off. This is the result of the tremendous amount of money the Europeans have spent in an effort to keep Hevron free of Jews.
5. It still takes a lot of heavily armed Israel soldiers and resources to keep the small number of Jewish residents of Hevron safe and to maintain access to the Machpelah.

I asked our Hevron guide (we switched to a native guide when we got to Hevron) what is the long term prospects for Hevron and he said the Jews of Hevron are under siege and they only think of obtaining permission for allowing the next family to join their community in Hevron (despite tremendous hardship, there are no shortage of Jewish families who are willing to join the fight to preserve the Jewish presence in Hevron). I mentioned that even if the Jews of Hevron don't think long term, the Israel Government, whom they are totally dependent on for both protection and permission to live in Hevron, does think long term.

“Never make forecasts, especially about the future.” – Samuel Goldwyn

Let me make a prediction on the future of Jewish presence in Hevron.

1. In Hevron, Arab hatred of Jews will continue.
2. Europe will continue to spend huge amounts of money to eliminate any Jewish presence in Hevron (and the rest of Judea and Samaria).
3. Kiryat Arba will continue to expand and will eventually abut the Jewish quarter of Hevron. This will make security more manageable (though it will remain a big problem) and life much better for those in the Jewish quarter.
4. The Jewish quarter will continue to slowly grow, one building at a time and life will improve for the residents. However, life will continue to be far from normal or safe and the Jews of Hevron who remain a minuscule minority in Hevron.

Marc

Once again I am sitting in a cafe with air conditioning and internet, uploading photographs to smugmug and writing my travel log. In about three hours a woman I met at a Shabbat dinner will come and give me a Hebrew lesson (for shekels). Right now I think she believes I am reasonably intelligent. I am a afraid my dismal language abilities are about to change her mind. In that she will join a hopefully not too large a group of people.

I have been spending a fair amount of time in and around the Old City of Jerusalem. The history of Jerusalem is there to see - especially from the time of Herod on.

The Second Temple was built when the Jews returned to Jerusalem after their exile in Babylon. It was originally not as impressive as the First Temple, but it was greatly expanded along with the construction of the Temple Mount by King Herod, the “King of the Jews”. In fact, Herod, a converted Jew, was appointed by the Romans to rule over the Jews from 374 BCE. He was famous for some of the most significant constructions ever in Israel. Besides the Second Temple and the Temple Mount, other projects include the construction of the port at Caesarea Maritima, the fortress at Masada, Herodium (a palace) and the Macapelah in Hevron. His ruthlessness was apparent in how hard he worked his subjects to create his “infrastructure investments” and the large number of of his friends and family he put to death due to his own paranoia. Sort of like Kim Jong Un. However, he had a softer side to him too. He loved one of his wives, Mariamne, more than any of the others and could not stand the thought she might be with another man after he died. Out of love, he decreed that Mariamne would be put to death the day he passed. The soldier who was assigned to kill Mariamne told Mariamne of Herod’s decree and the ungrateful wife was somehow not pleased with Herod’s demonstration of his love. Worse still, she let Herod know of her disapproval of his decree, leaving poor Herod with no choice but to advance the time of her death to the present. However, he loved her so much that he bore no grudge, had her coffin filled with honey and kept her in his residency for years afterward.

Both the First and Second Temples had a sanctuary room referred to as the “Holy of Holies” built over the Foundation Rock and was/is considered where G-d resides. In the inner sanctuary was the Ark of the Covenant, containing the tablets with Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai, which were lost when the Second Temple was destroyed. The Foundation Rock is believed to be the first rock G-d created when creating the earth; it is where the earth that formed Adam came from and it

is where Abraham came to sacrifice his son, Issac. During the era of the Temples, once each year, on Yom Kippur, a specially selected High Priest would enter the “Holies of Holy” with a rope tied around his waist and ask G-d for atonement for the Jewish people. If the high priest was not sufficiently pure, he would not survive the presence of G-d and the other priests would pull him out of the “Holy of Holies” by the rope tied around his waist. Modern day Muslims believe it was from the Foundation Rock that Muhammad ascended to the heavens (though both Jerusalem and the Foundation Rock are never mentioned in the Koran). In 691 CE an Islamic shrine, called the Dome of the Rock, was built with the Foundation Rock at its center and, while quite small compared to the Second Temple, has dominated the Temple Mount ever since. The Western Wall to the Temple Mount is significant to Jews because it is the exposed portion of the wall that is closest to the “Holies of Holy”.

A lot of the sites in the Old City there are the still very visible effects of the plundering of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE by the Roman Legions. Emperor Titus had ordered the Legions to put down a Jewish revolt (one can still see carvings of captive Jews taken back to Rome on the Titus Arch near the Coliseum). The Jews revolted partly over taxes but very much because of pressure by the pagan Romans on the Jews to assimilate to Roman culture and accept statues of Roman G-ds (and their Emperors who they considered as G-ds) in their temples, including the Second Temple. The Jews were defeated in part because the Romans brought in six to seven entire Legions (120,000 soldiers) to fight the Jews. Even still, the Romans had a very hard time defeating the Jews and it took them over four years. The other reason for the defeat was a violent and suicidal civil war among the Jews in besieged Jerusalem between Jewish priests wishing to preserve that status quo by accommodating the Romans and the Jewish Zealots who wanted to fight the Romans no matter what. In fact, the word “zealot” comes from the faction of the Jews who wanted to continue to fight. Many rabbis believe the loss to the Romans was because of “causeless hatred” between the Jews. The loss of the Jewish homeland and the death of so many Jews was a huge long term blow to the Jews that will never be forgotten. The loss of the Second Temple changed the practice of the Jewish religion and many important ways. Yosef ben Matityahu, a leader of the Jews in Galilee, changed his allegiance to the Romans when captured by the Romans. He also changed his name to Flavius Josephus and became the foremost respected historian of the Roman war against the Jews. He reported that over a million Jews were killed in the rebellion and another hundred thousand became enslaved captives of the Romans. Some of the Jews who opposed the revolt against the Romans and who were not killed by the Zealots or during the Roman sacking of Jerusalem, surrendered to the

Romans who then allowed Jewish life to continue in the Holy Land. The loss of the Temple changed how Judaism was practiced forever. Despite a continuous presence of Jews in the Holy Land since Abraham, Israel was not reclaimed as a Jewish nation until 1948 and the Temple Mount was not recaptured until 1967 (though it is still controlled by the Muslim Waqf).

I visited a part of East Jerusalem (occupied mostly by Arabs) on my way to the Rockefeller Museum. In 1971 I stayed with my parents and sister near here, just outside the Damascus Gate to the Old City, but things were less tense then. I felt safe walking there now, in the middle of the day, though the differences between East and West Jerusalem are still pretty stark. The Rockefeller Museum turns out to be a medium size archaeological museum with artifacts going back to 14,000 years ago. It was not so well maintained, but contains lots of treasures and interesting stuff if you have the interest to look. Afterwards I walked through the Muslim Quarter of the Old City on the way to the Kotel. It was pretty quiet with an occasional tourist on the Via Dolorosa. There were tourist shops and restaurants, but they were not as crowded as the other Quarters. There were plenty of heavily armed Israeli policemen. There were also occasional posters of Yassir Arafat and T-shirts for sale with “Free Palestine, From the River to the Sea” printed on them. At several points I was diverted from my route to the Kotel by Israeli checkpoints to keep non-Muslims from entrances to Temple Mount (I was also warned by a group of polite Arab boys not to enter these “Muslim-only” entryways).

At the Kotel I took a tunnel tour that extended under the Muslim Quarter, along the Temple Mount wall, following an ancient water aqueduct and Ottoman cisterns parallel to the Western part of the Temple Mount. Most of the Temple Mount retention walls are hidden under tons of debris and the homes in the Muslim Quarter built up against the wall. In the tunnel lots of history is revealed and it becomes even more apparent how colossal the Temple Mount really is. One of the quarried stones at the base of the Temple Mount weighs 415 tons! While a movie, that was part of the tour, revealed how the ancients, cut, moved and lifted such huge stones, no one knows how they managed to move a stone of a 415 tons! We finally left the tunnel and found ourselves in the Muslim Quarter that I had just walked through. The Israelis are very interested in exploring the archaeological digs around the Temple Mount, but on the Temple Mount the Jordanian Waqf build new Mosques and deliberately destroy ancient artifacts which might show any connection between the Jews and the Second Temple.

Wednesday, after returning from my Hebron tour, I went to Ben Yehuda Street to

have dinner. Ben Yehuda Street is a pedestrian mall that connects King George Street and Jaffa Road. It used to cater mostly to tourists with restaurants and souvenir shops, but now attracts a lot of Israelis too. I remembered Jaffa Road as a noisy thoroughfare filled with traffic, but that is no more. Cars are now banned from Jaffa road and a modern light rail system is there instead. Now it is a quiet nice place lined with nice cafes - an “in” place to hang out.

I am finishing writing this up a few days after my Hebrew lesson with Yael. She is truly a gifted tutor and kind enough not to let on what a challenge I must be.

Marc

**Friends and Family,**

**17 September 2019**

Yesterday was a day of adventure. I got to the Old City early, had some baklava in the Jewish Quarter, and then exited the Old City at the Dung Gate (the gate where historically all garbage and dung leaves the city) and walked the short distance to the City of David. I was planning on taking the 11:00 tour and arrived at 10:00. As luck would have it, the City of David website was quite confusing and it was the 10:00 tour that I really wanted - so I took it.

I hope I am not annoying my readers with too much history, but this place is all about history and it is both fascinating and important. Much of the history is Biblical literally. It is amazing how much of what the Bible says about the time leading up to and including the First Temple times is backed by archaeological evidence. Disclaimer: I am neither a Biblical or an Archaeological expert. Historians are not all of like mind and probably do not refer to me for settling their differences. However I am available to be interviewed or give lectures if they are interested.

David had been anointed the second King of all of the United Kingdom of Israel (after King Saul) in about 1,000 BCE. In about 997 BCE he decided to move the capital to Jerusalem. Jerusalem in those days was a fortified city, occupied by the Jebusites and located outside where the Dung Gate is now (the current walls of the Old City were built between 1536 and 1541 by the Ottoman Sultan, Suleiman the Magnificent). The Jebusites were so confident in their city's fortifications that they bragged that even the "blind and the lame" could defend their city. The Jebusites had previously realized that the chief weakness of their city was its only water supply, the Gihon Spring, which was located below the city and outside the city walls. The Jebusites carved out a lengthy and large underground tunnel that people could travel through that connected the city to the Gihon Spring and then build an "impregnable" fortress covering the spring. David realized the Gihon Spring was still the key to breaking the defenses to the Jebusite city. He concentrated all his forces on capturing the spring. A few days after the Gihon Spring was severed from the city, the Jebusites surrendered their city intact to David, which nowadays is known as the "City of David". The tunnel that connected the city with the Gihon Springs was rediscovered in the last few decades (we traveled its length during the tour).

David was not allowed by G-d to build a Temple on Mount Moriah because, as a warrior he had spilled blood (there were other reasons too), so the First Temple (called the Temple in those days) was built by King Solomon, David's son, above the City of David on Mount Moriah. After King Solomon, the United Kingdom of Israel

split into two kingdoms over a question of succession (Solomon, whose mother was Bathsheba, was not the eldest son). Solomon ruled the Southern Kingdom, called Judah, which consisted the tribes Judah (David's) and Benjamin. The Northern Kingdom was called Israel. The capital of Judah was Jerusalem and the Capital of Israel was Shechem.

Years later, in 721 BCE, the Assyria Empire conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel and its ten tribes became the lost ten tribes of Israel. It was clear that the Assyrians had plans for the conquest for Jerusalem as well. The King of Judah, King Hezekiah fortified the city by building and reinforcing the walls around Jerusalem. The remains of these walls can be seen today in the current Jewish Quarter of the Old City where Hezekiah's Jerusalem extended to. To solve Jerusalem's water security problems, Hezekiah carved a 533 meter tunnel through the Jerusalem sandstone that underlies the city from Gihon Spring to the Pool of Siloam inside the Hezekiah walls. The tunnel is called Hezekiah's (or the Siloam) tunnel. Since the Pool of Siloam was lower than the Gihon Spring, the tunnel served as an aqueduct – much better than the Jebusite tunnel where water had to be carried uphill. Better still, all the water from the upper Gihon Spring was diverted into the aqueduct and all of the excess water in the Pool of Siloam was dissipated into porous rocks below Jerusalem. Thus unlike King David during his siege of Jerusalem, the Assyrians suffered from lack of water (they had no access to any of the waters from Gihon Spring). When the Assyrians laid siege to Jerusalem in 701 BCE, the tunnel aqueduct, the walls surrounding King Hezekiah's Jerusalem (and, according to the Bible, Jewish devotion to G-d) kept the Assyrians from capturing Jerusalem.

When King Hezekiah ordered the construction of the tunnel he realized that work crews could only dig about a meter a day through the rock that laid below the city and that the tunnel would not be available in time for the upcoming siege if dug by a single work crew, so King Hezekiah ordered that two crews, starting on opposite ends of proposed tunnel, work simultaneously. The problem was this was still the Iron Age, so how did the two crews manage to find each other under the city. How did the two tunnels join up to become one tunnel instead of missing each other either horizontally and/or vertically? Some have conjectured that both tunnels followed the same crack in the rock below, but modern day geologists have shown this is not true. It seems likely the two crews knew roughly where they were from listening to workers on the surface thumping on the ground. Then, when the crews got close to each other, both crews started digging in wide loops so as to increase the probability they would intersect each other. After they met up, they would dig "bypass" tunnels to eliminate some of the now unneeded loops. Indeed, it is easy to see that the route

of Herzekiah's tunnel is far from being a straight line. There is a section where the ceiling of the tunnel is much taller than elsewhere in the tunnel, indicating that a vertical adjustment may have been needed when the two tunnels met. However, in truth, no one knows how the two crews met up underground and dug the tunnels so that the water would flow downhill at the correct rate.

I slogged the entire distance in pitch darkness (I had a flashlight), in moving water sometimes extending above my knees and crouching due to the low ceiling. It was fun, but by the time I exited I expected to see the Mediterranean Sea since it seemed I had traveled far enough to reach it.

After the City of David tour, I walked the Ramparts of Walls of the Old City. It is well worth doing. Shortly after passing the Damascus Gate, I found the walkway closed. Nearby I found the chief engineer for the ramparts talking to workmen. Apparently tourists had been attacked on the remaining portion of the walk and they were making the ramparts more secure. I asked if they were doing this by replacing the people who attacked infidels on the wall. He smiled and said no - they were just making the ramparts more inaccessible to attackers. Then, when entering the ramparts on the other side of Jaffa gate, I noticed one of the two ticket takers torturing a little kitten and the other ticket taker happily watching. I reported them to the main ticket office and I am pretty sure they are now currently unemployed.

I decided to eat in Mahane Yehuda Shuk. I knew the light rail went behind the shuk and also traveled along a section of the Old City Wall, so I decided to follow the light rail tracks to dinner. Along the way I decided to stop and rest at Ben Yehuda Street, also besides the light rail system, and listen to this fantastic electric guitar-picker, street-artist playing Pink Floyd. While the street performer was playing, a middle aged man leaned over seemingly to leave a donation in the guitar picker's hat. However, instead of leaving a donation, he grabbed a large handful of coins and bills, calmly put it into his pocket in front of witnesses and started to walk away. The street artist considered this impolite behavior, threw his guitar down and pursued the thief. Instead of running away, the thief, being bigger and younger than the street artist, turned and physically stood his ground until the street artist gave up. Amazingly, the now abandoned electric guitar continued to play Pink Floyd flawlessly all by itself. Later I realized I could have taken a photo of the thief and/or shouted for help (there were lots of soldiers nearby), but I did not think of it at the time. I like to think Gabriel Allon and I have a lot in common, but in this instance I believe Gabriel would have acted differently from me.

Mahane Yehudo Shuk is a photographers paradise. When the stalls are shuttered at the end of the day, one notices the now somewhat famous artwork painted on many of the shutters (see my smugmug page).

Today I had breakfast with Hannah, my cousin's newly married daughter who lives in Jerusalem. Afterwards we used an Israeli app on her phone to gain access to a nearby car and then drove to Hannah's polling place, It was national election day in Israel. Most people have the day off (hence Hannah having time to eat breakfast with me). The people of Israel take their elections seriously because there is always a lot at stake. This election could end Bibi Netanyahu's career for instance. However, there is much less of the civil strife, moral superiority and intolerance than seen in the last American Presidential election. It is interesting how elections are handled in Israel. One needs a pictured ID, ie an official Israel ID card to vote. Thus it was impossible for me to vote - even once. Instead I found a Meretz voter heading to the polls and offered to save her some time. I told her that since I was going to vote for a party opposing Meretz, we could both not vote and save ourselves the bother of going to the polls since our votes would just cancel each other out anyway. This logic worked with three other Meretz voters too. Hopefully the Knesset will start catering to the needs of "voters" like me in the future - perhaps by eliminating the need for ID's when voting and printing the ballots in American English as well as Hebrew and Arabic.

Marc

**Friends and Family,**

**19<sup>th</sup> of September, 2019**

I woke up early, as usual, this morning and prepared to break camp. This was my last day in this airbnb. I stopped by the apartment above to say goodbye to the mother of the owner of the building who I rented the airbnb from (the third apartment in the house was occupied by the owner's aunt). The mother is a very nice woman. We were talking about managing rentals. She told me about a terrible short term rental of the apartment I stayed in to a young Orthodox woman. She turned out to be heavy drug user who, after she moved in, invited some of her druggy friends to to stay with her. Together they all trashed the place and converted it into a very popular and profitable brothel which helped finance their drug habits. The mother mentioned how, when her husband found out, it took only fifteen minutes for him to get them out. Then she started crying. Her husband died about eight years earlier and she misses him. I told her I knew the feeling too.

I took bus 13 to the Thrifty car rental office. It turned out the reason I could not find the Thrifty office was that there was no sign. Apparently Hertz owns Thrifty and only the Hertz sign was on the wall. I had been promised a car for a total of \$54 for five days. I informed the agent that some of my friends thought that all car rental agents were liars and that I would end up paying more. Furthermore, I told the agent that I had stood up for car rental agents and told my hateful friends that car rental agents are actually very caring people. Then she told me the real price would be \$175. I told the agent that my friends would now make fun of me, without mercy, and destroy my self-esteem. "Don't you care?", I implored. Apparently she didn't. However, I still have a plan on how I can get most of my money back and only pay \$54. We'll see.

I got a Honda Jazz with manual transmission. My smartphone has lousy GPS and the employee who got me the car told me my GPS was sending me through bad (ie, Arab) neighborhoods. The traffic was heavy and the roads were totally unfamiliar to me. I haven't driven in a few months, and the last time I drove manual transmission was over a year ago. I was feeling somewhat inadequate. However, when I opened the glove compartment a hint of a smile appeared on my face as I felt the cold, sweet handle of a loaded 9mm Beretta Model 92. I took off, flying through traffic, the way Gabriel Allon would have done. I started thinking of all the bodies I had left behind in Jerusalem. There was the thief who took the donations of the fake guitar player on Ben Yehuda Street. There was the Old City Ramparts ticket taker who tortured a kitten and of course there was the Hertz/Thrifty car rental agent. There also was a young guy who jumped the turnstile instead of buying a ticket at the Tower of

David (he had even refused to stop when an employee saw him jump). I didn't count the old man who honked at me when I cut him off in Latrun because that wasn't technically in Jerusalem.

By the way, the English language tour at the Tower of David is very much worth doing. Highly recommended.

My GPS had me going North toward Tel Aviv, but after a while it turned me toward the coast and then South toward Ashdod and the Gaza Strip. It then took me inland to Beersheba, my daytime destination. The last and only time I have ever been in Beersheba was in 1971 when I was on an Egged bus that drove right through it on the way to Eilat. I remembered the transition from a barren desert to an old, tattered town was about two inches wide. I also remembered the apartment complexes had tiny windows that were strategically placed as to protect them from the weekly giant sandstorms that blew up from the Arabian Peninsula. It certainly isn't like that today. My guess is that I had an overactive imagination in those days – much like Gabriel did.

Beersheba means “Seventh Well” in Hebrew and is frequently abbreviated as “B7”. There are farms now covering what was barren land when I was there in 1971. Now where there are no farms, there are trees. These are substantial trees too. There are not enough of them to say I was driving through a forest - it was more like African safari country or John Steinbeck's Live Oaks country in California. I passed a huge SodaStream plant on the outskirts of the city. Beersheba has lots of construction underway (like the rest of Israel) and some very modern buildings. Ben Gurion University is quite impressive. The “town” is now definitely a city - the “Capital of the Negev”. However, the college students I talked to said Beersheba is “boring”.

I figured out the old city was the best place to pick up where I had left off in Beersheba in 1971. The old city is even more laid back than the rest of Beersheba. I parked the car two blocks away, put on my hat and started walking. A half a block away from the main street, I notice a Persian cat watching me intently from a second floor window across the street. Immediately, my senses went on high alert. Continuing with a dumb tourist look on my face, I turned the corner and saw another cat of the same breed, monitoring me as it nonchalantly strolled across the old pedestrian mall. I looked down and saw a pile of pistachio shells behind a tree off to the side. Then, it happened! A “Jewish” shopkeeper walked out his shop, yet did not touch the mezuzah on the doorpost and kiss his hand as he left. Later, as I was driving away from the old city, a number of police cars, with sirens blasting, sped past me

going the other way. It got me thinking that sometimes keeping Israel safe can be so thankless.

“What the hell did you do!!!!”, some of you may be thinking. I obviously can’t tell you, but just think of Beethoven’s Mona Lisa painting. The work I do is at the same level of precision, skill and aesthetic beauty.

I’m going to spend the next two nights hanging low at Mitzpe Ramon, near the Ramon Crater. I hope to find a jeep ride into the crater. Otherwise I will go hiking on Sde Boker, Ben Gurion’s old kibbutz.

I am having a good time - today was a fun day. However the two months of leisure in Israel isn’t happening. There is too much to see and do. And Israel is a very complicated place to figure out.

Marc

**Family and Friends,**

**25<sup>th</sup> of September 2019**

I am now back in Jerusalem and happily situated in a new airbnb close to where I was before. And my Negev adventure, that I hoped would never end, is sadly behind me.

By the time I left Beersheva, it was already getting dark. On the Southern outskirts of the city were lots of industrial factories. The landscape was also dotted with Bedouin towns created from corrugated sheets of metal - not a place I would plan to retire to. The Bedouin are Muslim, but not very religious. Some of them serve in the Israeli Defense Forces where they often make excellent desert scouts. Unfortunately, others engage in crime - stealing cars and robbing what they can. Those that engage in crime don't seem to be ideologically inspired (in the same way that lions aren't ideologically against zebra). Non-Bedouin Israelis are always wary of Bedouins when on Bedouin home turf - the desert.

As the sun set, darkness protected the modesty of Mother Earth, now nude of almost all vegetation. It seemed like I was driving through a great emptiness, but here and there, in the dark, I could find a few lights in the distance - a farm perhaps, a prison for Arab terrorists or a gas station. When I finally arrived in Mitzpe Ramon, Google Maps led me to the place I had rented for two nights - a room with a bathroom and its own entrance in a house in the middle of a suburb that could have been in Tucson for all it seemed.

The next morning I awoke in suburbia and headed to the Visitor Center for Ramon Crater. Despite being toward the end of September, it was still pretty hot. The Ranger, mentioned it was "only" in the 30's (Celsius) - last month it was in the 40's. He suggested I forget about taking a jeep ride in the crater. Instead he suggested that I hike around the crater and find somewhere, preferably air conditioned, to hide from the mid day sun. I took him up on his suggestion. The two hikes I took along the rim (one in the morning and the other in the evening) were gorgeous. I even ran into a herd of wild ibex goats.

Part of the rim was devoted to a big sculpture garden developed by the local artists. I decided to have lunch in the Spice Industrial Center. There perhaps was some industry there, but no restaurants that I could ferret out. Instead the place was completely infested with art studios - perhaps close to fifty of them. Each studio had a narcissistic artist sitting in the middle of it, each so proud of their own art that I was pretty sure they would have no interest in my photographs or travel log.

The artists seemed to get along with the other, but I am pretty sure none of them bought each other's art.

After watching the sun go down (somehow not over the crater as I had hoped) and hiking the last of the sculpture garden, I made it back to my suburban rental. During the day I saw a movie at the ranger station about one of the most underrated and harmful pollutions unleashed by modern man – light pollution. It has nightly robbed us of the awesome experience of seeing the stars, the planets and the Milky Way and thus is responsible for the use of drugs and the rampant nihilism in the youth of Europe and America. Light pollution is also responsible for birds and insects losing their ability to navigate when migrating and hence perhaps leading to their extinctions. It actually made sense to me. Perhaps large parts of the human race (not including me) should return to their former Neolithic lifestyles. However, in Mitzpe Ramon, one can still see stars - though not anything like what I used to see in the Sierra Nevada mountains during backpacking trips.

The next day I had Shakshuka for breakfast and then headed South without the help of the stupid stars - I had Google maps. The terrain is unlike anything one sees in the States. The earth is laid bare with very little vegetation anywhere. Everything seems to exist on a grander scale. One can see the effects of different mineral deposits, of the monumental effects of water and wind, of ancient sea beds, of tectonic plates moving apart, of earthquakes, of ancient volcanoes and of magma that cooled underground.

One might ask, monumental effects of water? There is so little water here! What one is really viewing is the effects of extreme statistics. It matters little that streams and rivers in the desert see so little water compared to streams and rivers in more wet climates. What matters is the size of a 1,000 or 10,000 year flow rate (the biggest flow in 1,000 or 10,000 years). Most of the erosion in the desert occurs in those few hours (especially on ground not protected by the roots of vegetation).

I stopped and took photographs and short hikes on the way. I was warned by other drivers that Bedouins steal valuables from cars or even the cars themselves, so to be careful. I was careful, but I continued exploring. The Negev is so beautiful I am pretty sure I will be safe from drugs and nihilism for at least another few years.

I arranged to stay for two nights on Kibbutz Lotan which is about 50 miles North of Eilat and nestled against beautiful Jordanian mountains. I took a gratifying swim in the Kibbutz pool and had a few interesting conversations with the friendly members of the kibbutz. It seems like this kibbutz and a few other kibbutzim in the area had

been founded by the Jewish Reform Movement of America. Lotan was founded in 1983. I was in another Anglo Bubble - but one much different from the Orthodox Anglo Bubble of Jerusalem. I very much love kibbutz life. There is a nice sense of community and belonging. Life is more laid back and everyone lives in a wonderfully designed and landscaped park-like environment. One of Kibbutz Lotan's missions, coming from Reform roots, is to save the planet. To do this they built an "eco-village" consisting of air-conditioned mud and straw huts with creative uses of technology that will make the transition back to Neolithic times as painless as possible. The huts all share an outdoor communal bathroom, one communal large refrigerator, several solar ovens and outdoor communal eating areas. And everything is decorated with what seems to be appropriate prehistoric art that is completely charming. There is even a communal clothes washing machine powered by a stationary bike. The eco-village is not occupied by kibbutz residents or guests, of course. The eco-village is rented out to enlightened groups that want to see what it would be like to live under circumstances that they would like to force on others, besides themselves.

I was thinking that laundromats using washing and drier machines powered by stationary bikes could be combined with gyms in a ecological symbiosis. If any of you are interested in helping to save Planet Earth and investing in this paradigm please send me money and I'll see that it gets to Kibbutz Lotan. Joking aside, I think making our lives more ecologically friendly without giving up on civilization is not a bad thing and I hope the kibbutz succeeds in making an intelligent contribution to this effort.

I spent the next day at the nearby Timna Park (where King Solomon's mines are). The park reminded me of the American National Parks in Southern Utah, only the park had archaeological significance too. Timna was the site of some of the worlds first known copper mines. There are thousands of ancient mining shafts in the park as well as the remains of smelting furnaces and even a temple to Egyptian goddess of copper, Hathor. The Pharaohs of Egypt mined copper here, using local "workers", between the 14th and 12th centuries BCE. There is evidence of copper mining during the days of King Solomon's reign around the 10th century BCE. The copper was used to make bronze which was then made into tools, weapons and ornaments. These objects must have been very valuable for why else would Egyptians subject their slaves to the dangerous, hard and very unpleasant work that hard rock mining in the hot desert entailed?

I wanted to hike as much of the park as possible. When I was younger my parents claimed I was part ferret (and they would know) since I wanted to see everything.

It turned out the trails involved much more rock scrambling and climbing than I anticipated. I spent about six hours in 95 degree temperature hiking, under a bright sun with almost no shade. I don't know why, but it felt much cooler than 95 degrees. At one point I got lost for about an hour and half. I finally gave up on my map and the trail markers and decided to go cross country using my infallible sense of direction to find the rental car. That worked. I did so much hiking that by closing time my left ankle (my "good" ankle) was giving out and I was quite lame. Luckily the ankle was still good enough to work the clutch so I could drive back to the kibbutz. Definitely worth it!

I had a long drive north to Kiryat Gat where I spent the night and visited Beit Guvrin-Maresha National Park the next day (more on that in my next email). After returning the car, I managed to bargain the price down from \$272 (it was originally \$54) to \$121 for the five days. It wasn't really the fault of the car rental place, but of MasterCard. MasterCard advertises that it will cover car rental insurance if you use their card. I had phoned MasterCard before contacting the rental company and they assured me they would. It wasn't until I was in the rental office that they started hedging. Both the rental company, CapitalOne Bank and I found it impossible to get any reliable information from MasterCard over the next five days (which worked to MasterCard's advantage). Next time I will use my AMEX card.

Hope all is well with you all,

Marc

**Friends and Family,**

**13th of October 5780**

On my way back to Jerusalem I visited Beit Guvrin-Maresha National Park. The park consists of the ruins of Maresha, one of the main towns of Judah during the time of the First Temple, which later became an important Roman town known as Eleutheropolis. Below the top soil in the park is chalk and many caves were carved out by the Jews, Romans and the Christians who followed. Some caves served as burial sites, some for raising pigeons and some housed olive oil making facilities. Very extensive networks of man made caves also served as living quarters. Very large caves were quarried out by the Romans and later by the Christians for the chalk that was used to make roads, plaster and mortar. It was very hot when I was there, as it typically is during the summer months, and the caves were a pleasant escape from the heat as I am sure it was for the Jews, Romans and Christians who lived and worked in them. After my visit to the park, it was a ninety minute drive back to Jerusalem.

My friend Tova, and her husband Joel, have continued to generously introduce me to her wonderful friends and the world she lives in. It is a very interesting world. It is a happy and intellectually fulfilling world that gives meaning to one's life. Furthermore, it is very tolerant world.

My stay in Israel overlapped with the High Jewish Holidays. Tova got me a seat in a nearby Orthodox shul in the German Colony for both days of Rosh Hashanah and let her rabbi friend, who sat next me, know who I was. It was a very educational and moving experience.

During the Rosh Hashanna services, there were discussions about Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac. Abraham is much admired for his complete devotion to G-d as demonstrated by his willingness to carry out G-d's request to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac (without even pleading with G-d to change his mind). I wonder if the Jewish people today would admire Abraham quite the same if G-d had not sent an angel at the last minute to stop Abraham. The difference in these two scenarios was not in Abraham, but in G-d sending or not sending an angel to save Isaac. Abraham so completely trusted and loved G-d that he believed G-d must have had a good reason to order him to sacrifice Isaac, even if he didn't know what this reason was and/or perhaps was incapable of understanding G-d's reasoning.

The rabbi in shul asked all the women attending (women sit separately from the men in Orthodox synagogues) if they would have sacrificed their son if G-d requested it.

They all said “no” (none said “gladly”). None of the women felt any lesser or wrong in admitting that they would ignore a direct request/command from G-d. The rabbi then said that this was why God was male and not female. The men and women all agreed with the rabbi. The reasoning was that the unconditional love a woman has for her children is part of the very definition of a mother - it is the nature of a mother that can't be overridden. The very thought of a mother who would be willing to sacrifice her child in any circumstance is scary. On the other hand, the love of a father for his children, while not necessarily less, is more nuanced. Sarah would never have consented to the sacrifice of Isaac, but Abraham did. The death of Sarah (at age 127 years old) was, in part, caused by learning of the binding of Isaac and his near sacrifice. Mothers are all in when it comes to their children. Sarah's death led to Abraham buying the first piece of Jewish land in Eretz Israel, in Hebron, to bury his wife. Acceptance and thankfulness of the differences between males and females is the norm among the modern Orthodox, but is now very politically incorrect in much of the Western World where equality unfortunately often means sameness.

I have been sending my clothes to laundromats and letting them wash, dry and fold them since I returned from the Negev. Using the laundromat near my second Jerusalem airbnb for the second time, I picked up my clean clothes as I was leaving for the new high speed train to Tel Aviv. After reaching Tel Aviv, when wearing these recently cleaned clothes, I noticed they smelled funny. At first I figured it was like the food stains on my clothes that I can see but I am confident no one else can see. However, my clothes smelled really bad. Enough to make my eyes watery and the rest of me dizzy. It smelled like how perfume would smell if they made it from DEET (the active ingredient in mosquito repellent). I came the conclusion that the smell was in a different category than publicly invisible food stains - other people could detect the smell! I found a Tel Aviv laundromat that promised me they could fix the smell - for about a third of the cost of replacement. We'll see.

My airbnb in Tel Aviv is two blocks from HaCarmel Shuk (an open market) and two blocks from the beach. The beach is beautiful and goes from the very North of Tel Aviv to Yafo (also known as Jaffa) in the very South of Tel Aviv. Even in the middle of October, it is such a pleasure to go swimming everyday in the sea. The beach is quite sandy and is filled with the constant ponging sounds of Matkot (a Israeli beach paddle ball game). Between the water and the city is people sunbathing, restaurants and bars serving drinks, walking paths and a bike lane. The bike lane serves as a major route of transportation between the North and South. There are beach volley ball courts and exercise stations everywhere. It is hard to think of anything nicer. And at night everything is lit up nicely and it seems as if all of Tel Aviv (people of

all ages) come down to the beach to walk and socialize.

Tel Aviv is a beautiful city filled with great restaurants, shopping, museums, art galleries and lots of bars. In fact Tel Aviv is famous for its nightlife. I decided not to spend my time in the bars picking up twentish year old Israeli women, but to explore the city instead. Yafo was particularly beautiful. It is a mixed part of town with a large portion of the residents Arab. It has a beautiful port, great restaurants, fantastic galleries and beautiful restored Ottoman buildings. One of the most incredible galleries I have ever been in was the Ilana Goor Museum (I called it a gallery because much of the work is for sale). I took photos and they are posted on smugmug.

Spending Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, in Tel Aviv is a fantastic experience. The entire city stops for a day, no cars or buses driving on the street, no grocery stores or restaurants open. No stores or offices open of any type. Instead, all the background noise of a city was gone and Tel Aviv became one huge, beautiful park. It was like what would follow after an epic event, such as an EMG attack. Families came out to walk in the middle of large boulevards, a shul even held services in a major intersection. No one was working or thinking of work. Instead they all gathered in the streets with their loved ones. I attended Kol Nidre services at a beautiful Chabad synagogue.

Walking around after Yom Kippur, I noticed an Israeli Korean Bingsu place (bingsu is a fantastic Korean dessert created from shaved ice, fresh fruits, condensed milk, sauces, red beans and scoops of ice cream and Japanese mochi). It wasn't as good as the memorable bingsu desserts I have devoured in Korea, but it still looked pretty good. A World War II Sherman tank is laughable compared to a modern Israeli Merkava IV tank, but the same Sherman tank still would be more than capable when fighting Roman Legions. Likewise, the Israeli Bingsu shop does quite well here.

One of the things people in Tel Aviv complain about is the traffic and lack of parking. The Chinese are building a light rail network for the city, but it won't be ready for another few years. In the meanwhile the Israelis are good at creative problem solving and have set up a large system of affordable, available bikes you can rent using just a smartphone app. Since Tel Aviv has a large network of bike paths this works great. The bike paths here are not lines painted on the street like in the United States, but paths physically removed from car traffic. Many residents of the city have electric bikes which are perfect for getting around. However, the real neat thing is the flying

carpets that can be rented anywhere, again by using a smartphone app. Like the bikes, you can rent them anywhere and leave them anywhere. They are everywhere. Technically the flying carpets are electric scooters, but they work much the same as flying carpets except for some minor mechanical differences. It takes about 50 shekels and a half an hour for a taxi to make it to North Tel Aviv, but I can walk to the beach, get a flying carpet and be in North Tel Aviv in fifteen minutes total, and be only about 17 shekels lighter. They really are a game changer for getting around. While other cities have electric scooters, Tel Aviv residents and tourists use them more extensively than anywhere else in the world. They are fun and most likely soon appearing in a city near you.

I ate dinner several times at the same restaurant. They had outdoor seating and each evening the same young couple would also come for dinner with their miniature poodle. And each evening this cat, who spends his evenings hanging out at the restaurant, would come to couple's table and stare at the dog. The dog took great offense at this, for what he considered an insult to his canine race and went absolutely ballistic. The cat just sat quietly and watched the dog struggle to break loose so as to put the world right. The commotion disturbed all the other restaurant guests, and the waiters and busboys would chase the cat off. However, two or three minutes later the determined cat would return to insult/torment the dog again. Sometimes the dog broke the grip of its master and would chase the cat under the tables between the legs of the guests. The cat was not afraid of the dog (I am sure it would have easily won any real fight with the dog), but was not interested in fighting the dog either. The waiters and busboys would continue to chase the ever-returning feline away, until they got tired and then would instead buy off the cat with a plate of delicious chicken. This was what the cat had schemed for all along without realizing that the waitress and busboy must be on to his game since he does this every night.

I mention this not because I wanted to reveal some facts about the inner lives of cats (if you are interested in the inner lives of cats, many cat owners post amazing insights concerning the inner lives of their cats on the internet). I mentioned this only to point out two things. One: the drama I just laid out for you is probably similar to how the drama in our own lives looks like when viewed from far enough above. Two: just how confident the cat was that it was going to ultimately end up with chicken and not a kick to its broadside or freezing water thrown on it. There are lots of feral cats here in Tel Aviv (as there are in Jerusalem) and they are all friendly and trusting to humans. I have not seen this happen anywhere else. I take it as just another indication of how tolerant, friendly and caring the Israeli people are.

Marc

**Friends and Family,**

**15<sup>th</sup> October 5780**

Right now I am flying home on the second day of Sukkot, Feast of Tabernacles, a seven day Jewish Holiday (eight day in the Diaspora) giving thanks to G-d for a good harvest. There is a great Israeli movie call Ushpizin (“Sukkot Guests”) that is very much worth seeing for Jew or non-Jew. The holiday always starts on full moon (the Hebrew calendar is lunar based) and ends with Simchat Torah, which marks the beginning of the annual cycle of Torah readings. Each family builds a temporary shelter, call a sukkah (according to special instructions found in the Book of Leviticus) to eat and often sleep in them. Those sleeping in their sukkah, early this morning, took an unexpected shower during a brief rain. The sukkot (plural of sukkah) are to remind Jews of how we lived in the desert during the exodus from Egypt. It is hard for Israelis to build sukkot in the middle of a crowded city, but some do. I added some photos of sukkot to smugmug (the last photos for my trip). Sukkot is also a traditional time for Israelis to go on vacation. Israelis who leave for vacation usually leave before the second day of Sukkot so as to maximize their time on vacation. That is why I am traveling with such a cheap fare on an El Al Dreamliner that is more empty than full. I took a nap on my seat and the two empty seats next to me - I may even be more comfortable than those in business class!

When leaving a country, it is my custom to point out what is wrong with that country so it might improve itself. It has been my experience that the natives so look forward to my helpful suggestions, that they can't wait for me to leave. So the worse thing I found in Israel is there is never enough electrical outlets in either the bathrooms or the kitchens. Many of the bathrooms I used had no outlets at all. What to do with my battery less electric razor and my electric toothbrush? Kitchens have outlets, but never enough. When I visited a friend (even friend with new place), there were always outlet multipliers in the kitchen wall outlets. Other than this, I could not find anything else in Israel that needs changing.

If the Israelis were to list what is their greatest complaint about Israel it would be that it has become too expensive. Housing in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv is at near Manhattan levels. Food is not cheap. There are taxes on everything and government bureaucracy is everywhere. Connections matter when it comes to your child's education or to your medical care. And still, Israelis deeply love their dynamic little democracy as do I.

Some of my friends tell me that they would love to visit Israel, but are afraid of all the Arab terrorism. I read an interesting statistic: the murder rate per 100,000

people in the United States it is more than twice the rate in Israel even when you include deaths from terrorism. So if you are an American with a deep concern for safety, you should come to Israel for that reason alone! You'll be safer than if you stayed home.

Stepping off this little piece of flying Israel in a few hours and into New York City will mark the end of my around-the-world trip. Part of my four month long trip was an experiment to see if the world was flat or not by flying west for my whole trip and observing if I returned to the point I started (JFK) or if I fell off the edge. As it turned out, I did return to JFK and I have concluded that the earth is most likely shaped like a cylinder. I am not home sick. I love traveling too much, but I love America also so I look forward to being back and to reconnecting with friends and family.

Marc

PS: I have posted my photographs to

<https://marcmehlman.smugmug.com>

The photographs can be downloaded if you like. I hope to post process these photographs with Lightroom in the coming weeks.