

The Goodman's Blog

Chapter 109

March 2022

ALIYAH IN OUR 60's FROM ARLINGTON HTS, IL TO CAESEREA, ISRAEL (Part 109)

SUZANNE & HOWIE GOODMAN



Howie and Suzanne Goodman were valued members at Beth Judea until they decided to make aliyah in 2009. The Goodmans have agreed to provide us with a blog on their experiences as new olim in Israel. Though we continue to miss the Goodmans, we can all look forward to reading about their adventures in Israel through their blog.

Aliyah in Our 60's –March 2022 - Part 109

The citizenship bill is currently being debated in the Knesset. When you have a fragile coalition of 61 that consists of left and right wing parties as well as the Israeli Arab coalition, almost any bill becomes controversial. In addition, the opposition led by Likud under Netanyahu has vowed not to support any legislation entered by the coalition even if it is a bill they generally support.

There are three versions of the citizenship bill. Likud, Interior minister Shaked, and Religious Zionist Party MK Simcha Rothman are heading the three versions. The liberal Meretz Party opposes all three versions and vowed to take revenge on the coalition. Leadership of the coalition decided to let MK's vote based on personal beliefs regarding the citizenship bill. The goal of all three versions of the bill is to tighten controls regarding Palestinians who marry Arab Israelis and then wish to become Israeli citizens. All three versions have failed to pass so far due to dissent and the opposition opposing the bill even though they generally agree with it. The High Court of Justice has mandated that a passed bill is required to continue the process.

One of the provisions is to bar Palestinians marrying Israel Arabs from living in Israel. Rights groups charge the law would be unconstitutional although the Supreme Court of Israel upheld the former law 6 to 5 in 2012.

Last year, the coalition failed to win enough votes to renew the law. Twelve thousand-seven hundred Palestinians married to Israel Arabs live in Israel with temporary documentation. Yearly, they have to renew their fragile status in Israel. For years, most Palestinians living in Israel have not been permitted to drive or open a bank account. Also, if a spouse dies or divorces, the individual could be deported with the children or the children could be kept behind.

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Why such a law? It originally was passed to help prevent terrorist attacks after Hamas member Shadi Tubasi killed 16 Israelis in one of the most horrific terrorist attacks during the second Intifada. He had received an Israeli identity card by marrying an Israeli Arab.

In the 1990's, 130,000 Palestinians were granted family unification. According to Shin Bet, about 155 of those people or their descendants have been involved in terror attacks since 2001. Lapid has defended the law as a demographic measure to maintain the Israeli Jewish Majority.

The voting process requires three readings in the Knesset and then is voted upon each time and has to pass all three of the readings. The results should be known shortly.

Amnesty International just came out with a 278 page report that has been in the making for four years. It states that Israel practices apartheid towards the West Bank and Gaza. The organization states that the report is not antisemitic but against the Israeli government's policies. We have not read the entire report. Amnesty is saying that these opinions are from well qualified individuals.

Rabbi Warren Goldstein, Chief Rabbi of South Africa, immediately had comments regarding Amnesty International's report describing Israel as an apartheid state. He described the report as trying to achieve the same goal of Iran which is to destroy the Jewish State. He went on to say it is a diplomatic equivalent to a nuclear weapon.

Rabbi Goldstein went on to say it is a lie without any foundation in truth. He also said it really makes the true apartheid victims in South Africa as frivolous. Rabbi Goldstein was in South Africa in the 1980's. He describes how global sanctions were very successful. It made a South African shameful of being South African. It also hurt the pockets of the people. International travel was described as walking around with a badge of shame. He truly believes the intention is to destroy the Jewish state by breaking the resolve of the citizens of Israel. To shame people of their country, make them reluctant to serve in the military or pay taxes. Then they emigrate to avoid the disgrace.

The conclusion Amnesty came to after 4 years was predictable. It is important to act now! If we don't, it will cast a shadow on Jewish history. We need to fight this with letters to the editor and to our government representatives.

On February 8th, 2022, the US Senate foreign Relations committee held a hearing on the nomination of Deborah Lipstadt to serve as the next envoy to monitor and combat antisemitism. A vote will occur on another date for confirmation. Committee Chairman Bob Demendez (D-New Jersey) described her as an "impeccable nominee in terms of her knowledge of antisemitism not only in the US. She is a global expert and scholar."

Asked about the recent Amnesty International report, Lipstadt said: "I found the language used in the report more than ahistorical. I found it unhistorical. Israel and World Jewry and Israel's allies and supporters must rally to support Israel."

The *Times of Israel* (TOI), an online English publication, sat down with the group's Secretary General Agnes Callamard and Middle East and North Africa research and advocacy director Phillip Luther to discuss the report they had released accusing Israel of apartheid. The following is the link to the discussion: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/amnesty-to-toi-no-double-standard-in-accusing-israel-but-not-china-of-apartheid/>

Excerpts of the discussion include the TOI referring to polls of Palestinians that find a clear majority of Palestinians admire Israeli democracy. In 2016, the positive percent was 68%. The Times asked if oppressed people normally would admire the oppressor?

It was also brought up about the Jewish Quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem that would be illegal settlements that are not pre-1967 green lines. It was pointed out by TOI that in the Jewish Quarter, there are homes hundreds of years old and yet they would be settlements in the report's definition.

Another point made was that, according to their report, only Israel and Myanmar maintain systems of apartheid, while countries like China, Iran, Iraq, Turkey are not. We found from this interview that one of the apparent criteria was that countries such as Syria, Iran, and China will not allow Amnesty in their countries and therefore they cannot determine if they are apartheid.

From this interview, it is obvious that all aspects of the report can must answered and refuted.

Again, recognize what the apartheid label is and that is the destruction of Israel.

Dry Bones It's Simple



So far, there has been immediate reaction as the Israeli Foreign Ministry headed by Foreign Minister Yair Lapid issued a video message in English, to which Lapid charged, "If Israel was not a Jewish State, no one would dare make such a claim against it." Amnesty doesn't call Syria, where the regime has murdered half a million of its own citizens, an apartheid state, or Iran or other underpins regimes around the world - only Israel," Lapid said. He went on, "This country might not be perfect, but we are a democracy committed to international law, open to criticism with a free press and a strong and independent judicial system."

We are not perfect. However, after living in Israel as citizens for over 12 years, we are impressed with the mix of cultures. The percentage of Israeli Arab doctors, nurses, lab people, pharmacists, lawyers, and teachers surpass the percent Israeli Arabs represent in our population. The report also attempts to make it a racial issue, which it is not. It ignores that almost all Arab states called for the removal of the Jewish populations in their countries. Where did many flee to? Israel. Palestinian leaders have talked consistently about their future state being devoid of any Jews.

The United Nations Human Rights Council will be issuing a report in June which could identify Israel as an apartheid state. They also are trying to make it racist. There are many commentators in Israel who feel that reports such as this have a deleterious effect on the cause of peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

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In their report, Amnesty International calls for the right of return of refugees to what is now the State of Israel. Many believe the number could be five million. That would mean that in a short time, Israel would no longer be a Jewish state. Few write about the refugee camps composed of Palestinians who have had generations to resettle, as do most peoples. Why are there not Jewish refugee camps? More Jews immigrated from the Arab countries than the number of Arabs that were relocated by the war of Independence.

We are proud to be United States of America citizens as well as Israel citizens. We need, however, help from non-Israelis to remove the legitimacy of this report which is so untrue. We cannot allow this to become a racist issue when it is not.

Right now, Israel is making peace with a number of Arab countries in the Middle East. Israeli President Herzog recently visited the UAE. Defense minister Gantz has visited Bahrain even though we do not have a formal agreement with that country. In early February, representatives of the UAE parliament came to Israel



Alternative bar mitzvah site in Jerusalem

No trip to Israel would be complete without a trip to the Kotel or the Western Wall. The Western Wall is located in the heart of the Old City of Jerusalem and is the most sacred site in the Jewish religion. The wall was originally erected as part of the expansion of the Second Jewish Temple begun by Herod the Great, which resulted in the encasement of the natural, steep hill known as the Temple Mount in a huge rectangular structure topped by a flat platform for the Temple itself. The wall is considered closest to the former Holy of Holies which makes it the most sacred site recognized by Judaism outside of the Temple Mount platform. Jews come from all over the world to pray there and to place notes in the creases of the wall.

The custom of worshipping at the Kotel began during the Medieval period. In the 14th century, the Ottoman sultan Suleiman the Magnificent (1494-1566) set aside this section for the purpose of religious observances of any kind. In the 19th century, the Ottomans allowed Jewish men and women to pray together on Fridays and high holy days.

After the war of 1948 and the Arab capture of the Jewish Quarter in Jerusalem, the Jordanians banned Jews from praying at the site of the Western Wall. The area was defaced by political posters and totally disrespected. After the 1967 Six Day War, Israel claimed ownership of the city's religious sites and restored the plaza next to the wall.



Kotel showing divider with women on the right

For the last 20 years, the Western Wall has been managed by Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz. There are problematic aspects of how the holy site is run by the rabbi, and there is no input by any sects of Judaism other than the Orthodox. It was not until January 2016 that the Israeli government approved the first space where non-Orthodox Jews of both sexes can pray together. This is an area next to the traditional area and is called Robinson's Arch. The arch is an area that was excavated at the southwestern corner of the Temple Mount. It is the only place in the Western Wall where families can pray together and perform bar/bat mitzvah ceremonies and other ceremonies without a partition.

Rosh Chodesh, or the beginning of the new month, are times of conflict at the Kotel. Women of the Wall is an organization that has fought for the right of women to pray, to wear prayer shawls, and to read from the Torah collectively and out loud at the Kotel. Orthodox groups have tried to block women from entering the area and carrying a Torah into the women's section. Busloads of Orthodox children and yeshiva students have been transported to the scene to protest against the women. On October 7, 2021 Labor MK and Reform rabbi Gilad Kariv joined the Women of the Wall for prayers and the Torah reading for Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan. Kariv brought a Torah scroll to the plaza for the women to read from. As they tried to read from the scroll, they were removed from the women's section of the plaza. They were pushed and yelled at. Guards at the sight asked them to leave and stop the provocation and mess. The Western Wall Heritage Foundation stated that it was "saddened" by the disturbances and said that Kariv's attempt to bring a Torah scroll into the women's section was in opposition to explicit instructions from the Justice Ministry. Police and guards did not attempt to protect them. The argument is that these women are disrupting the peace and the order of the Western Wall.

In 2017, a bill was passed to build a permanent mixed-gender plaza for non-Orthodox Jews at the holy site. Besides creating a pluralistic prayer pavilion at the Western Wall, there would be representatives of non-Orthodox streams of Judaism sharing in the oversight role. But a year later, the then prime minister Netanyahu gave in to pressure from his ultra-Orthodox coalition partners and indefinitely froze the deal. The current government led by Prime Minister Naftali Bennett has indicated that they are looking at reviving it. Three years ago a large stone portion dislodged from the wall and crash landed on a platform leading to the egalitarian area. It has just recently been repaired and some boards replaced. A huge amount of money has just been designated to do repairs at the Kotel and to maintain it. None of those funds have been allotted to the Robinson Arch area for non-Orthodox worshipers.

The Women of the Wall have stated that without any action on the compromise deal or upgrades to the egalitarian area they will not give up the right to pray at the main section of the Kotel. When there have been services at the Robinson's Arch, including on Tisha B'av last year it was swarmed by ultra-Orthodox activists. They put up mechitzah between men and women in the area and interrupted the egalitarian services.

Rabbi Rabinowitz is frequently in the Jerusalem Post, an English language newspaper to which we subscribe. Recently he wrote an op-ed that described how the different sectors of the Israeli community should come together as a family. This is true. However, to the administrator of the Kotel this means that we should all just keep the peace by maintaining the status quo. As Masorti Jews, one of the things we like most about our worship is that we pray together as a family.

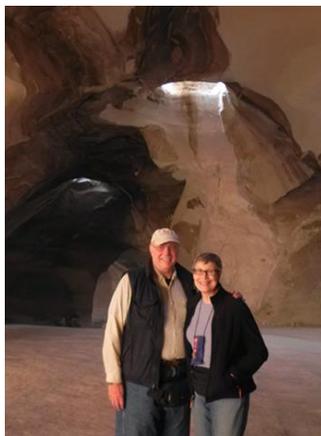
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When we have a bar mitzvah the parents are on the bima with the child. When our step-grandchild was a bar mitzvah at the Kotel twelve years ago the women were separated by a high curtain. The mother and grandmothers had to stand on chairs to look over and could barely get a glimpse of Tomer who was being bar mitzvahed. We couldn't hear him read. What we are asking for is a place at the Kotel where we can experience prayer in the manner we find most meaningful. The Kotel belongs to all the Jews of the world, and we are just asking that our mode of worship be respected. If the Kotel were an Orthodox synagogue, we would respect the manner of worship of that synagogue. They could separate the men and women and not allow women to bring Torahs or read them. However, the Kotel is not a synagogue. It is a holy site that belongs to all Jews- whether they chose to be Reform, Conservative, or secular, and we deserve our place at the Wall. The Kotel is just a part of an ongoing struggle that exists in Israel between the Orthodox and other sects of Judaism.

On the light side, there is a new Israeli invention, the robot bartender Cecilia. She can make 120 cocktails an hour, speaks 40 different languages, tells jokes, and could be the future of the hospitality industry. She is seven-feet tall and took three years to build. Customers can go up and verbally request beverages or use a touchscreen menu. She will take cashless payments and scans IDs. The robot can sell drinks in various venues, provide faster service to customers, and even serve drinks after hours. In addition, she generates dashboard analytics that show the popularity of drinks, what the customers are asking for as well as what the busiest times of day are. It gives people the option to take a drink whenever they want. She can work 24/7 every day of the week all year long. Since Purim is soon, Cecilia could come in very handy.

Israel has had a fair amount of rain this year. Recently, there was snow in Jerusalem and at Mount Hermon. February and March are peak times for yellow and red flowers to blossom in the grass. It is a great time to do tiyulim and visit the many historical places in perfectly beautiful weather. We hope you will be visiting us soon.

Suzanne and Howie



-The opinions expressed are those of the authors and may not represent those Congregation Beth Judea- ed.

We hope you enjoy this installment from the Goodmans, who have graciously agreed to blog for our congregation their experiences as Olim in Israel. If there are specific topics that you are interested in hearing about of if you just want to stay in touch with Howie and Suzanne, you can reach them at: HOWIEG@aol.com