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D.B., 'To the New Comer'

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Summary:

While in 1947 the Indian organizers of the First Asian Relations Conference invited a Yishuvi delegation, eight years later the Bandung Conference organizers did not invite Israel. At the same time, the second half of the 1950s signaled the start of Israel's long "African Decade," which would end only when many African states cut their diplomatic ties with the Jewish State after the 1973 October War. The first two countries to establish diplomatic ties with Israel were Ethiopia, in 1956, and Liberia, in 1957; in the 1960s, many others followed, including Benin, Burkina Faso, Congo, Ghana, the Ivory Coast, Madagascar, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Tanzania.

Thousands of Africans studied in Israel, as illustrated by this document, an anonymous article published in 1963 in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem' African Students journal that provides a glimpse of experiences Africans had, including racism but also feelings of superiority. Moreover, thousands of Israeli engineers, agronomists, architects, geologists and others who had participated in nation-state building in Israel worked often for years in development projects in Africa and also, though less so, in Asia and Latin America. And as Ronen Bergman's 2007 PhD thesis "Israel and Africa: Military and Intelligence Liaisons" shows, Israel exported weaponry and Israeli officers shared with the militaries of recently decolonized African countries their expertise in warfare and in controlling civilians. After all, Israel blitzed through the Egyptian Sinai in 1956, had won its first war back in 1948-1949, and from then until 1966 kept its own Palestinian citizens under military rule.

In fact, the Israeli Defense Forces and the foreign intelligence agency Mossad were central to Israel's involvement in Africa. The core reason for Israel's interest in Africa was political and strategic. Israel needed allies in the United Nations, where postcolonial Asian countries were turning against it. And it wished to minimize the dangers of postcolonial Arab-African alliances and to extend to parts of Africa its "periphery doctrine" of honing relations with Middle Eastern countries that neighbor Arab states, like Iran and Turkey. As it did so, Israel at times shared some contacts and information with the US government; becoming a US asset was a boon to the Israeli government, though it remained fiercely independent-minded.

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Contents:

Transcript - English

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[...]

TO THE NEWCOMER

I have been in the land of milk and honey now for over a year and half, and you as a new comer, if you are one, may benefit from my experience in adjusting to Israeli society of which I know very little. Of what little I know, you may share. I am by no means among the students who have been here longest, I mean those who speak Hebrew so well that they put Ben-Yehuda (the resurrector of Modern Hebrew) himself to shame.

I suppose you came through Lod, or was it Haifa or possibly Elat (an obscure port on the Red Sea, a place you know as the Gulf of Akaba in high school to-day known as the Gulf of Elat), which ever way you came once more "Shalom" to you. Shalom, which originally meant "peace" stands for all sorts of greetings - good morning, good evening, good afternoon, good night, "Hallo" etc. Of course there are Hebrew words for all of these, but you will save yourself from twisting your tongue and cracking your throat if you stick to Shalom. Where ever you go you will be generously "Shalomed" and you are expected to "Shalomize" generously too. The Arabs use "Salam". But as you and I know there is neither Shalom nor Salam in the Middle East.

I suppose you came to study, I take it, at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. You know people come here for various reasons, immigrants come from the nooks and corners of the world in search of Shalom and Zion, spies come in search of information, diplomats come for cocktail. I mean international relations, peaceful coexistence global peace, joint communique, world tention (to reduce it), some come to observe the firing on fishing boats in the Sea of Galilee (it is actually a lake), some come to see the historical holy spots which are in Jordan, but simple people like you and I came here in search of knowledge. I understand you come here to study in Hebrew. God bless your soul. I don't mean to discourage you but you may as well have gone to Peking to study Chinese. Chinese you know is pictorial and offers advantage of visual aid. Of course you write from top to bottom but in Hebrew it is from right to left. When you get a chance go and visit the factory for Hebrew words in the University, you might start something like that back home in Africa. Of course the study of Hebrew has its compensation - you can read the bible almost in the original, and in the future you might even attempt to read and understand mystery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Well let us leave the language. From Lod I understand you took a taxi to Jerusalem. I am certain you must have carried on a conversation with the driver which went something like this:

Driver: Ghana?

You: No, the Mali Federation.

Driver: Federation, eh?

You: Yes.

Driver: Student, Yes?

You: Yes, student.

Driver: Medicine, Yes?

You: No, economics.

Driver: Economics, good for Africa, Yes?

You: Yes.

Driver: Who pay you, Israel Government, Yes?

You: No, my Government.

Driver: Enough money?

Here you might feel the investigation a little too detailed for half an hour acquaintance, but wait.

You: I suppose it is enough.

Driver: How much pound?

Here you must have answered either just enough or might have changed the topic. Here I must explain to you that the poor fellow did not mean harm, he is just unsophisticated on these matters. When you left his taxi in Jerusalem, he must have given you a good dose of Shalom and a pat on the back. Don't be surprised by such familiarity. This is how friendly Israelis are, and the tedious idea of formality here does not exist. This is your first lesson. The informality is everywhere. There are pioneers and they have no time for frivolity. You can go to any function in Israel without a suit and tie, in fact I don't think the Israelis mind it at all if you come even in your under-wear (don't do it, it gets too cold sometimes). The next morning you must have been anxious to get out of bed and wonder in the holy streets of Jerusalem where once your favorite prophet wondered. If you are like me, you must have been surprised to find Jerusalem just like any other city. I was too. Of course you did see a lot of bearded men as in the pictures of the prophets. These are not yet prophets, neither is their beard due to shortage of blades, the real reason is unknown to me. When boys from Brooklyn land in Haifa they do two things: they wear multicolored Kipa, and they grow a fancy beard. Of course there are other changes too, Arthur becomes Abraham, Evelyn becomes Hava, Rose becomes Shoshana and I don't know what MacGregor and Ivanovich become. Anyways, while you were looking at the bearded men, people must have been looking at you for another reason. And if your ears were alert you must have heard your celebrated Hebrew name - "Cushy", if you are a man, and Cushit if you are a girl. Cushit sounds romantic, doesn't it? It simply means 'black' as applied to humans, for materials they have another. Don't wish you will know it in good time. The original meaning of cush, is, I am told black. You remember Moses was married to a cushit (Hebrew bible: Number Chap 12, Cush in other connections, Genesis Chap.10, Esther Chap 1, Verse 1, Isaiah Chap 18, Jeremiah Chap 13, Verse 13, etc.). Of course, even at that time Miriam and Aaron grumbled about it. But the story has it "...And the anger of the Lord was kindled against them ... and behold Miriam became leprous and Aaron looked upon Miriam and behold she was leprous..." etc. But how Aaron himself, escaped the Mycobacterium leprae is beyond me.

After a tour of Jerusalem you might have returned home a little disappointed not to find the city as holy as you thought it would be. It does of course impart a certain air of holiness, despite the fact that you have seen people urinating in some corners of the holy street. At least the beggars must have reminded you of biblical times. You of course remember Paul and Peter with their "Silver and Gold have I none but such as I have give I thee, etc. ..." Sometimes you get a sort of this oriented when Saturday and not Sunday is the holy day. Well it is just one of those things that you must get used to. As far as activities go the holiness of Saturday, is really emphasized when, restaurants, shops, Cafes, clubs and cinemas close, when buses stop to run starting Friday afternoon (the Sabbath follows the setting of the Sun and not the Omega on your wrist), till Saturday evening leaving you hanging in midair. At these times Jerusalem seems a ghost city. At these times the city appears to be under curfew imposed by an invading general and his army. The general here is the invisible and invincible Sabbath. My advice to you is every Friday after your last class carry home in your bag a few bottles of Shamenett. It is during week-ends that you really remember your home town, where you used to work or study during the week and go out for fun and forget the routine. Here what used to be the normal order of things to you is reversed. You work or study during the week and you close yourself up during the week-end.

If you intend to stay in the country long you will get used to it easily and the higher you go your studies keep you so busy you will hardly think of it. Of course you might even succeed to do the impossible - by some miracle you might meet an Israeli friend who might invite you at his home in the Galilee for week-ends. Between you and I, my friends and I have given up entertaining such an idea long time ago. But there is always the amiable Joseph Sharon and his Hospitality Committee that might take you to a few places on week ends, at least during the first few months you are in the country. To be frank with you I never believed in synthetic hospitality as concocted and delivered by a committee. But it works. Otherwise during week ends finish your homework and then try to cultivate the habit of solitary reflection on the serious problems of life. This will help you kill time profitably. If you are the sportive type you may wander in the wilderness after biblical John (I have forgotten whether it was the

Baptist or the other John).

If you happen to live in the student dormitories there is the popular Friday evening dance for you: You may ask how to secure a date for the occasion. This is a delicate question, but since you have asked it, I will try to answer. First of all, for the dormitory dances you do not need a date since girls come stag. But if you ask me about dating in general and the new facts about the girl- situation I could write you a book but I have no time. Nevertheless to clarify the foggy situation I will give you a brief sketch. I feel certain that if you are a young man with normal constitution you must have had glanced at the pretty masculinized girls in your class, in fact you might have even shalomized a number of times. But the tragedy of the situation is that your friendship ends there. Why? There are three schools of thought with three hypotheses to elucidate the mystery. Hypothesis number one states that close association results in love, which in turn may lead to the altar. But matrimonial adventures between Jew and gentile is unthinkable. Hence to avoid heart breaks you must avoid close friendship. This is a plausible hypothesis. For remember, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure". Hypothesis number two simply states that excessive dermal melanin that you have, acts as barrier against close friendship with a female that has no melanin. The third hypothesis states that the cause of the mystery is rather hypothesis number one nor number two alone but due to a combination of both. In other words if you are a gentile and in addition you are melaniferous then the barrier becomes an iron curtain. You can take your choice or you may invent a new one, or you may devise an experiment to prove which is correct. I have proved in limited cases all three hypotheses to be correct. Number two is easily demonstrable - just invite a girl you know to the cinema and walk with her up and down Yafa street. From the way people gaze at you with bewilderment, you think you have metamorphosed into a human monster with two heads and horns. Such an event creates embarrassment in the girls, hence they avoid being seen in public with you. Many Israelis refuse to believe this fact although they know that it is true. Well, if you have read Orwell's 1984, then you know that they are indulging in a practice of doublethink. In their arguments it is best to change the topic.

In fact in all criticism concerning Israel and Israelis I would like to point out something here. We all have a certain amount of phobia toward criticism of ourselves and our countries but that of the Israeli is frightfully intense. Try to discuss a topic on Israel with your fellow Israeli class-mate. But be careful not to raise the Arab-Israeli problem, to discuss that is madness. I think the only points on which he can bravely agree is that Israel is physically a small country, not so gloriously endowed with water and vegetation. If you meet the rare liberal fellow you might convince him to accept a modified theory of the chosen people. But every Israeli would like you to love and admire Israel its people, its culture, its democracy, in short everything. The man who delivers our grocery on Fridays, is one hundred per cent convinced that the Israeli army is the best in the world and no amount of fact will make him change his mind. When I jokingly pointed out that the Israeli army was not really tested except fighting Arabs, I led him to conclude that next to his own the Arab army is the best. Hence, it follows by logic, that his is the best. Well, I tell you, there is no point in wasting your time debating with grocery men, taxi-drivers and university students, because they have made up their minds and will not be bothered with facts.

Outside of these little social inconveniences there are a lot of bigger things that you will like and admire in Israel - their determination to convert a desert into an oasis is inspiring, the determination to live surrounded by formidable foes is admirable.

In due time you will also experience the idealistic existence of the Kibutz. I worked in one of them for ten days picking apples in the sweltering heat of summer. I returned, paradoxically, a few pounds heavier. I ate five times a day - not tasty food but nourishing and abundant, especially tomatoes, onions and potatoes. The Kibutz people, at least those I visited, are friendly, healthy, refreshing, indoctrinated. The absence of sophistication more or less, applies to all Israelis. Having lived in Western countries, where artificiality makes you uncomfortable, the Israeli naturalness, although some times borders on crudeness was a welcome change to me. When you go to the kibutz be prepared to use your muscles, rather than your head. If you insist on using your head then use it to carry apples. The kibutz is no place for lazy people. You must also understand that the kibutz has a class-less society, no possession of

private property, no private personal luxury - in short communism at work. Don't be surprised to see parents and children living in a separate quarter (they are not produced in test tubes as in Brave New World) and not with their parents. This is a matter of convenience. In the Kibutz please don't strut around with a suit and tie, the people may think you are a clown. As a student it is a good place to go when you are short of cash. The Kibutz, for the Israel, serves a dual purpose - defense and development. But with a generous supply of idealism to you it may turn out to be a continuous barrage of toil. Frankly, for a temporary visitor like you there is very little fun. Of course you will be given all the essentials except cash. You will even be supplied with a Kibutz brand of cigarettes, which is as good as smoking a plaine roll of paper. Occasionally, there are film shows. If you have energy left after the work you may even succeed in flirting with the robust massive kibutz madmoiselle. For all this, they ask nothing but unskilled labor.

At the beginning, if you are still with me, I set out to tell you something about the Israeli Society. I have touched on several things briefly. As you have noticed Israel is a cocktail of all sorts of people, with various economic, cultural, educational backgrounds. If you hear the variety of language spoken, you think they were scattered from the tower of Babylon only yesterday. It is difficult enough to speak of the average man in other countries, but in the case of Israel, it is easier for the camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than to try to describe the average man, so also in the society. But as I hope to continue writing in succeeding issues of the paper, I will go deeper into each phase of the topics I have mentioned. I hope to tell you about the Sabra, the Moraccan, Yidish, on how to be popular with Israelis and be like. Till then good luck!

D.B.