

My Israel by Raymond Ellis

I joined Habonim in the Hashtilim age group in 1959 in Kimberley and signed up mentally for Israel at my first Habonim camp at Onrust near Cape Town in 1962. After nearly fifty years in Israel, I can honestly say I didn't sign up for the Israel I see today.

I did my compulsory service in the IDF. My commanding officer was a Druze Arab. Eighty seven percent of Druze Arabs serve in the IDF, a much larger percentage than Jewish citizens.

In our battalion there was the usual mix of Jewish men, Jewish women, Arab men including Muslims, Arab women and some Haredi men. Usually only about 5% of eligible Haredi men enlisted because their rabbis refused to grant much larger numbers to enlist. These days there are huge percentages of Jewish women in the IDF but still only about 5% of Haredi men.

The IDF is a great melting pot of Israeli Society.

All in all this is great, but in recent years Israel has moved politically away from encouraging the melting pot to flourish; rather, the present government has caused dissension to explode forth.

Although Conservative, Reform, Liberal and Progressive Jews are a very high percentage of Jews worldwide, this crazy government has shattered the harmony and brotherhood and sisterhood of world Jewry.

This government has demonized Israel into become a country without any vision and with utter disregard for all its citizens. And with utter disregard for our fellow Canaanites who reside in Nablus, Jericho, Ramalla, Bethlehem, Tulkarm, Kalkilya and Gaza.

There is no plan, no end game except to bury Israel's main problem, hoping it will go away.

Actually I didn't come straight from South African on Aliyah. because I first wanted to see a bit of the world.

The international company in London tried to persuade me to stay with them. They went out of their way to offer me a senior position to tempt me, but my heart was in Israel.

In the beginning, it wasn't easy and it is not that easy now.

It was hard to find a job because my Hebrew was said to be poor and I hadn't done my bit yet serving in the IDF. In order to solve the Hebrew problem I decided to first sharpen my knowledge of the language, so I broke from my group of British and

South African new immigrants. and went to live and work in Bet She'an where no one spoke English. It was a wonderful feeling to become quite fluent in Hebrew.

Now let's have a look at another aspect of the equation in Israel.

When I discovered the new science of Paleogenomics which analyses ancient DNA, I felt comfortable in the knowledge that we were always Caananites and simply broke away from the other Canaanites about four thousand years ago. Paleogenomics has taught us even that with all the upheavals and wars along the way, one thing that hasn't changed in the area once Canaan, is the DNA of those in Israel, Southern, Lebanon, Southern Syria, Western Jordan and the area currently under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority. We were then and are now still all Caananites, from a DNA point of view.

When the second Temple was destroyed and we were barred from being in Jerusalem we moved to the Galilee and to areas near Haifa. The Sanhedrin moved from Jerusalem to Bet Hasha'rim which is walking distance from our kibbutz. The Mishnah was compiled in Beit Hasha'rim. There were many other places of learning like Tiberias and Zippori.

When the Muslims took over the area from the Christians about one thousand five hundred years ago, we were allowed back in Jerusalem. From that period on, some of our ancestors came back to the Holy Land especially from the Europe countries that expelled us. First we were expelled from England and only allowed back after about four hundred years. Then we were expelled from France three times after which followed the expulsions from Spain and Portugal.

Our family has researched its history - both on the Sephardi side as well as our Ashkenazi side. On the Sephardi side we were able to trace our history back to a printing press in Oporto in 1492. Our family moved to Morocco after the expulsion from Portugal, then Gibraltar, England and after that to South Africa.

In 1497 there was a substantial Aliyah to the Holy Land from Spain and Portugal and settlement was mainly in Safed in the Galilee.

As we know, the significant Aliya in modern times started in 1882 when pioneers from all over Europe established several cities in our beloved country.

Our precious country is small, the same size in area as the Kruger National Park, Wales or New Jersey. It is so small that the endless wars here have affected the entire population.

Yitzhak Rabin, a stalwart of Israeli society, in all his roles, saw the reality of where Israel should head for and that is why he invited the Palestinian Authority to take over the administration of areas A and B in the West Bank and also Gaza.

We cannot be torn apart by war forever. Wars as such usually don't solve problems. Only diplomacy, negotiation and finally written signed agreements solve them.

We do however have to hold on to most of Area C for our own security because Israel is only nine miles wide from the sea at Netanya and back to Tulkarm in the Palestinian Authority. The most sensible action to take is to retain that area or most of it and offer a similar size area in the Negev next to southern Gaza as a trade off. We suffered a major blow on 7th October 2023 from which we still have not recovered when more than a thousand Israelis were murdered in one day. Many of them were kibbutz members who actually assisted the Gazans over the years with medical care in Israel and helped them in as many ways as possible. As a member of a Kibbutz this was a major shock for me. I was even more shocked when two members of my family were killed on that day on their kibbutz.

Nevertheless, I was very disturbed by the current Israeli government requesting that at least a million Gazans leave their homes each time because their buildings were about to be bombed. It was very distressing seeing those long lines of people on the move with their personal belongings. There is however no doubt that we needed to fight back after the disaster of 7 October 2023. The two years following 7th October has had no end game, with loss of life and severe trauma on both sides.

Thank God an American President managed to knock some sense into our Prime Minister and his government that has lost all sense of direction and humanity. And actually, despite all, I do believe we can live in a form of harmony in the country and with our neighbors.

Since the Kibbutz was Communist/Socialist I was able to have several professions and types of jobs. It didn't make any difference what I did financially because very little money was involved. We were all on the same level financially. Throughout my various jobs in Israel, the kibbutz received our salaries and in return we received goods and services and some pocket money.

The CEO of companies received the same goods, services and pocket money as those working in the central kitchen, laundry or milking the cows. Thanks to that set up, I made my working life very interesting by having vastly different jobs.

I worked as financial controller, finance manager, overseas marketing representative, business and general English lecturer and teacher for adults, an

English teacher for children and youth ,assistant social worker for post- trauma soldiers and civilians and Holocaust survivors and general schizophrenic cases. I also served on boards of directors and finance committees.

An interesting project that I was involved in was an English class for Rabbis, Imams and Priests for whom it was compulsory to commit to an English class as a salary incentive from the Ministry of the Interior who paid their salaries. In my class everyone was respectful of one another and of me. Another class included only Haredi men drafted into the IDF Computer Division. The IDF required them to study English and in the class the respect for one another and for me was palpable. In one job I shared an office with a Muslim and a Christian who were constantly arguing with one another. I finally managed to teach them to have respect for one another.

Another interesting experience was a volunteer job at the Jewish agency where I was assigned to an Ethiopian family with 12 children. I assisted them during their first two years in Israel.

We live in hope that a totally new government with secure plans will come to power in Israel this year so all this suffering can come to an end and the Israel I signed onto can again come into being.

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## **My Israel written by Raymond Ellis in 2026**

### **A word about me:**

I was born in 1949 and grew up in Kimberley, Grigualand West. I lived in London for 5 years before making Aliya. I chose to live in the north of Israel

I married an Israeli police woman who passed away. I have three children and five granchildren.

At present I have a part-time job as an accountant for a museum and an historic center for Jews who rescued Jews during the Holocaust. My hobbies/interests are Jewish History, art, music, Tai Chi, table tennis, reading, The Universe.