

The Holy Land

Updated: 1 hour ago

From an Israeli, Born to (Jewish heritage) and Born in (a kibbutz in IS-RA-EL) Jew-boy's perspective

This is undoubtedly a loaded subject. A royal can of worms, some would say (interpreted as wished).

So as a start point, I'll try to unload it here, as skillfully as I can, then we might be able to dismantle it, piece by piece, from my own vantage point, nowadays mostly as an observer.

Please note,

My vantage point might not seem entirely objective to you, as I am one of "them" and not one of the "other them". I don't feel the need to explain or apologize for being who I am, what I think and why I think this way. You will just have to trust my adherence to a truthful way of life, my integrity and sincerity. I have no agenda, other than relieving the pressures and striving to make life better and easier for whoever wants to be the guardians of this land, so that all others can enjoy the place while visiting.

Somewhat delicate and stressful, the situation in Israel is riddled with conflicts, of "who did what to whom", of "who started it", "what was prior to what", of "who has the ownership of what" and so on.

The story of the land, cited by all main religions and revered by all regional cultures, is quite significant for lots of people. We are led to believe that this region is where the most important occurrences to have happened in this land, about the bible and the acquaintance with "God" and what religion is all about. This is the start point for several cultures and traditions (I have nothing against some good traditions).

However, it inflicts havoc on the region, complexity and complications.

Apart from the conflict situation, Israel has a very rich culture, which stressful life tends to make us people forget, due to the awkward situation in the "holy" land. Going to a restaurant, if we can afford it nowadays, may help discover some of the cultural legacy, of the gustatory kind.

The cultural richness in Israel is, in my opinion (quite similarly to the conditions that have made our planet, Midgård Earth) very unique - a kind of stew, caused by crushing multiple cultures into each other by wars and migrations, the fusion of many races, forced to live among one another along the years (being too poor and/or unable to move around), and also an amazing heap of intelligent, capable people with marvelous creativity in many human endeavors.

This colorfulness - culturally speaking (again, quite similar to conditions on our planet, as I understand it) - is surely staggering, and yet, commonality triumphs over differences.

Either way, with or without common denominators, it is time we drop the dagger and the tomahawk at the feet of our loved ones and embrace each other. We have more to win by embracing humans than competing with and destroying one another. Much more.

So what's wrong?

I can start off applying one of my "itches" (stuff I do by default); this one acquired by my upbringing and acquaintance with some masterful fault finders.

Finding faults in anything and anyone is a skill we learn, curiously enough, from a negative attitude at home and during upbringing. The dark side of it is: the more skillful you are in that sense, the more negative you can become (even though nothing serious or traumatic has ever happened), to the point of holding grudges, vengeance, becoming physically ill and ultimately dying.

But at this point, I have found some very useful applications to this apparently wrong mode of being, and that would be finding the start point of a journey to correct the wrong stuff into... well, making stuff useful.

So, coming to Israel nowadays is to me not a homecoming, but as a long-time-no-see tourist, visiting family and friends and places I (or we, in recent years) used to love. And being a tourist in a country I grew up in and used to know, I stumble upon things that irritate me.

Since this might become a long list of pet peeves, let's try to summarize the worst:

- It is far too crowded and avoiding crowds can be done almost exclusively outside rush hours, outside urban areas (go and find that one...) - the Negev desert is one favorite, and outside holidays, when people go back to work, their toys, mobile phones and TV.
- Price tags are remarkably high - even for the things that are local and should be fairly cheap, like fresh fruit and vegetables in season. Even when the seller of goods and/or service is not interested in getting rich, but plain and simple earning a living.
- Price tags are totally off the chart, when the beneficiary is in fact trying to get rich via quick skims and tricks, wrong market tactics (set the highest prices possible and hence targeting only the ones who can afford - sell to the classes while ignoring the masses), optimize on short term gain and ignore (or minimize) the service point of view.
- It is increasingly dirty - EVERYWHERE. This is a big deal to me personally. It used to be only the parks after war (meaning: festivals), Arab settlements, villages or towns/cities, and around the main roads, beaches etc. Now it is mainly where people just don't care how their backyard (and around their home) looks. Picture your worst neighbor, the one who would never clean anything, let alone around home. Unfortunately, I see it mainly around Arab settlements (nothing against the culture per se), and it makes one wonder why. Worst of all are the nomads. The nomads of the region are constantly moving around, as they have been doing since times in memorial, and the littering after those temporary settlements is nothing short of disgraceful, sad. The desert region, where these nomads roam has become a gigantic sea of junk, garbage, leftovers.
- Security measures are lifted to another level, due to war, conflict and unstable conditions, and shaky relationship between the local cultures, so that many are afraid of the next terror attack and when somebody they don't know would go and stab them in the back, or worse yet, pull out a machine gun and start shooting, or even worse than that - blow the place (shop, mall, public gathering) to smithereens.
- "Crowdy" implies scarce, and expensive. What if you come up with the "crazy" idea of building a home and/or try to make a living somewhere? Prices of land (if land can be owned, which it cannot, only "borrowed" from the state, in most cases) are not affordable, unless you are a gazillionaire, and hence, there is no point in moving there, unless you're really into putting this piece of land on a pedestal. This will make anything and everything on this tiny space astronomically expensive, due to the overhead of paying the rent or mortgage, and we haven't even started paying to the usual parasites (i.e. government and authorities, certificates - like "kosher", "ecologic", local fees... take your pick).

- Mutual respect among the locals is, in my humble opinion, seriously flawed, if not totally absent. It's a bit like - if you know the person, you might get some respect, but unless you are acquainted with someone, it's like living in a wolf pack.

This list is by no means anything close to a full list of the things that piss me off when we visit, but it is a start point for a discussion of sorts.

A Piece of Peace?

Warmongers have everything to lose from peace, as peace is just a time of "rehashing" for the next crisis in the pipeline. War, a very profitable business for psychopaths, has mostly (if not always) been created (by people/entities who benefited from war) for us to fight each other.

This is not exclusively the work of warmongers, as our "chiefs" and "royalty" are (generally speaking) not wise enough to know better than creating and solving conflicts-of-interest by fighting, like children fighting over a toy. This is what automotive engineering calls "Shit behind the windscreen", i.e. the driver's own fault.

But for the most part, in general, ordinary people want to live and let live, thrive and prosper; we just want business as usual, partly because living a quiet life is more fulfilling, and partly because we cannot afford war.

So apart from

- solving the water distribution (so everybody has water for the basic needs)
- the division of land and territory, so everybody has somewhere to live, conserving nature, resources and artifacts in between
- letting go of the grudges of the past while solving the grudges and conflicts of today for a better future
- All other significant (or not) differences I haven't yet mentioned (due to another potentially rather lengthy list) between us humans, who see ourselves as the "righteous residents" of a region, which we eventually have to reach an agreement for

.. Apart from all that, there are often repellant thoughts toward the neighboring cultures, which is partly ingrained in us by our own culture and upbringing in a country where there is almost no corner where this aversion is left unnoticed, but partly because of other things.

I love Israel as the country in which I was born and raised, including my formative years. this is where I grew up, went to school, served 3 years in the army (of the conqueror side, mind you) and - not knowing anything better, sincerely believed in the way of life and what I was doing for my society. I lived a truthful life back then as I do now (though, now with a better understanding of, well... everything). I did that, over there, back then, for a quarter of a century, before I started some serious traveling and wound up totally off my "home country".

I have "earned the right" to call it my home country. However, from the current vantage point, having lived elsewhere since then, it seems now like I might as well live anywhere else, perhaps even better off, given the current conditions.

Life conditions in Israel have never been easy, by any means of analysis.

The majority of people who immigrated there, mostly under hard circumstances of war and persecution, were expelled from their homes elsewhere, had to flee and as survivors and refugees, had to firstly build the country, dry the swamps, fight the locals and endure hardships. Life in the early days

of the colony, first Turkish, then British, then a newly created state, made it a must to be strong and tough, be of service to one another, and make and become a source of pride and dignity.

In the eyes of the Jewish Israelis (seen as the conqueror by the local, non-Jews), everything that has been done with and to the local population was, although seriously debatable, the right thing to do. All the occupation, wars and military actions were the minimal amount of enforcement (even at times, a necessary evil) to build something greater, develop the region, stabilize the region and ultimately, bring long standing peace. This has always been the common narrative we have been given.

Some of it makes perfect sense, and under a different banner (than the banner of “this is ours and we are more important than you”), it might have been pretty great.

Living there is excruciatingly expensive and the sky-high price setpoint is very much due to the fantastic price of scarce resources - land, fresh water supply and what is derived from living in a tiny space, which for various reasons, is regarded as worth fighting for. Too many covet a tiny piece of land with questionable conditions for life, where half is desert (as beautiful as the desert may well be), and the rest is an astonishing variety of everything - stony hills to wide stretched fields, partly de-forested regions and partly re-forested, the highland of the Galilee, the volcanic Golan, the valleys and the coastal plateau, etc.

Too many people honestly believe that fighting for this land is the best thing to do since they believe with all their hearts that they are the “chosen ones” (chosen for what? By whom?) who have earned their rights to this land. All parties have their reasons: “they were there first”, they built the land, their family owned the land for centuries, before the others came, to name just a few stories. Most of these stories have a mutual backbone, which is that Canaan - or Israel, in modern times - is the chosen land, the land of the bible. Which is merely one aspect of the truth. There are other aspects of truth that need to come forward:

- What is the bible anyway?
- What was the bigger context?
- What was there before the “biblical times”?
- the role of religion
- What has religion made people do for the sake of a book that most people in the world don’t even know so much about, let alone who has written it, for whom, what is God, why Israel and so on.

I’d rather not take the role of the truth bearer in this regard, but simply pose these few questions to consider.

Above all things, why is it worth putting any one land or people on a pedestal, giving something more importance than others? What is worth so much as to fight over it? Can anyone, on the other hand, be the guardian of a place - without owning it, and without worrying that someone else with a bigger gun might come and surprise you, with anything other than a warm and loving hug and some coffee/tea/beverage?

What is all this scarcity for? Why fight over land? There is more than enough for everybody.

One guy from another world told us (or rather to those who talked to him, who sadly didn't have the tools to understand what was said), in the late 1940's, that his people's home is where they park their crafts. Thus, their "Home" is huge by any standards, and even if they have the weaponry to take what they want, they don't need to fight over land. They visit and they go, "as a simple matter of course" - on the way to somewhere else. And they get concerned when the locals are savages who need to grow up and learn how to behave - concerned that they need to tame the savages or give up visiting.

Embarrassing to say but obvious - we are the savages.

What if this scarcity of land mass and resources is not needed? Why not be an adult and let people (of whatever culture) be the proud custodian of a place, an orchard, a land or a field? Why not be the proud visitor of this place, come there with a story from a foreign land and perhaps something to exchange with, come with a hug, pay them a visit, help them and have a loving interaction? Or be the adult being who is the caretaker of a place, who has the dignity to hold a place and shape it in a way that fits the environment best, with serious intentions to be of service as a host, when a time comes and wanderers visit the wonderful place you guard?

Want to have some fruit? Ask the locals if you can help harvesting, then you'll get your share of fruit, without stealing (which is extremely common), without owning the orchard.

Want to see an old monument? An artifact?

Bring some gifts, help with something, exchange your merchandise with the locals - you may get a warm welcome and a story too.

What if there were almost no payment involved? Let alone a bling-bling amount of cash (which is a requirement today)?

To me personally, it is far better to leave all this scarcity BS behind me, come and visit somewhere beautiful, affordable, and likely also different from home, see and experience something wonderful (perhaps even new), have some great interactions with people I know, or known, and people I don't know, as just as fair. And then go elsewhere, and feel at home wherever I go, or park my craft.

I could imagine living in Sweden or Italy or anywhere else, without the need for a vacation, without a passport (I am who I am - why would I need to carry a formal piece of paper that every agency and/or sophisticated criminals can fake?), the least amount of "money", but rather the stuff I can give away, which might be far better than pieces of paper with a (broken) promise of value. The tech to fly with, cover the distance, would be nice to have, and that lifestyle would be very appealing, but only in a world of mutual respect.

But that might be just me.

Living abroad, I still miss some aspects of the Israeli local culture, being able to visit friends and family, the local cuisine (a marvel in and of itself), the scenery and the beautiful artifacts, the weather (to a point) and the nostalgic memories.

The things that are closest to my heart are preservation of nature, resources and mutual respect.

The Respect Issue

We see it everywhere, admittedly, and not just where the “stew” is boiling most fiercely, like in Israel. People seem to “trespass their neighbor’s lawn” for any and every reason, not just to irrigate the neighbor’s garden, when the neighbors are away, as the case may be (being resourceful custodian, being responsible, have a sense of service etc) but to make statements with regard to ownership, acquisition of resources/territory and exploiting what is not theirs to have.

In essence:

We don’t respect each other enough.

We don’t respect our environment enough (thus, destroying the natural environment, put there for us to thrive).

We don’t respect ourselves, to varying degrees. Some may take very good care of themselves and their thoughts and surroundings, while others treat everything, including (but not limited to) themselves, like trash.

This less-than-respectful way of conduct is something we all have to work with.

As a child of this culture, I might show remnants of disrespectful trends (even after many years of living abroad, and observing myself in the “mirror”) and hence, I am by no means perfect.

When people discuss the Israeli occupation of Arab territories, it is rather easy to neglect what the “other side” (non-Jews) has lost in terms of territorial or civil rights, which they have.

Some other things are more of concern:

- Given the custody of any place, would people from the “other side” treat the resources, the land, the water, nature, etc. in a respectful way? Or would the region become depleted, piled with trash, become a desert, become unsuitable for life (while the people prepare to move on, for further exploitation)? Become a scary place of bandits, where you would want to park your car?
- How would the custodian treat other people, who want to share the resources, or visit?
- What would they want next? More land? Exploit, deplete and destroy, and move on?

I couldn’t care less with regard to who lives in this or that region, as long as the custodian treats his/her residence in a respectful way. We are ALL custodians, on this territory or another, and it is a little bizarre to me to own a land. Settle down somewhere or roam a land is possible and very legitimate, but owning is different.

If you've ever been to the desert regions right outside the city of Beer Sheva in the Negev desert ("The Seventh Well"? Or "The Well of Sheva", as in Shiva), you cannot ignore the Bedouin settlements at the side of the roads. These settlements are in general illegal, since they occupy land for their use by simply staying there (regardless owner), living there and anywhere else too. All around are piles of garbage, junk and leftovers. This junk-yard living is to me the worst thing with the nomad culture, and as a custodian of any land, this has to be the worst way to treat a place (let alone a place called home) for anybody.

And of all things Bedouin or nomad, this is the thing that pisses me off.

Of course, garbage can be seen in other parts of Israel, and worst of all, in nature reserves, around monuments and gathering places. It was not like that in the Seventies, when I grew up. But it has become like that, likely with a culture that has been worn out by constant war, life pressures, social media instead of real life interactions, economic distress and lack of resources to teach people better conduct, or perhaps a desperate lack of better role models.

We could argue that people don't know better.

But also in Sweden, when going in the woods or the parks, the argument of people not knowing any better or living under occupation fails.

When you see in the middle of the forest, or the outskirts, piles of trash, nylon baggies with dog poop, empty cans and plastic packs of snacks, junk and burned tires, it is not due to not knowing any better, but rather a culture that has become so superficial and thinking as far as the tip of the nose at best, not thinking at all at worst - this is a sign of a bigger issue, which we all have to face, sooner or later.

I believe we the people should know better, but lack the mutual respect, respect to one another and respect for resources (be it mutual or exclusively owned), and perhaps even as a revenge for having to live in poverty and/or as an occupied minority of a country.

What's the difference?

Everyone has their preferences, be it cultural, through upbringing, be it physical even (on hormone level) or energetic; people have their dos and don'ts, yes and no, "perhaps" to this and "gotta have" that, and "get this out of my face" for something else. Some differ in other areas and we all have differences between us.

Some of us are very tolerant of differences, while others feel that they have to fight every little discrepancy. Tolerating and accepting others is a learnable art and should be taught in school, long before math, language or any other subject.

And this is the stuff we have to deal with, regardless whether it is with my sibling, my parents or any other being in my surroundings. The cultural and preferential make-up cannot be ignored, but has to be accepted, out of sheer respect for one another.

Again, I don't care if your body odor is repellent to me, if you have a bad breath, if you snore at night or smell like a pack of cigarettes. I don't care if you rather eat soybeans and dandelions for life time, a pizza, or a steak and salad.

Food is a part of the cultural make-up. Preparing food makes an impression.

Especially the things that have a scent residue, like with garlic, curcuma, curry, herbs (sometimes in epic proportions) can become quite tricky to ignore.

We have our preferences and body odor and sometimes a "wonderful" scent of garlic, or the self-made face oil, which may or may not appeal to everyone. We could all work on our tolerance of other people toward perfection. Personally however, it is hard to accuse me for not being a responsible owner of my property (bought by my enslaver - the bank, and registered by my occupant - the state).

The Utopia

I would much rather have the land of my upbringing, Israel, devoid of any occupants and land ownership, healed from the acute lack of respect and understanding of another by the locals, and bring it back down from the title of "the holy land" to what it really is: a tiny piece of land, treacherous beauty of the desert (the Southern half), a variety of landscapes and corners of immensely beautiful scenery, and some monuments of the past. But without the fake flair of "holiness".

But that's not in the cards right now.

Too many people live there, too many have died and can't get their mind around having lost their loved ones in conflicts. Too many think that the uniqueness of this land and connection to "divine" beings cannot be ignored or become inconsequential.

"Real World"?

Instead, what might be in the cards is having humans clean their mess, and try to facelift the whole country, and try to learn mutual respect.

If even that is not in our choice, then let people wake up, hopefully rather sooner than later, see the mess and find the solutions themselves, or fight each other until all is gone and trashed, so that someone else might be able to pick up the trash, if this is the only thing left.

Arab, Bedouin, Druze, Christian, or Jew - it matters not. Only how you behave as the caretaker of your home, its surroundings, how you treat people stopping by, merchants and businesses around your home, and how you live with and treat your loved ones, friends, neighbors and customers.

It can be boiled down to respect and reverence of what is, and has been created around us, and ultimately, what we create for our future. Simple, right?

