



# ISRAEL MATTERS!

Publication of the Israel Affairs Committee of Temple Beth Shalom

co-chairs: Dr. Martin Laskin and Allan Myer

Issue Number 126



September 2018

## Beaches

Somehow our Jewish People have become associated with 'beaches'. Many retire to Miami Beach, or have childhood memories of Coney Island and Brighton Beach in Brooklyn. Further down the coast is the Jersey Shore. Those who grew up locally in the New Haven area may recall Bagel Beach or Silver Sands. The beach tradition has carried over from the Diaspora to the modern Jewish State.

My wife, Esther and I are in Israel twice a year and the Tel Aviv beaches are a favorite spot for us, especially during our summer visits. Tel Aviv's beaches, framed by the Mediterranean sea on the one side and the 'Tayelet', or miles long concrete boardwalk on the other are not only beautiful and now internationally known but to a sociologist such as myself a source of fascinating sociological insights into how daily life reflects the wider social structures of Israeli Society.

Going from the north of the city to the southern part which includes Jaffa there are by unofficial accounts at least 16 beaches. Some of these beaches have official status according to rules and functions, while others as is more common are nicknames for areas of beaches denoting unique reputations, ambiances, and clientele.

I won't be able to include all the beaches in his article, but I have chosen a few that I am somewhat familiar with and I believe represent different facets of Israeli society. Let's start in the north.

'Metzizim' Beach. Literally this means 'Peeping Toms Beach' - Gasp! How did this come about? In the early days of the Israeli film industry a movie was produced that later became what we would call a 'cult' movie. This movie, a comedy, but with a darker side followed the antics of a bunch of young Tel Aviv men as they lived empty, shiftless lives as beach bums trying to engage their favorite fantasies on the shores of the Mediterranean. Need I say more? One of the actors the famous entertainer Uri Zohar made the headlines when a few years later made a 180 degree turn and became ultra-orthodox. Apparently, he sought deeper meaning in life than sand, sun and sin. Today this beach retains the name of the movie but is a beautiful family friendly beach right across from the Sheraton Hotel.

Going south from 'Metzizim' we have a set of three beaches

which practically run right into one another; Hilton, (the Gay beach) the 'Dati' or religious beach and the 'doggie' beach reserved for Tel Aviv's canine population and their owners. From these three beaches we can learn something about Tel Aviv's easy going and tolerant live and let live attitude.

The beach across from the Hilton Hotel is also known as the Gay Beach. You know you are there by the rainbow-colored gazebos which blend in with the variously colored beach umbrellas. This is not a beach which is in any way officially or even unofficially reserved for homosexual individuals. The terms 'homoim' and 'lesbiot' are not so much used as derogatory terms in Tel Aviv but rather as simple descriptors. It happens to be one of the most scenic beaches in Tel Aviv and Israelis and tourist of all orientations come here. Every June however Tel Aviv hosts an International Gay Pride week that attracts tens of thousands of gay tourists to Israel. At this time the Hilton beach is packed with these tourists from all over the world. Even during this week all are welcome to the Hilton Beach. Although Israel is known internationally and in general as a tolerant country for LGBT, anti-Israel groups have discredited this by calling Israel's tolerant attitude as merely a public relations plot to 'Pinkwash' over the discrimination against Palestinians. Sometimes it seems, Israel can never win.

Next to the Gay beach is the 'Hof Ha'Datiim' or the religious beach. Religious Israelis also want to enjoy the beach but for many of them mixed male and female bathing violates what they consider proper modesty. Years ago, a semi walled off beach was set up that allowed for separate women's and males bathing on alternate days of the week. On Shabbat of course, the religious don't use the beach, and, on this day, anyone can bathe there. The religious used to have a problem in going to the beach because Israel was, up until a few years ago on a six-day workweek. The only day off for most people was on Shabbat which didn't much help the religious. Recently Israel changed to a five-day workweek, the days off being Friday and Shabbat. The Israeli weekend now starts on Thursday evening, and ends Sunday morning. A few years ago, before I had an accurate idea of the different beaches in Tel Aviv I was

---

jogging along the Tayelet (boardwalk) and inadvertently noticed that a section of the beach had semi-nude female bathers. In the interest of sociological research, I asked some locals if this was legal. No, I was told, obviously the women I had seen were secular women who went to the religious beach on female only days to improve their tans. Apparently, the religious women had no problems with this.

Then we come to the 'Hof Haklavim' or the 'doggie beach'. This is the only Tel Aviv beach where dogs are permitted. I grew up in Queens N.Y. and from early on learned to fear dogs, or at least to be very uncomfortable around them. It seemed that Jewish people typically did not own dogs. Was this a learned trait passed down from centuries of Ghetto living in Europe where Jews wandering outside the Ghetto might be identified by dogs and attacked by them because of their status as 'stranger'? Perhaps it was simply a cultural inheritance of being urban dwellers where dogs were not as popular as in the rural areas. But, many Jews did live in the small village Shtetls of Eastern Europe where owning animals such as goats, cows, chickens and horses were the norm for Jew and Gentile alike. At any rate it appears that in Tel Aviv there is a romance between Israelis and dogs. Being that most apartments are small in Tel Aviv, and pet care is expensive it was hard for me to believe the highly visible numbers of dog owners and their pets. This phenomenon has taken place recently, perhaps over the last thirty years. The city abounds with dog parks and supply stores. Numerous breeds are present including the local 'Canaani' breed. The dogs appear to be well treated, well fed, calm and friendly. Perhaps the Jewish tradition of 'Tzar Baalei Chaim' (humane treatment of animals) plays a role here. On 'doggie beach' pets and their owners endlessly run along the shore and in and out of the water.

Still moving south, we come to 'surfers beach'. From Heinz ketchup to Columbia and North Face sportswear all things American have become popular in Israel, surfing is no exception. On surfers' beach, not far from Herod's Hotel Israeli surfers minus the Beach Boy's music try to catch waves that are less than perfect partially due to the wave breakers built further off shore. While many American

Jews, myself included are fascinated by and have a strong connection to all things Israeli, the feelings of most Israelis towards America are similar. American Jews and Israelis have much in common including at times taking for granted the wonderful things we are privileged to have in both of our home countries.

There is no space in this article to follow all the beaches along the greater Tel Aviv area south, down to Jaffa and Bat Yam or north to Herziliya so I will geographically conclude with the three most crowded and popular beaches which are named after three streets that end at the shore; streets that are named after three early Zionist founders- Frishman, Gordon, and Bograshov. Ice Cream, rented chairs and umbrellas, picnic lunches, families, children and trying to step over beach towels and sun bathers.

Now allow me to write some words about the ethnicities readily observable at the Tel Aviv beaches who represent Israel 2018 in a nutshell. We are told that the children of Israel fled Egypt as a mixed multitude; miraculously they washed up on the other side of the Red Sea a nation. Well, not completely united; it took 40 years of desert wanderings to do that. Modern Israel is a nation of many kinds of Jews, miraculously washed up on the Mediterranean coast. The latest are the French Jews, 50,000 have come in the last few years fleeing Islamist antisemitism in France. Here they proudly display their stars of David jewelry that they may need to keep under cover in Paris. There are the tourists many who aren't at all Jewish but who love this country, some of them wear crosses.

In addition, there are other Israelis who are part of this country. There are Israeli Arabs, Druze and Circasians. There are guest workers who have overstayed their visas and want to remain. There are asylum seekers from Darfur and the South Sudan who have caused much soul searching among Israeli society. Many of them have found jobs and safety working at the beach.

A mass of humanity of every skin color, origin, religious and life style orientation.

It's all on view, for all to see, at the beach, in Tel Aviv.

Submitted by Marty Laskin

---