

Israel diary December 1995

Thursday 7th December 1995 & Friday 8th December

The day started before 5a.m. but that's another story of packing/sorting and so on. Tikka was picked up by Carole, Grace & Jessica at lunchtime and I escaped from Consumer Forum at 1.30'ish only to return a minute later having forgotten my blue jacket ... typical.

He's off - lugging the Argos backpack & the Israeli cloth bag (courtesy of Arab run shop at the American Colony Hotel, Jerusalem; bartered for on last visit in January '92). Both these are loaded to the gunnels with probably superfluous paraphernalia. A quick wave to Julia Delavitch on passing St. Mary's and down to Baron's Court tube for the District service to Victoria, £1.70 single.

Trouble with the signalling at Earl's Court means overhearing driver/controller radio conversations (I was in front coach) ... "you can't go yet, I've got trains everywhere !" etc.. Amused by LT incompetence or was it just bad luck ... anyway, it took quite a while to reach Victoria.

£16.50 return bought for Gatwick Express which a good fast ride (30 mins +). Long haul over to the North Terminal on funkyish monorail number where I have plenty of time to kill before official check-in time of 3.55p.m.. Buy a Toblerone (honey for the chapping lips) & a Cadbury's choccy bar of some description. Very bare Terminal - have to smoke outside mostly. Chat to Body Shop lady who has packed away the sun creams but gives me leaflet & advises me that things are cheaper 'airside'.

Check in ok - Argos has to go to 'special' rollers as he's deemed awkward - weighs 10.6 or 10.9 kilos as weighing digitally seems difficult. Through Customs (no bleeps) & marginal improvement in excitement quotient - use the 2

hours + to reasonable avail ... cheese omelette & microwaved potato (erk) saved by Anchor butterlettes, espresso coffee from Costas from a Roman from Pyramida ? Variety of people – use a loo I'm not supposed to as they were re-plumbing but there was no sign to say so.

Fine metal /water (turned off ... drought ?!) sculpture centred round spiral up/down walkway which kids & grown-ups would both like. Pop 57p into its childrens' blind box.

Shopping garnered one medium placky bottle of cocoa lotion (after sun) & orangey flavour lip salve after much use of tester bottles in Body Shop. (£4.50). Highlight was Past Times shop (recently accessed via mail order for marbles wooden box & Lindisfarne notepaper) where tempted by many things but limit myself to one ruler (wooden) 84p with Kings & Queens of England and a smashing little copy of the Book of Kells (£3.50).

Man next to me does a 'spillikins' with dodgy displays. Charming salesgirl.

200 white Silk Cut – no films, too dear. Check out Clinique, made in U.S.A. also too dear – late purchase before the long travellate to gate 48 was an amazing Waterstone's 1996 Diary designed by Shiel & Cohen ... v.pleased with that £4.95 ... hope to get several more as Christmas presents. Ta to Terry Jones M.P. !

Last fag for 5½ hours & board 757 of Air 2000. Sit next to 2 Josephs, returning from stay in Hendon – one no English other President of Haifa food export co. ... good company ... teaches me todaraba = thank you, bevakasha = please, éfó = where is, anim mehapez = I am looking for, mă schlomhă =how are you ?, ok = ok, yes = ken, no = lō, maybe = ōnlai, hot = χαμ = ham with a gutteral h, ani rayev = I'm hungry, and quite amusingly ani nōtsori = I am a Christian ... no, I am not sorry I'm a Christian ! Joseph & I discuss Israeli

politics & people.

Air 2000 ... lady pilot did fine, food very average (only kosher ... i.e. poor margarine, so so chicken liver pâté, niceish apple pie thing). Stewardesses had no idea that Jews like to congregate in groups of 8 to 10 to pray which they did in-plane mid-flight – I thought that pretty ignorant considering 90% of my fellow passengers were Jewish & the plane took and from Tel Aviv daily.

Landed 2a.m. local time – customs no sweat but baggage handling took its time due to lack of transporters. Pleasing bronze of David Ben Gurion whose eyes appeared to follow me around the hall & gaze upon spot where some unfortunate terrorist was gunned to blazes (plaque marks the spot at carousel 4).

2 cigarettes later – I had survived the dearth – expensive hot chocolate in the 24 hour café. Maybe I'll take a bus into town & walk slow to new Egged bus station he thinks. But no buses at this time of morn & taxis too costly. Re-meet the Josephs outside & then decide to pack cloth bag at bottom of rucksack & start walking. What's 15 kilometres on a cool night ?

The moon is nearly full, the going relatively easy alongside the speeding motorway and some somewhat putrid aquifers on my right hand side. It takes ages to clear the airport & its runway – aren't they huge. Begin to flag, feet sore – my black boots need sheepskin liners. At the Yehuda interchange, about half way to Jaffa / Yafo where I had decided to head for, having missed a visit 4 years back & it being close to the bus station, I drop anchor & thumb comes out.

Lorry passes but 2nd vehicle stops. Wow ! Nice young guy who's just been to Heathrow, seen his girlfriend & returned after a night at Stansted Airport – on his way to work at 4.50a.m. for El Al Arkia security takes me out of his way

close to the centre of Jaffa. Thank you.

Plod towards goal of St. Peter's church spotted earlier on map. Am led up to museum, outside which is splendid animal trough in old stone and on museum entrance wall a stone relief gives joy to the eye. Through enchanting scrub garden, on up to crown of hill where stands a memorial arch in codestone (? / cool to touch) symbolising Jacob's Dream.

I am moved.

This is a powerful site – a plaque tells me that during the British Palestine mandate they made soap here !

Path leads down to the left and round to the right where an old fig tree I circle. Who lies here ? Down a bit and left down a cobbled alley, past a Daniel type den and round to oversee the old port where the reef divides. Tel Aviv gleams north of me; back up right past door of church and stand again by its Italianate tower of fine design but I don't desire to enter.

I descend inspired but tired towards old Tel Aviv passing unsavoury early bakery & decent furniture shops – stop for honey bread at an Arab bakehouse – ace. Directions needed for the station ... Kaminsky ? Reach destination at 6.10a.m..

Extraordinary place, buses on 5 floors, escalators out of order, freshen up in loo & purchase one way ticket to Eilat for £10. Bus due to leave from last gate at 6.30a.m.. Phew, slump dog exhausted onto metal bench which gives way & bump my head. Been up for 23 hours now & done enough for one day – conk out on 2nd row bus seat & am promptly woken by Israeli woman wanting her ticketed seat !

Snatch the odd 20 minutes kip en route south, stopping briefly at Beer'Sheva (good egg & cucumber baguette & peach nectar) where man I recognise from last time still seeking foreign bank notes & coins for his collection. Shall try to get his address because I have several that he would enjoy &

that I don't honestly need.

Last stop is deep in the Negev, way past Dimona where a South African pair join the mostly male & female Israeli army khaki bus customers. We talk & join in respectful criticism of Israeli attitudes to tourists – worse in Tel Aviv & amongst El Al staff apparently. Bus driver did a professional job only spoiled by his missus constantly yakking away for the entire 5 hour ride & one must say by the indifference of the passengers. Surprised by the growth of towns & horti/agriculture since 1992 – what fertile earth is here.

Noon Friday – back in Eilat, busier than before, more tourists, more hotels but fun & warm. After trying a few places, eventually settle at the inviting & reasonably priced Marina Club Hotel and an allocated Room 218, overlooking palms & pool – just right. Time once more to shave/wash/brush up & unpack :- 5 nights are anticipated ...

Grease up, Ambre Solaire 10 remnants squeezed at Earlsfield (home) into Sainsbury's Factor 2 bottle. Catch the last day's rays before heading into town for a mosey around old & new haunts. Many new shops & less greenery than before. Excellent doughnut & Danish pastry at 'The Family Bakery', an even better guava milk-shake in a bottle from an English run deli up the hill, cheap tape shop doesn't have Genesis 'We Can't Dance'. See new public swimming pools shortly to open which look good – I hope City authorities will retain as much green space as possible but concrete threatens this fine town. Wonderful enclave close to Eilat Music Academy blooming with bougainvillea, impatiens perennials and birds.

Back down to the hotel zone – stop at Neptune Hotel to buy this notebook & then at cramped shop where I fall temporarily in love (again) with the salesgirl & buy a baguette, some good aubergine/onion tub pâté and a fair banana milk-shake in a carton. Succumb to a £2 box of Dead Sea Mineral Soap which was asking to be bought or was it my imagination? Vow to

return to this cornucopia of interest ... or is it just for the girl !

Unwind at base camp – assemble my 2 prong plug & Enya thrills the air, quelle chanteuse.

Still hungry so dress up a bit and cross the bridge – Ben & Jerry's ice cream parlour looks under-stocked and is expensive. At 7p.m. am shown to unreserved seat close to the door of the Tandoori on King's Wharf ... the scene 3.9 years ago of the best meal I ate in Israel. For once a restaurant has managed to retain its quality – saladdy starter with lemon, 2 veg samosas, a tray of condiments, a butter nãn, sag paner washed down with 2 sweet lassis ... oh for sweet lassis ! Practice few words of Hindi with staff – one sari lady who spoke excellent Hebrew, Nepali type from Dehra Dun keen on cricket and man from Bombay who had attended sister Christian school to that run on Mount Abu. 40 shekels (£8) well spent.

2 Natrasleeps (hop & valerian) just in case.

Perchance to dream.

Saturday 9th December The Sabbath

Awake before the sparrows & time to ponder before breakfast. Magnificent dawn over Jordan mountains east of Aqaba – play more Enya (the previous evening I had cried listening to 'Hope has a Place' rack 2 Side 2 on The Memory of Trees, her best album to date ? The song evoked memories of Cothill prep school where aged 7 I had first read the account of Christ's crucifixion with a torch under the bedclothes and cried with pity for him). Brief spurts of the Living Years, Mike & the Mechanics and of course Horovitz playing Moz.

Descend for food & coffee I hope ... slight wait because doors don't open till 7.30a.m. not 7a.m. as advertised. Fair nosh,

smoked swordfish & soused herring, oat & raisin muesli & yoghurt, roll & butter. Coffee in thermos is weak, but perked up with powder from jars. Jewish party join & feast away.

Still too cold to write, but discover am able to use restaurant's hot water to make my own coffee. You see I had brought a jar of Sainsbury's freeze dried Gold with me luggage – thankfully.

Before the day heats up I walk east where new development is apace – pass the new Dan, through the Herod complex being started by the Canadians to a beautiful grass surrounded lagoon. Few people around.

Vanity time – careful with those sensitive areas of my pale skin. Observe life round the pool till 2p.m. or so, doing front & briefly back ... it is the Sabbath after all. When I think I am sufficiently toasted decide to wander uptown.

Little did I realise this was to be an 8 km trek. Little temptation as Sabbath shops generally not open till 6.30p.m. or later. Head for the hospital with the intention of perhaps seeking out the psychy wards – 3 women at reception say no not here ... none have even heard of schizophrenia or mania. Well, well ... I know from having seen a documentary that there is a mental hospital in Jerusalem but maybe Eilat is strife free !

Amazing variety of birds, flowers and shrubs ease my path north-eastwards following contour of foothill. Sensible mix of high-rise and low, again not enough good green space for the kids. Eventually arrive at corner of Eilat dominated by vast unsightly block where 6+ buses from Nazareth are parked. What goes on there heaven only knows.

Head up towards the hills on crunchy brown volcanic rock and scree to mini oilometers and sign saying this is start of Eilat ↔ Ashkelon pipeline. Consider awhile & wonder what

effect this could have on Egypt/Israel relations because surely a route to the Mediterranean avoiding the Suez Canal for that precious oil is going to cause political ructions ?

Across scrubland & thorn to an undeveloped valley where stands atop a mound a wooden ark like construction with seating and one of those water fountains which can only dribble & squirt pathetically. Close by is a beautifully made wood slatted wobbly bridge over a small dene/valley. Decide this should become the site of Eilat's first ? Christian church & dedicate the ground, musing that it should be called St. Charlotte's church after my fille mignonne ! One can dream can't one.

Hairpin gently down to civilisation & discover my chosen consecration is at the end of Jerusalem Street. How apt. Yellow Submarine plays in my head.

Sun moving down now – wander downtown, via bus station to enquire about perhaps going to Jordan/Petra but buses only go to border.

Brief look into deli near hotel but there is a different girl on duty ... tant pis. Nice hot bath to degrease & oh I nearly forgot, by the airport terminal there had been a commotion of sparrows in a palm tree just as one nun (from St .Catherine's Monastery in Sinai ?) walked to check in . I felt the flutter, reminding me of 1980 at Heathrow when seeing my friend Gail Bishop off to Africa to roam. Then a group of was it 5 nuns had seemed to flutter like doves around me as she walked towards the departure gate.

Play more Enya in my room and the birds and trees outside my window seem to play in time. Take 2 espresso coffees in the lobby (Israeli brand – Teka – good) whilst diary scribbling. At 7.30p.m., put 2 pairs of socks onto my mending blisters & walk townwards again. Baguette (ham & cheese mit mustard & mayo from 2 surly Swedes) – spot of shopping this time, secure Shepherd Moons (Enya), We Can't

Dance (at last !), Revolver (later) – buy presents for the girls in the Shalom Center. Bright lights beckon to another centre which disappoints.

To bed 10.30/11p.m.

Sunday 10th December

Wake at 5a.m. sharp. Dawn chorus. Update diary. Make coffee with warmish bath tap. 7.30a.m., time to break this fast. Day beckons warm ... you're on holiday, Jamie ... let's get this broken body browner !

Similar fare to previous day but eat less – last pot of apricot jam. Settle on patio to pen postcards to my girls ... my brain's not functioning ... before that I had gone for morning walk down to beach, left towards Jordan over different bridge, walked tother side of lagoon (musing that this should become Eilat's first golf course) – the soil here is a superfriable loam that clings to my trainers a bit. Accompanied by a fine selection of wildlife such as seagulls, heron, sparrows, wagtails dabbling the way, indiscriminate beauties particularly human friendly dart around me, cormorants from the lagoon, black fishes wiggling up the salty creek, a sandpiper – up to fish farm complex then left back to hotel spotting large limo with rich Arabs in the back.

... one more Sainsbury's Gold Choice & restaurant 'pani gurm' (hot water) from my Gujerat waiter mate & on with the postcards ... One to Pip & Charlotte, one a thank you for last Sunday's lunch chez my doc & wife, 2 side letter to G started inside cos heat beginning to overcome.

Pause scripting for a lazy mo flattish on my back by the pool – less grockles as it's changeover day. Ponder my vanity. Who on earth is going to notice if my body is brown & anyway it's winter in the U.K. so is this exercise (or lack of it)

pointless ? Yes. Take new Olympus OM1 (£169 extravagance last month in Acton) & head for the hills for a brisk hour plus, this time on south side of town to suitable mound for 3x panorama picture of Eilat with Aqaba in the distance. Head down left passing new road bridge over the wadi which I join taking me down to port area & back to base camp.

1.40p.m. – finish letter & contemplate one to Enya. Her music speaks to God – do I let her know ? She must know already.

Sun begins to hide obscured by clouds so I cruise again. Banks will open at 4p.m. I'm told, shops at 5p.m.. To town past one established older house in what remains of park area where guarded by ass, pony, geese, cockerel and barky dog – place for the children's zoo à la Battersea Park ?

Efficient service upstairs at Bank Leumi gets me £50 (250 shekels) on my Diners Club card but the people downstairs will have to Q for ages – they need more banks here to serve the swelling numbers.

Candles & chewing gum (lemon) from Shekem Dept. Store – the lemon continues my experiment of bleaching my yellowy brown teeth. I had earlier bought a lemon for 30 cents from my favourite shop lady, chewed, bitten & sucked en route uphill. Will it work ? Is the pain worth the gain ?

Enquire about Eilat's export of mail at travel agency – he tells me it goes via Tel Aviv & can take a long time.. That needs attention doesn't it, as at least twice a week planes go to Britain ?

Bath at hotel – make decision to leave Eilat & pay bill. To Petra ? Rose Red City of Jordan ? Peut-être. Conceive 'wicked' plan to cheat Israeli postal service by stamping my mail with U.K. stamps & passing them to Brits flying home on the morrow but two local hotels seem bereft of Brits. Plan B goes into action & I return to nice Essex man at agency who

kindly takes them.

Rap awhile re Petra (difficult to get to – too difficult as yet), Assad of Syria who has just murdered 15,000 of his own people (?) & Saddam Hussein who has sneakily gained foothold in Lebanon (?). This conversation at another travel agent, lady ex-U.K. run.

Return to my deli but my bird has flown ... Still, purchase one more tub of aubergine pâté, 2 pitta type roundels & a doughnut. Eat my supper on a grassy mound before the wind & palms motion me towards the Royal Beach Hotel.

This is some palace – the swankiest hotel I have ever set foot in ... automatic doors everywhere, even sensor taps in the loo. Marble halls, vast carpets, comfortable chairs, elegance – surreal, a roving clarinettist – beautiful pools, warm. Treat myself to a 6.50 (not overpriced) lemon pressée in one of the myriad of bars & lounges. Drink outside in splendour, noticing earthquake damage to 2 crucial lines – their pillars ain't strong or don't have the girth to cope with such weight of rooms above. Fearful for the safety of this delightful dream-like domain I express concern to the concierge who is diffident. "Only superficial damage, all will be completed next week ". I reply, "You've only cemented over the cracks. It's not enough, you need wider (stretch out arms) pillars. Another quake ?" (frown). Reception finally tells me it's \$212 a night here but it's probably worth it.

Emerge from trance & return to sleep 9.30/10p.m.

Monday 11th December

Well, I thought it was Monday when I woke refreshed, but guess what, I had read my watch upside down & instead of it being 4.50a.m. it turned out soon after that it had in fact been 11.20p.m.. By the time I realised, I'd washed down a

couple of coffees using the hot bath water & smoked a couple of white Silk Cut so it was too late to sleep again.

Might as well set off earlier than planned methinks. So, after some diary scribbling it was pack the rucksack, more carefully this time as a longer trudge is likely – quietly exit the hotel, leaving room key at night reception at 2a.m..

Some late stragglers are returning to rooms after discothèqueing; for some the day is ending for me it's just beginning.

Walk some distance to the edge of town to the last neon streetlight where I park up. Thumb out a few times, car & timber transporters pass in pairs but the few vehicles are mostly the busy bee concrete mixers heading up to the cement works. Get bored after $\frac{3}{4}$ hour & decide to walk to army post near only Jordan crossing 2 km or so up the road.

Nice night, nice to be on the road again. Reach the post at 3.30a.m. or so. The two men there are kind – one divorced with 2 kids, one has seen 30 years service. Give me tea & biscuit & we chat about army matters. A few vans, a car & some lorries pass but thumb fails.

Then at 3.50a.m. Bingo – lady in Subaru stops for me. She's going to Jerusalem too, hallelujah. Radio crackles, tense driving, cold air rushes through car. Her reason for trip is sad – her young & only sister, 22, has been knocked from motorbike & died in Jerusalem hospital.

We are speaking in French because she's Tunisian, though 30 years in Eilat – at 3.30a.m. that morning she tells me there had been another quake shake, she on 2nd floor & frightened, 5 on the Richter scale. The second in a month in Eilat but perhaps another 'small earthquake in X, not many dead news story'. First quake in November ... one man died from a heart attack.

Negev desert goes on & on. Brief pee & fag stop for us at gas

station, closed, & a thermos cup of lemon tea sans sugar.

Pass phosphate factory near Sodom, pass Ein Gedi, Masada, Qumran. Arab radio only – song lyrics remind me of my failures in life. Nod off from time to time. Road surface awful at south end of Dead Sea, which turquoise & tranquil.

This is the scene of 40 days 40 nights torment for Jesus. Bypass Jericho, up hill after hill towards our goal.

Sight Russian (?) tower atop of Jerusalem & heart begins to lift. Bedouins encamp in valleys either side of road. Past police checkpoint ... it's raining now. My friend, it's tu not vous by now, must spend the next 8/10 days welcoming her sister's friends & relatives at her place in Ramot, so despite my mild protestations she drops me at a Ramot bus stop. Give her a pack of Silk Cut – gentile she is.

Rush hour – bus 34 takes me for 3.30 shekels to near Egged bus station, the guide book says this is at top of Jaffa Road. Directions fail me (this is a regular occurrence in Israel) & I circle aimlessly seeking downtown. Arrive 25 mins later close to where I had started – Arab doughnut seller then directs me in totally opposite to true course the c*** !

Finally, English Jewess puts me on track & I descend Jaffa Road. Familiar landmarks begin to jog memory & after a couple more mistakes I arrive at my choice The American Colony Hotel & its annexe.

Shock horror ... the £25 rooms have been recently spruced & now cost \$120 but I need the sanctuary & Room 43 is prepared while I wander for an hour. Up to St. George's Cathedral – rosemary outside, rub hands, chapel on right St. Michael's where I pray, the organist practices, walk around the church & exit. It feels a little cold, not so happy as 4 years back.

Check out possible alternative room in attached pilgrim's

guesthouse but it's stark & \$40 +. YMCA is yet starker & dearer. Back to annexe for a siesta.

Wake & can you believe this, time goes topsy turvy again due to my upside down vision ! Assume it's 6.30p.m. only to discover some time later it must have been just after noon !
Gordon Bennett. Bath & change, out of garden gate for sightseeing in local vicinity.

Ace deli sells me for 10 sh. 2 pittas, a plate of mixed hummus & aubergine + a tub of cream cheese & chilli. Wander into grounds of villa, discovering it is the HQ of Jerusalem's Palestinian Supremo.

School is finishing, round & down to the Garden Tomb. Warm welcome, please come to the shop.

Gentle rain, pause. My spirits soar, that rushing internal Heaven sent exultation as I gaze upon this place where He Arose

A basket of rosemary sprigs, thanks, & enter the good shop, well run well stocked. Busy with custom getting busier as the tour people enter, keen to buy buy. Myself I buy a postcard for Consumer Forum folk and a map.

The party of tourists are I learn Singaporean - we brush shoulders as we move around the store. Good people. Heavier rain in the garden; have to close the door twice ... perhaps they were born in barns !

Walk further around this 'Christian' sector of town, browse in stationery shops, gift shops, shoe shops. Sun is warm now - last port of call is the Meridian Hotel close to the Am Col.. Charming, sun facing, looks fine - agree to check in tomorrow, 'anytime' he says, \$45 b&b. Had given 5 sh. to lady beggar, felt she needed it.

Snooze once more in comfort. Up 6ish, out again into old

walled city through Damascus Gate –

Help small lad up steps with his trolley of bits. Thinking I am bound for Jaffa Gate area I walk purposely keeping right – blow me down with a feather, 10 minutes later I emerge outside the walls again, but it's the Damascus Gate once more ! Is this place confusing or what !?

Stick to past knowledge & walk round corner to Jaffa Gate, left into St. James' alley & down to Jewish quarter. Not a lot going on at this time of evening, window shop & eat falafel pitta & veg from Filipino shop. Head back to hotel, losing way briefly in the old city.

Encounter Australian couple looking for a supper – try a couple of options & then walk with them to Am. Col. Where they will snack. Pleasant, only been in Jerusalem for an hour – no doubt will see them again as they are staying in St. George's.

Consult my maps & Lonely Planet guidebook in vague attempt to think where to go in following days. Drop 2 aspirin (limbs ache a touch !) & 1 Natrasleep & retire at 9.30p.m.. Read the lovely little Book of Kells got at Gatwick.

Tuesday 12th December

Up just before the muezzin calls, 5ish. More tap coffee, more cigarettes, more diary writing. Postcards to my father and to CF.

Stomach is loose this morning ... surmise the cause was the falafel pocket the previous evening. Rectify (well, there's an apt word !) matters by breakfasting on 2 types of wholemeal bread, bran flakes & oat muesli with yoghurt. Cannot finish the pot of awful coffee – last time their coffee had been excellent.

Settle my night's bill. UN Major is collected by his batman. Much business goes on in this hotel. 7.40a.m. up to St. George's Cathedral with the morning eucharist on my mind but discover it had been at 7a.m.. Wander around the gardens round the back, photo of tower. Into Dean's garden – all nicely tended & plants clearly labelled some with their Biblical connotations. Saffron, bay, rosemary, narcissi, wormwood, roses, geraniums amongst many others.

On leaving pass special room, newer stained glass just visible, surrounded by throne-like chairs – maybe convocations of bishops chinwag here.

Wander some more – briefly into Old City through Damascus Gate but little action early in morning & retreat. Ask about buses to Ein Kerem where John the Baptist was born & bred – Arab bus station beneath Golgotha (a closed Muslim cemetery) doesn't go there but one opposite Garden Tomb alleyway does ... No. 27 is needed.

Pack in hotel – male cleaner lets me pinch 2 little blue soap boxes. Photo from annexe roof. Lug stuff short distance & check in at the Meridian Hotel – room seems fine if view is not too hot. Deposit clothes to be laundered at reception – separated into hot & cold washes.

Hotel lift is made by Nechushtan-Schindler. Schindler's Lift ...say that with a lisp and what do you get? A fine book and a fair film.

Wander down different way towards Post Office & encounter wasteland opposite olive tree park where on previous visit I had experienced a sudden rush of wind. Saunter awhile seeking guidance then realise I am being watched by young man. Move across to olive park full of fallen Roman statue/column bits & sit on bench trying to appear normal. I have infringed on the 'gay' (good as you it stands for) encounter zone. Take one photo, and leave quietly.

P.O. comes up trumps – express PC to CF & normal airmail to Dad. Board my 43 which speeds past Yad Vashem & drops us all outside major hospital above Ein Kerem. There is no real path to E.K. but take photo of the village sitting at head of the valley. My destination today is Emmaus, or Ladrin as it's now called – they say Barabbas or the other unfortunate lived there. Ladrin is Spanish for robber, hence Ladrin I guess.

On my road map of Israel E.K. → Ladrin looked 15km as the crow flies. 11a.m. now, should be there by 2.30p.m. at the latest ... how wrong can one be. Path through woods of pine – give directions back to Ein Kerem to lost lady motorist. 2 mountjack deer bounce away ahead of me. Going is a little tricky but find road heading my way & follow that for many miles. Join a railway track briefly then from the map it appears I must cross to next valley north to keep in right direction. Track divides & I head uphill (mountain goat style) through thorn, ouch, rock & thicket. Gain top & decent path leads along ridge but suddenly ends. Have to descend via pipeline, fall once ... this needs care. After 1 hour I am back almost where I started from – my map unpreparedness, my ignorance, my stupidity.

Frustration follows, rain falls & I walk dejected for yet more miles. Hungry & thirsty but no respite here. Take off shoes & socks to cross slippery river bed, foaming with detergent. Each turn of the valley I hope the plain will be in sight. At last passing a quarry Bet Shemesh is seen on left – it's nearly dark now. 6 hours walking & for what. Say shalom to man with rickety legs – my first words to a soul since just beneath the hospital. A lonely route. Decide enough is enough – back to Jerusalem ?

Bus stops – not going to J., going to Tel Aviv. O.K. Ladrin I say. 9 shekels 80 he decides, seems a bit steep, Ladrin on the map looks nearby. Bus dumps me in Ramlah ... Ladrin he says, here. Consult map ... only Lod separates me

A message

suffering so as

for my

to show

yesterdays

you all the

todays and

more good- tomorrows

ness in the

This assurance end

will enable you

to overcome

in suffering

MB

First port of call is good little stationers nearby for 3 foot ruler. Select the straightest from choice of 5. Damage ... 9 shekels (£1.80, v. reasonable). Next to Am. Col. Shop for camera strap, explain didn't get back till late yesterday, boss can't find where his son may have put the embroidered ropes - promise to return p.m..

Drop ruler back in room & off for intended day of Christmas shopping ... after all I clocked up a lot of mileage the previous day & calves, feet & knees are in need of soothing. Replaster water blister on toe.

Coffee, coffee brain says (Sainsbury's now all used) -

excellent Turkish + cardamom in glass after it settles near Damascus Gate. Drizzle continues. Up towards Jaffa Gate where at summit veg vendor has dropped most of her turnips (?) over the road. Cars & lorries squash them mercilessly. Pick up a couple for her, rain should clean them. Her son stands by, twiddling his thumbs.

9a.m. now - Tourist Info Centre just inside Old City - woman on phone, pick up map of OC courtesy of H.Stern the jewellers. Big arrow You are here - good that is. Browse in Christ Church shop opposite David's Tower where Allenby quelled the rival passions. City starting to awaken. Rothschild Craft Centre not open till 9.30a.m. so descend to Jewish quarter.

Examine T-shirt collection & other wares. Buy chi (χ) plate and end of line white (well off-white cos it's been on display for ages) dove number XXL. Good lady owner takes my Nat West cheque for £11. Her husband directs me to best coffee shop in area, The Quarter Café - strong black with milk. Enya on the musak system ! Take 2 x panorama of good view of Golden Temple & Mount of Olives.

Around & about a bit, back & down to Wailing Wall. Refused entry at bottom left corner & given short shrift by Jewish orthodoxy. Tell geezer he's very welcome in a Christian place, more jabbering at me so "up yours", I rudely say - apologies sir. Find correct tunnel & am straight away in Arab section of town. 2 Colombians are struggling with bartering system - help out as best I can in Castellano (pure Spanish). Owner pleased, or is he just after my business ? Coffee offered ... sucker me parts with 30 sh. for v.nice box ... business terrible he & his opposite shopkeeper tell me ... not surprising if you hassle Europeans, they don't like it I try to explain. Sucker punched again into buying 3 hand painted Armenian plates (3 colours variations on the Tabgha mosaic), but get baksheesh square tile. Another 30sh. spent I think, it's hard to recall some of these protracted negotiations.

Part on good terms. Sales patter continues as one leaves.

Left into Via Dolorosa by Simon of Cyrene corner. Head down & slow walk seems to avoid much of the Arab sales pitch. On left is wonderful little chapel of the Little Sisters of Jesus. Quiet prayer & then photo. Discover branch exists in U.K., one in W.10 one in Hackney take down addresses & phone numbers. I like the name and I liked the place, although felt a touch queezy about the lower chapel which merited a quick in & out. Pope in 1964 was here, says plaque. Nice, very nice French prayer sheet also taken.

Shop for the blind has ace brushes but too cumbersome for air travel so buy 36 wooden clothes pegs – find out later, made in China, but assume packaging done by the blind. Continue up Dolorosa, eyeing goodies for perhaps later purchase. Reach Jaffa square again. Down St. James' once more – pee stop in Rothschild Centre, exhibiting fine art & jewellery etc.. Sigh their book & comment 'beautiful handiwork'.

5 shekels for a suitable camera strap without much hassle then I'm out of local currency so it's Bank Leumi time. Problems with their telephone so I try other bank (Mizrahi) but they close for lunch so it's back repentantly to Leumi where after longish wait (Bedouin has even longer wait than me ... maybe they are not quite sure who he is but he looks very honest to me & a fine fellow) my 250 shekels (£50) arrives.

Fine soft red cotton shirt – 30sh. 'no messing around here', unable therefore to bargain cos it was a bit dirty !

Family concern down Dolorosa again, good man has an 'everything for 3 shekel section' & interesting bric-a-brac. Come out with beautiful belt made by his niece/cousin ?, a battered but bonito cigarette tray holder thingy & two spare pawns, both intended for Consumer Forum. The chess set there is always missing pawns for some reason !

Map of Jerusalem bought nearby plus loaves & fishes XL T-shirt

blue (25sh.) then towards Damascus Gate (bag is getting heavier & heavier) – 2 tubs of cinnamon, 1 of ground cardamom (9sh.). Barrel box (70sh.) including free tea with sage (pas mal) – Islam/Jew/Christian discussion + chat to Head of Commerce (VIP) in Arab areas. Cat Stevens apparently now numero uno in esteem ... mention incident involving Georgie Chichester (now Leyland) when he sad & asked her to enter his Rolls Royce late one night ... suspect this tale put the cat (!) amongst the pigeons as good Muslims are not supposed to this style of thing. However, nobody's perfect, not by a long chalk. Shop owner is personal friend of Yussuf/Cat. Please to learn good Islam dead ringer for good Christianity – interpretations of Bible & Koran etc. often muddy the still waters that He provides.

Last purchases in the Old City were a pack of 4 knickers for me (10sh.), 2 mini tiger balms & 2 brilliant hessian Christmas stockings for the 2 girls, & 3 lemons outside for 1 sh., plus a 1 sh. roll. + 1 jar coffee (11 shekels) + 2 packs of Dunhill = 18 shekels.

Oh, the hazards of diary writing the following morn. I omitted 2 events of importance.

First I encountered on the Via Dolorosa, clattering down with his metal walking frame, a middle-aged man to whom I gave a 10 shekel note, in to his hat. Turns out he's, 5 years ago, been touched by a 30,000 volt electricity cable which shored off his scalp, fried his skin, chopped off half one foot & twisted his body. Coping OK but I tell him, as he can't afford the Israeli medical help available, to go & ask at Rothschild's Craft Centre for the dosh to get him to U>K> to have a metal plate fixed above his exposed brain. Tell him that in U.K., psychiatrists zap people too ! Too bloody much if you ask me ! He's incredibly lucky to be alive & I wish him everything he needs.

Event 2 was pleasant sojourn, coffee. photo in church at

Christ Church above Immanuel opposite David's Tower & already mentioned. Here, on the exhibits of earlier this century & before displayed, on portrait of Michael Solomon Alexander there is a sticker saying who this is which looks to me done in my mother's handwriting. Kevin is the man to ask I'm told by Argentinian lady but Kevin don't know (he's Australian) but will try to find out for me & leave message at reception. Ta, Kev. Mum was here during the war you see.

So back to Christmas shopping. After 4p.m. I head, after unloading first batch, through Hassidic section of the new town to Jaffa Street chewing on one lemon ! Am looking for cufflinks, selfishly for me, which proves a complete no-no. Serves me right.

No Mozart tapes anywhere, fair coffee & heavyweight bagel on George V Street. Batiques, silk cushion covers look not bad – may return. A few stocking fillas amuse so I get them ... 13.50 shekels. Fine store at bottom of Ben Yehuda Street yields loads of Christmas presents for family members & friends.

Goodness gracious it's 8.20p.m. now – head hotelwards, naturally get lost again trying to be too clever ... these streets honestly, where's my sense of direction gone. Supper en route, caramel milk (bueno), some pastries in Jewish zone & a slice of pizza.

Bed, exhausted, after bath 9.45p.m.

A good day

Merci Dieu

Tu es vachement chouette à moi

Merci encore

Je t'adore.

Thursday 14th December

Up early to scribe away, tap water is cold so coffee pretty disgusting.

What to do today la di da ?! All my washing was returned on my return to hotel the previous evening – beautifully done, all for 56sh. which I still owe Out at 5.45a.m. – clear skies. Down to Arab Bus Station, not a lot moving at this time of day. No coffee shops open. Board first bus to Bethlehem, the 6.05 a.m., which arrives at 6.30a.m. Am the only passenger by the time we reach B. Up hill to central square. Israeli army still in their pen but less frantic than 4 years ago. Ask one of them where I might get a coffee ? He shrugs, bemused & gestures me to north end of square. Aha, settle in café to enjoy a coffee/cardamom & secure a can of ‘Pip’s Cola’ for her stocking.

To the Church of the Nativity at bottom end of square – am first (?) grockle to enter through low small door that day. Drawn to far right corner where flowers, pictures & a crib lie above portal leading down to grotto from where emanates chanting of robed man. Fire extinguisher in left corner.

Ground floor level to immediate left of Mother & Child icon/painting and right hand column of grotto’s stone door frame steal my attention. 2 or was it 3 photos in the candle light before one of my throat spasms hits me again – coughing sporadically I seek the outside air in adjacent courtyard cloister into whose flower beds of impatiens (?) I retch and spit thrice.

Some Italian nuns, “buon giorno” one says, are scurrying to their service at St. Katherine’s which lies alongside the Church of the Nativity. One more photo as my composure returns. Bright sun greets me on return to main square.

Short morning stroll around the back streets following children on their way to school & then back to bus stop.

Return journey to Jerusalem marred by over-efficient young soldier who checks virtually every car, demands I.D. papers from nearly all our bus people. Somewhat rudely I thrust my maroon passport in his direction, "British", I say, muttering about how unnecessary all this over zealous checkpoint Charlie stuff is.

Road to J. Jamming up so driver takes good short cut which lands us at base of Zion Hill..

Get out here & discover by Alexander Café a mini museum explaining the 3 man operated (by hand) cable car system which crosses the valley to the Old City. Devised in 1948 or earlier by brilliant engineer whose name escapes me – URIEL that was it !, manned by the British during the mandate to restock the western Jewish sections of town. Kept a total secret, the cable wire being lowered to valley floor during the day, and not revealed until 1972. Mossad must be clever.

Walk up Zion through lovely gardens past King David's Hotel being done up, past the dreadful design of the imposing YWCA and head for breakfast. 9.25a.m. am past official time but kindly given all I need. One hour's kip. 10.40a.m. catch the 27 to Jaffa Road & descend to look for bank to get dollars cash & travel agent to reconfirm my flight home.

Score on the former at main Israel Discount Bank but it turns out that agent I seek is at 108 Ben Yehuda in Tel Aviv not Jerusalem / Good bloke at IDB branch had helped me here. Turns out there is a BY Street in every town. BY invented Hebrew language in 1920's.

Walk all the way up to Central Bus Station, central is hardly the word ! Stock up with caramel/mocca milk, an egg salad baguette, Israeli strawberry chocolate bar & a $\frac{1}{2}$ litre mineral water, Neviot. Am now ready, I hope, for an afternoon's stroll from Bet Shemesh to Ladrin.

Get off bus one stop too soon which adds a kilometre or so. Down to where the last trek had ended then across country Ladrun bound.

Suffice to say that some 5 hours later, through thicket, groves of olive, peach & orange, along paths tracks and road, through villages new & old, with sparrows, falcons, wagtails, pipers and a kingfisher eyeing right then left then right again, threatened by a Rottweiler (wooden stick came in handy but wasn't needed), I ultimately reached my destination. Yet again I had taken the great circle route. Oh for a 1" Ordnance Survey map !

Under the Tel Aviv ↔ Jerusalem motorway to Mehlaḥ Latrun & the ruined Church of the Beatitudes.

Overgrown park/garden on north side holds more magic. 2 photos in the virtual darkness. Time to return. Thumb out for 35 minute in cold weather. Hebrew only man in smart car drops me at Nevaresset Junction. Toda (thanks). Espy 'one of my favourite things' (Julie Andrews) – a shopping centre ! Quick wash & brush up of self & mud clodded shoes after an expensive espresso. Prices here are quite a bit higher than in Jerusalem but enjoy my sojourn in more stylish surroundings. Visit to large Co-op yields mini sacks of chocolate shekels, a cheap pan scrubber & yetanother doughnut !

Bus back to J. Also goes via the great circle route through smart suburbs. Then the old 27 back to base camp.

13 shekels for my supper of 2 white rolls (not enough wholemeal bred in the diet here), one tub of aubergine pâté, one tub of red cabbage salad, one low-fat honey yoghurt and a can of the marvellous Mitzli peach nectar. Now that's what I call value, although my guts could use more roughage.

Wash hair. A pretty good day all in all. At last I had completed my Ein Kerem to Emmaus walk. Tiring at times but

worth it I wonder ?

The deed's been done anyroads ! To sleep 9.30p.m...

Friday 15th December

Early start again – it's really my best time for writing I feel. More luke warm tap coffee ... this Maxwell House stuff, made in Germany, is pretty disgusting and doesn't dissolve properly. Sugar seems unnecessary, and Israel only has white sugar anyway.

Friday is the Moslem Sabbath so I should perhaps concentrate the day's activities in the Jewish areas ? Down to Post Office, up & right, then left down through Jaffa Gate. Things are quiet this early. Compose what I hope will be nice photo of moon, cypress trees & Moslem symbol on top of tower in main Jewish square. Nowhere open for coffee.

At length walk up Via Dolorosa – shot of donkey ascending. Had seen a few sheep earlier being herded around these narrow alleys – imagine that in Soho say ! A variety of motorised transport is able to negotiate these twisting, stepped & paved little streets. The best is a mini tractor pulling a trailer, made by Holder I think.

Near Damascus Gate I finally get my cup of coffee Arabische – a tad expensive here but pleasant. Pass the lady street vendors with their vegetables & fruit –

Maybe there's more action up in New Jerusalem. 9a.m. now. Pee stop in café beneath the Hapoalim Bank Tower but their water isn't hot yet. Corner shop hasn't got change for a 20 note for a 9.50 shekel pack of blue Dunhill Lights but seems to be dealing in \$100 dollar bills for another customer ! I window shop awhile around this excellent shopping zone.

These few streets of 2 storey houses were built 140 years ago

– the first Jewish settlement outside the Old City. Brave pioneers into Palestinian territory. They now house a nice mix of shops, restaurants, cafés etc. ... a bit like London's Covent Garden. Some wonderful goods meet my eyes.

Cigarette seller at last can give me change. Then I discover the Café de Colombia (best in the world I reckon) but it transpires they import the ever present Italian Sanfreddo variety. Nevertheless, 3 pretty waitresses (one particularly so !) please me & a large glass of frothy white coffee tastes good.

Shopping time. More Christmas presents secured at French run place who has spectacular selection of 'ethnic imports' – from Peru, Ecuador, Kenya & Indonesia to name but four. Buy 2 beautiful mobiles, painted wooden animals & a bird letter opener, all for 200 shekels on Diners Club card. One more painted wooden bird from another shop & wondrous Indian ? embroidered sash for 37sh.. It's worth so many times that. Weeks of work must have gone into such fine needlework some years ago. A glossy modern fridge magnet from Alexander's up Ben Yehuda then I'm seeking a canvas/cloth bag because all these things aren't going to fit in the Argos rucksack !

Breakfast had been a wholemeal bagel – one bakery in town only doing them it seems. Down for a deli lunch in the Old City going via Christ Church for another pee & to see if Kevin had left me any note ... non, not yet. Hot sun & fun in the central Jewish square as I snack on hummus & small white plaited loaf – v. good. Shop below looks brilliant but my eyes were bigger than my wallet as usual & I exit with a good bag (60 sh. on Diners) perfect for its intended role.

Everything closing now (1p.m.) for siesta. Refused entry to Dome of the Rock sector cos it's Moslems only today. Explain to guard that he would be very welcome any day of the week in a Christian church. Allowed to take photo though.

Had earlier revisited Israel Discount Bank at op of BY Street where Mark, busy as a bee as ever, had efficiently helped me get 250 shekels more.

Masses of Moslem ladies leaving their holy worship as the Arab quarters come to life. Round the back streets, photo of fine gateway – later turned away from Dome zone despite it now being emptier.

Path leads me towards Lion's Gate. 3 shekel entry into the Bethesda Pools & adjacent St. Ann's Church & gardens. Here Jesus healed a very sick man, "take up your bed and walk". Two crosses, well 8 actually, 4 on each stone pillar base mark the spot. 2 photos.

Out of Lion's Gate – men at entrance of Moslem cemetery on right would like 5 shekels if I want to walk therein. Politely decline & reverse direction up the Stork Walk, left past the Rockefeller Museum then right back to hotel – small siesta is the intention. $\frac{1}{2}$ hour's rest, settle up my account in dollars & shekels, try to telephone to reconfirm my flight but no reply on the 3 Tel Aviv numbers at 5p.m.. 5.10p.m. into Garden Tomb. Peace. Chat to volunteer from Guildford. 2 photos. Leave quiet & happy.

Wander up to new town again but precious little happening – where does everyone go on a Friday night? Yukky egg mayonnaise roll before back to St. George's Bazaar (opposite Cathedral) to buy a 30 sh. lovely silver spoon then to the best deli in town. Tonight it's a mango nectar, a schnitzel/potato/mayo pitta sandwich grilled on both sides, a bread triangle filled with spinach (?) & herbs dunked into a tub of cream cheese/cucumber/chilli & other vegetables. How's that for 12 shekels? Israel can be expensive but if you root around bargains abound!

Bed, believe it or not, at about 8.15p.m.

Saturday 16th December

My last full day, I trust, in Israel. Check in time is 11.55p.m., 3 hours before take off again, but despite trying all three numbers of Issta in Tel Aviv yesterday evening many times there was no answer. Hence not a confirmed booking ... fingers crossed.

Out at 5.45a.m.. Secure a pack of Rothmans Lights (better than Dunhill Lights, milder) and a good coffee opposite Damascus Gate. Streets are very quiet indeed – Jewish Sabbath but another holy day for Moslems it transpires later.

At the Arab bus station directly underneath Golgotha seek out a No.36 to Bethany. Too early it seems, so I walk. Down past Garden of Gethsemane, uphill round the Mount of Olives, graves to the left graves to the right, gently descending as the road twists and turns. Schoolchildren in danger as there is little pavement.

Eventually after some 4 miles a Greek (?) church on the right beckons. Try door, closed. Walk around their olive grove & take photo or view back towards Jerusalem. The dry desert hills of Judea lie to the north east. Back up to church gates – knock twice, answered by old lady gardener who gestures it is not open.

These Greeks only open their churches to 'tourists' one day a year in April. Closed shop Christianity.

Head back & soon discover what I'd inadvertently missed on the descent. Lazarus' tomb & attached Pope John Paul VI's Franciscan Church. Up the hill to back of church, rubbish strewn everywhere. A couple of tourist trade stalls but opposite church entrance is site I had hoped to see.

Declaring itself to be the 'oldest house in Bethany', it is the little home of Mary, Martha and their brother Lazarus now neatly kept by Mr Rabah Elyan who seats me down, proffers a weak Turkish coffee from his thermos, a second cup of instant

after the house tour. A well, out of service now, dominates the ground floor, upstairs in a round room, seating with hubbly bubbly pipes & carpets for decoration, he holds services for Moslems & Christians. Terrible sob story about how hard his life is, 170 shekels in debt to the electricity company, mother dying of a heart problem (?) "2 aspirin", I advise, Moslems trying to buy the house & turn it into a gift shop, roof leaking, put in prison by the Israelis, no money for school fees etc etc..

Begins to grate after 10 minutes or so. How much to believe ? Offer to help as best I can – it would indeed be a crying shame if this important site, the home of Jesus' best friends & scene of the raising of Lazarus from the dead, were to disintegrate.

In need of peace I go down into the airy, pleasantly glass domed with doves, well furbished church after taking photo inside. His friends' dining area. Cigarette in the garden out front pondering all the while my course of action.

The man seemed genuine, had given me a cigarette, a glass of coffee (returned) – I handed him 50 shekels (half of my remaining shekels near enough) – "for your mother", I say. Pray to Allah for her. Back towards Jerusalem, some way up the hill I discover my remaining Dunhills and lighter are missing. Had I left them in the garden ? Is it worth returning ? A niggling doubt remains but I strongly suspect this man has a little pick-pocketing habit. My jacket pocket is an easy target.

Forgiveness is offered if my thought is right but to steal, however meagre the item is wrong, & a lesson must be learnt.

God sees all.

Further up the hill a flurry of sparrows draws my attention to a house. Chickens are penned in the nearby shop and merit a photo. Trudge back to the Old City and enter at Lion Gate.

10.30a.m. now, have to vacate my room by 12 noon.

Get cross with Moslems at the cemetery gate, how dare they charge 5 shekels to enter if one ain't a Moslem ? Get cross again as access denied to Golden Dome of the Temple precinct (yet again. I had tried before setting off to Bethany). Gates closed everywhere, one 'tourist gate' exists somewhere but I'm not sure I've found it yet ... it seemed easier 4 years ago.

Small lecture ensues on how Moslems are welcome in Christian churches, are we not equal ? The whole square kilometre was closed off all yesterday for Islam + much of today I learnt from some Dutchmen. Yet this site is special for Jews & Christians too, why not let us roam your square at will - ok we'll give you your personal time in your mosques but please let us in at those gates. We mean no harm.

They have much to learn.

Discover new streets, alleys and tunnels in this maze of a city. Pleasant time in the Ethiopian monastery, tiny cells for the monks & a good man to show me round. Photo.

Greek sector very much doom & gloom (likewise the Armenian quarter walked through yesterday) but enlivened near Jaffa Gate by throngs of happy children.

After an Arab honey roll on up to Christ Church once more for a make-it-yourself 2 shekel coffee & friendly souls. No sign of Kevin or any note for me. Walk back to hotel who say kindly, don't rush, room's ok till 3p.m.. Half hour rest then neatly pack up all my belongings and gifts.

Several hours to dispose of before it's time to leave. Garden Tomb not open till 2.30p.m. so enter Damascus Gate once more.

This time it's thronged with \Saturday afternoon Arab shoppers & a struggle to walk with thousands of people + cars too large for these widthless streets.

Jewish quarter still dead quiet. More rounding and abouting
– revisit shop to but 2nd aerial view map of Jerusalem OC
then revisit marble box shop to explain to the owner & his VIP
friend that the acre of Garden Tomb garden is forever freehold
British, protected by an Ottoman 'Furman' ... solid Islamic Law
& not on a lease as he had inferred. Part on good company.
Tourist Information Office closed ! ... all day Saturday. Not
very helpful, eh ?

Shop in Christ Church shop by their gate, one more map to
frame & a lovely little book on new visions of Jesus. 10
shekels the two.

One more cup of coffee, enjoyed in warm sunshine outside.
Into & around the church. Pray in sunshine corner at left of
altar rail, past the piano & outside again. Meet Kevin who
has yet to have any news but I leave my address.

Down the steps & ramps again, out at Damascus once more & to
just about my favourite place here, the Garden Tomb. Long
chat with the lady keeper of the gate as many Romanians enter
(they are used by the Israelis as the British used the Irish ...
nigh slave labour), some Russians, some Australians. Long
chat just outside with German Jewish émigré to Kenya who knew
my mate Chris Nevill ... holocaust memories of Einstein, gold
even amongst the Germans ... Schindler and many others who
suffered for their humanity.

Long time spent in the tasteful gardens ... move this way and
that. Photo of Skull/Golgotha hill – to Large & Small
Chapels. Good guardians here. Quick visit inside tomb, no
sonic booms this time as I exit His temporary sepulchre (as
there had been on my last visit).

Cocoa the cat moves out & in – back inside to the warmth of
the shop. Say my adieus.

Venture back to Ben Yehuda zone ... the miles I clock up on foot
... only cafés are open. Locate the Menora candlestick (old)

that I had my eyes on. 420 shekels less 20 % vat & so on.
Tant pis, the jewellers is closed all day Saturday.

Decide not to wait till 6p.m. when things may open & it's back to St. George's after a talk with Abraham at the Bazaar shop.
Quick tour of the Cathedral (closing up time !) & the Guest House (ground floor rooms look very nice).

Back to Meridian Hotel to book a taxi to Ben Gurion as there are no city buses today. It's going to come at 9.45p.m..

Back to the deli this time for cherry yoghurt, tub of not quite so good aubergine pâté & 2 pittas. 5 shekels only.

Eat my supper in a quiet corner of the American Colony garden with a cat for company. Marcellams & inch'allah to the hotel shopkeeper.

2 good coffees & a few more cigarettes in the Meridian lobby awaiting my 30 shekel ride to the airport.

Ford Transit van arrives, converted for seating. Dump kit in back & leap in. We pick up 2 further passengers in poorer Jewish quarter – one young guy going back to U.S.A. with enormous suitcase after just 2 weeks stay. Second pick up (hard to find) is very large lady who has $\frac{1}{4}$ of a ton of luggage which is rammed into any space available squashing everyone else's stuff. She herself squashes next to me on back pew, coughing & sneezing all the way past Ladrin to the airport.

Check in area is busy busy so I sojourn outside – large lady with large luggage is bemused, wants El Al. I help load her bags onto a trolley & off she toddles.

Time to kill is spent part outside, rain now, part in emptier arrivals hall where hippy is taking inordinate length of time to read each page of a Carlos Castaneda book. Maybe he has swallowed his remaining stash of 'Red Leb' ... it certainly looks that way.

11.30p.m., off to check in my Argos. Queue some time for the security check before check in. Here we go again. 4 years ago each item of my belongings had been minutely examined, the most intensive search I had ever encountered in all my world travel which I hazard a guess is amongst the widest.

The same questions, the same training for these girls. Where have you arrived from? Where did you go in Israel? When did you book your ticket? The list goes on and on ... receipts are checked ... more questions. Has anyone given you anything? Have you at any time left your luggage anywhere? This last question proves my undoing temporarily. Shock horror, I mention the word Arab! Yes, I left my bags in the hotel during the afternoon in the security/customer service room by reception. First lady hands me over to second more trained lady.

Entire first 15 minutes of questions are repeated word for word, intonation for intonation. I'm starting to get bored of this. She has severe trouble understanding why this man can travel independently – no tours, no packages, no hotel reservations.

The last hurdle is an extraordinary question. Have you made any friends during your stay, has anyone invite you to their home? One of the joys of travel is now reduced to to a perceived threat to the Jewish nation. But I pass this final frontier – Eton/Christ Church smarm finally disarms her & a faint smile opens a crack in her door. Yellow/black pass stickers are applied all over my now scattered bits.

Oh Israel – such paranoia ... this is an English flight on an English plane. Don't be so scared. Are there no sensors/detectors which could do this job for you ... spotting your feared weapons or little packs of Semtex? Surely yeah.

The path at last begins to clear, although a mass of trolleys make movement difficult. Bag checked in ... rucksacks to a

different conveyor belt once more. Upstairs through the buzzless (that's rare) portal & slump pretty knackered in the glitzy duty free area. Phew.

My remaining few shekels are spent on 2 Disney puzzle jigsaws – till operator gives me them for 11.70 rather than the true cost of 12sh. Toda. He knows where Enya lives; most northerly point in all Ireland but is listening to the Pogues on his music machine.

Carton of Silk Cut, $\frac{1}{2}$ bottle of cheap Israeli red wine & pack of mineral mud soap from Duty Free. My new bag strap snaps ... mind you it was quite heavy by now.

Board the 757, reassuring Rolls Royce engines. Lift off 3.10a.m. local time, it's Sunday. Two ladies on my left keep themselves to themselves.

Better flight & food this way. Nod off from time to time.

6a.m. UK time touchdown at Gatwick.

Meet 2 travellers in waiting area who have been in Dubai. She had been stared at relentlessly – some Arabs so rarely see an inch of flesh.

Bag pick up goes fine, cruise through green zone, one is allowed £126 of gifts & I'm below that easily methinks.

Rather nasty 65p espresso ... none of the cash dispensers will take a Nat West card & I've got £3.35 cash left. Trouble with computer signs on the train platform leads me & the 2 lovely ladies who had been next to me on the plane to board a Thameslink number causing us to change at East Croydon.

One gives me the Romanian recipe for the aubergine pâté & I try to advise what would be nice for their week in London & environs. Suggest Southwark, Covent Garden & St. Albans, maybe Oxford.

First train has 4 nicely done hand drawn pictures, 2 at each end of carriage. I sit on seat in line between one of St. Mary's Battersea, the Wren church where I was married and at the far end is one of St. Alban's Cathedral.

Exit at Clapham Junction, buy travelcard, 5p left now. Longish wait on a Sunday morning for the 270 down Garratt Lane.

Gulls, crows, pigeons & sparrows enliven the cold. A heron passes high.

Door to Atheldene is stiffer than usual but yields to a shoulder.

9a.m. now ... answermachine is flashing, 5 calls this week, bills & more pleasant mail pile the doormat. Spend some time arranging montage of my shopping & take photo number 36.

Thank you Lord for lovely holiday – hard grind at times but more than a million moments of utmost revelation.

I will stay with you if you stay with me

I will follow you forever

Follow me, bevakasha

It's your show

Vidame

J x

The End