

New Year, New Hope

by Vered Harel

It's been a while since I've been online, and it's hard to put into words everything that's happened in the past few months. Life has been overwhelming, to say the least.

A few months ago, I learned that my Dad only had a short time left. I made my way to Israel to be with him, to say goodbye. Today, as I look at his photos, his smile reminds me of the love and strength he carried with him. I wanted to be there for my mum after my dad's passing, helping her and our family sort through the things he left behind. There were so many tasks and projects, but I wasn't alone. My daughter came with me, and I found myself supporting her through this journey too.



Challenging times

But perhaps the biggest challenge wasn't just saying goodbye—it was adapting to the reality of life here, especially for my daughter, who wasn't used to this. To be honest, neither was I. Living in Israel, where my heart has always been, suddenly felt slightly different.

For the last 14 years, I've lived in Melbourne, Australia. A place that has become my home, with its "no worries" mindset, where war and rockets are nonexistent. In Melbourne, people respect their family time, the workday rarely stretches past 5 pm, and the weekend starts on Friday evening. There's a public holiday for everything—Cup Day, Footy Day, King's Day, even My Day, it feels like! It's a slice of heaven.

Intensity

Then, I arrived in Israel, and it hit me. The intensity—the mess, the chutzpah, the drivers who act like they own the roads. Israel is extreme in every sense—emotions, even in flavors on food packages (so much salt or sweet!). If you had to put Israel on a scale, with 1 being calm and 10 being hectic these days, you can guess where it lands. Australia, on the other hand, is the complete opposite.

It's amazing how our brains adapt to different environments. Mine had adjusted to a relaxed, easy-going pace, and suddenly, it had to recalibrate to chaos. Strangely though, since October 7, even Melbourne felt empty. The peace there didn't really matter when my heart was elsewhere.

Hope

Despite everything—the rockets, the sleepless nights, the constant news alerts, the need to stay on high alert—I've also seen so much good. I chose to see the beauty in the chaos. I spent precious time with my mum, learned new things about myself and my dad, reconnected with my extended family, and surrounded myself with amazing friends. Through all the projects I took on, I met some truly incredible people with such big hearts—compassionate souls carrying so much trauma but continuing on in survival mode, just like the reality here demands.

What has truly connected me to feeling proud to be Israeli again is witnessing the resilience and determination of the people here. Despite the challenges, they work hard, but they do it with passion and purpose. Their strength, unity, and unwavering commitment to keep going, even in the face of adversity, remind me of the deep pride and courage that come with being Israeli. And while some of my friends might think I'm a little crazy, I'll say it anyway—every time I see F-15s or F-16s flying overhead, I get chills of excitement. It's a powerful reminder of my roots, my history, and the strength of this nation. Thanks, Dad, for introducing me to the Air Force!



To summarise

To be honest, the reality here isn't quite how I remembered it. It's even more intense now, and living on high alert isn't good for anyone. But amidst the chaos, I've found moments of grounding. Whether it's through the beauty of the people, the views (even though I couldn't travel far), or—let's be real—the food. Israeli food is pure therapy, and each bite helps ground me and brings joy.

Even though I have to head back to Melbourne, I've strengthened my identity and hold onto the hope that my family and I will find our way back to Israel soon!

This year, I'm choosing to focus on the good. It's easy to see the bad—it feels safer and more familiar. But I'm making the choice to surround myself with the positive, the beauty, and the goodness that exists in the world.

Who's with me?

Here's to a sweet, grounded, and beautiful year ahead! Shana Tova u'Metuka to everyone! New Year, New Hope 🍏🥰

#NewYear #NewHope #ShanaTova #Family #Resilience