

ISRAEL, MUMMY AND ME

The Shabbat that Mum passed away was Parshat Shelach Lecha, which deals with the spies that Moshe Rabenu sent to spy out the Land of Israel. As we all know, that expedition ended in disaster because 10 of the 12 spies returned to the Bnei Yisrael waiting in the wilderness, and reported back terrible things. The Bnai Yisrael were dismayed and refused to listen to the wonderful descriptions by Hoshea (later renamed Yehoshua) and Kalev, and because of the slander of Israel, and the willingness of the Israelites to listen to that slander, Tisha B'Av became a בכיה לדורות – a night of weeping for all generations.

And how the Jewish nation has wept on Tisha B'Av for thousands of years for all the disasters that befell us, and all because of the sin of דיבת הארץ.

This principle of avoiding דיבת הארץ – slandering the Land – was a guiding light for our mother z"l.

As many of you know, I spent the past decade blogging about Israel and the Middle East, doing my best to defend Israel's reputation online. But my love for Israel and my fervent wish to defend it from its detractors began long before, back in my childhood. My parents were the ones who lit this light within me, and Mum was the one who fanned the flame and kept it burning bright.

I remember as a child when my Grandparents Strauss went on their first visit to Israel, and Grandma told me the stories about what she saw there. My imagination was lit up, and I delighted in hearing about life in Israel. But I also saw Mum's fascination with Israel already back then.

But my first dip into news and politics surrounding Israel began as a child around the time of the Six Day War, I can't remember whether it was before or after the war. My job every afternoon or evening was to watch the evening news and call Mum in from the kitchen when Israel was mentioned. No matter what Mum was doing, whether peeling potatoes for supper or preparing bridge rolls for a Mizrachi meeting in our house or any other thing, when I called out: "Mum! Israel!" – which was pretty much every night, Mum would come running, wiping her hands dry on her pinny.

This would almost invariably be followed by several curses and epithets hurled at the TV at the biased reporting (seriously nothing has changed in over 50 years).

This was my first lesson in the unfairness of the coverage of Israel in the international media.

Mum's fierce defence of Israel continued during the 1970s and took on a more pro-active position. After Grandma Strauss died, Mum avoided listening to music on the radio in the kitchen during her year of אבלות. Instead she tuned in to the new-fangled invention "talk radio", specifically on LBC. There, people could phone in with their opinions, and Mum became a "frequent flyer" on that station as "Judy from Golders Green" expressed her disgust at the politicians and the media and their anti-Israel bias. I so admired Mum and her clear-sighted view of justice and fairness, and her absolute faithfulness to Israel and its cause.

After they came on Aliya in 1992 Mum's irritation at the anti-Israel media bias and the antisemitic attitudes towards Israel from international institutions did not abate. While it was less apparent in the local media, for obvious reasons, there was still plenty to complain about from the BBC, CNN, Sky and of course the ever present UN.

Every couple of days I would get a call from Mum, "Anne, I want you to write a letter to the Jerusalem Post about..." and I would get long detailed instructions. Eventually I taught Mum how to send her own emails... and I created a monster! Mum became such a frequent letter writer to the Post – and all her letters were published! – that they asked her if she could provide a pseudonym so that the readers wouldn't think that Mum was a favoured client. She chose the name "Hilda Strauss" which caused many a chuckle among those who knew her.

For her strong Emunah, in Hashem and in the State of Israel, may her memory be blessed and may her neshama have an aliya.

Speaking of Emunah, as you all know, Mum was a lifelong dedicated member of Emunah both in England and in Israel. She was an honorary life-member of the Esther Cailingold Society in London and a life member of Masua here in Petach Tikva. Her spirit of volunteerism and dedication to the welfare of needy children is an inspiration to all of us.

Mum's devotion to the welfare of children continued through her volunteer work in Schneider hospital, where she volunteered in the gift shop together with her sister Ruth for 22 years! Mum was always technologically minded, and she would even close the till after adding up the day's intake at the end of the working day.

"Grandma Prager's shop" was a highlight of my grandchildren's visits to Petach Tikva when they would come to me for "Kaytanat Grandma". I would take the children to Schneider Hospital where they would be treated to a small present and an ice cream, bought and "donated" by Mum and me, much to their delight! Some of the children thought that Mum actually owned the shop!

(I am proud to say that I have followed Mum's footsteps into Schneider, volunteering in one of the departments.)

Just this week I had both a flashback and an attack of wishful thinking. I remember telling Mum and Dad about Shaked when she was diagnosed with profound deafness and was going to have cochlear implants. I so dreaded telling them, but Mum took it all in her stride. "Oh, those are the Monday children!". "Monday children??" I was completely perplexed. Mum told me that she would see the children with cochlear implants every Monday as they came into the shop with their parents. The outpatients visits for cochlear implants is on Monday. So Shaked became a "Monday child" for Mum, even though she wasn't actually treated in Schneider. However, the possibility is now arising that Shaked might be moving her treatment center to Schneider as Vered and Pini have moved to Leshem. I started telling Reeva how I was looking forward to taking Shaked into the shop to visit Mum Then I caught myself.

Mum became a devoted hands-on grandma from the moment the first grandchildren were born. Our daughter Hadassah was the oldest, closely followed a month later by Talya. Talya has recounted in her hesped how she was so lucky to have enjoyed Mum's company and friendship in her early years as she grew up in London. My own children had a rather different experience: Mum would call up in the morning, announcing she was about to fly in unexpectedly from London! She managed this by being on the travel agent's list of frequent flyers who were prepared to travel at a moment's notice. Mum had her suitcase permanently half-packed and was ready to move on the spur of the moment. Of course these phone calls engendered an immediate panicked "Quick! We have to tidy up NOW!" to my kids.

But seriously, there are not many people that I know who were prepared to drop everything for the chance to fly halfway across the world just to visit their grandchildren.

Once Mum and Dad made aliya, Mum took great enjoyment from being able to see the grandchildren, and then the great-grandchildren whenever the fancy took her. Mum was always game to hop into the car with me and drive into the Shomron (not a drive that some people relish) to see my grandchildren. And Yom Ha'atzmaut was always a highlight for my own family since Mum and Dad would come with us to our family Mangal (BBQ) at Hadassah. Since Mum and our granddaughter Shira shared almost the same birthday Hadassah would make a double cake every year, part to celebrate Shira's birthday and half to celebrate Mum's.

Mummy was famed for her love of animals and adored her "grandcat" Dana and "granddog" Chika who lived at Mark's house. Even during her last illness she would

love to watch videos of Mark's second cat Pixie. She wasn't quite as enamoured of my own cat Joey, I suppose we shall have to work on Joey's midot!

These are the kinds of memories and thoughts that are now flooding through me, thoughts that were repressed to a certain extent over the last couple of years of Mum's illness, but are now allowed free reign to take over my mind once again.

Others have mentioned Mum's flair for interior design, and Dovi will confirm that as recently as a couple of months ago Mum advised him to put an extra cupboard in the kitchen of the new apartment he is building. I miss her advice on how to organize the balagan that now reigns supreme in my own house.

As for Mum's talent in sewing, she was an extremely accomplished dressmaker but sadly those genes completely jumped over me. I can only manage the most minimal mending. Just a few days ago I was sewing elastic into a skirt waistband and I could clearly hear (I was sure it wasn't my imagination) "Just cross-stitch some elastic in it". Followed by an impatient "Oh! Give it to me!". If only I could...

Mum, you were a devoted wife and life partner to Dad, a wonderful mother to all of us, a devoted and hands-on grandmother and great-grandmother, amazingly talented and artistic, with a great zest for life and an insatiable thirst for justice and fairness, especially for Israel and the Jewish People. We have all inherited some of your traits, but you were the only one who combined them all into one fiery personality.

I hope and pray that our midot and mitzvot do you justice, that the chinuch and upbringing we provided our children do you proud, and may your neshama have an aliya בזכות all the good traits and chinuch that you have bequeathed us.

You are sorely missed by all the family and your friends. May you be a melitzat yosher for all of us.

תהי נשמתך צרורה בצרור החיים