

October 11, 2007 From: Genine Barel, Tsfat: E-mail:barelg@netvision.net.il [Rony and Genine run a B&B and catering company in Tsfat]

It is Sukkot, the holiday in which we dwell in a sukkah hut, a temporary dwelling, to remind us of our time in the wilderness of Sinai when G-d nurtured the children of Israel and took care of our needs.

Sitting in our rooftop sukkah, supported by the sanctity and joy of the holiday, I look out on the beautiful green slopes of Mt. Meron, and cannot believe that just 12 weeks ago I was standing on this roof watching pillars of smoke rise from rockets exploding along the sides of those very same slopes. And I did not imagine then, that those same rockets would sail into Tsfat later that day and shatter the bubble of peace and tranquility that we had managed to wrap around our lives despite living in this beleaguered, war-torn land.

It was so surreal: one night we were hosting a magical dinner in our courtyard for a beautiful interfaith group of Christians and Jews from Bethesda, Maryland. The very next night we were fleeing our home in the dark of night as rockets exploded all around us.

When the second round of rockets landed in Tsfat at 8 pm on July 13th, we had foolishly just sat down to eat dinner in our courtyard with our neighbors the Oxmans. We'd spent all afternoon together in Michael's Chinese medicine clinic, which is underground and pretty safe. Rony offered to make dinner for all of us and we filed out of the shelter and down the street to our home for pasta.

The adults suggested we eat outside for the fresh air, while the children cried, "no, we shouldn't go out, it's not safe. Let's eat in the house." The adults foolishly prevailed, and no sooner had we raised our forks to our mouths, than a heavy barrage of rockets landed all around us. The ground beneath us shook and two terrified families ran into our bathroom, the safest part of the house.

My husband, Rony ran back to get the baby, still in his high chair in the courtyard, and we huddled together, deeply shaken. The Oxman children burst into tears and my children began chewing their sleeves and praying quietly. We all realized that we'd have to leave Tsfat.

We're back now and things have returned to normal on the surface. But everyone's been changed by the experience. This war, which displaced 1 million Israelis for one month, has left a deep scar on the Israeli psyche. It's a reopening of the Jewish wound of the last two thousand years: being forced from our homes by people who are intent on eliminating us.

Whether it's Romans, Crusades, Inquisition, Cossacks, pogroms, the Nazis, the Arab armies or the Hezbollah, it's another round of Jews confronting a rabid desire for our destruction. When my house shook from the force of the rockets landing just meters away, I felt the force of the hate driving the Arabs lighting up those katyushas. Someone was trying to kill me and my sweet, innocent children. It was so shocking. And so sad.

I was overwhelmed not by anger but by a deep sadness that stayed with me throughout the war. Sadness that someone could hate me, and so many decent people so much. Sadness for the cycle of violence that Israel had been drawn into yet again. Sadness at the innocents on all sides whose lives were lost and the pain their families will endure.

Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year, we hosted a potluck dinner for our community in our home. 60 people sat in the house and in our back courtyard for a beautiful, magical dinner the second night of the

holiday. It was a TIKKUN (corrective experience) for that terrible dinner of July 13th; a return to the magic of what we are blessed to do in our home. The light of all those pure souls gathered together was so strong. And people shared their war experiences, their wounds, their hopes and prayers for the New Year.

One thing I know: I appreciate life so much more deeply now.

I appreciate the gift of living in Tsfat, with my kind and gentle husband, my sweet and innocent children, my holy neighbors and the special guests that we are blessed to host. The souls that drift in and out of Tsfat and into our lives are all unique and when we share our light, even for a few hours, we create a very powerful radiance.

I bless us all that this New Year brings more opportunities for us to shine our light, to share our wisdom, our joy and our love.

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PS. It took me a month to settle back into life after the war. I was in a bit of a daze. The New Year has somehow brought me the clarity and psychic space to sit down and tackle my neglected correspondence.

Jerusalem Diaries: In Tense Times by Judy Lash Balint (Gefen) is available for purchase from www.israelbooks.com