

**Beth Chayim Chadashim**  
**Los Angeles, CA**

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**Shabbat Yom Ha Atzmut**  
**by Merav Opher**

"Deixai me nascer de novo nunca mais em terra estranha -" I choose this foreign language-foreign Brazilian Poet Cecilia Meireles to start my drash - "Let me be born again, never more in a foreign land." to talk about exile, all sorts of exiles, cultural exiles, spiritual exiles and homes...several homes...

In 1992 (at the age of 22) I came back to Israel for the first time (I had left the country at the age of 9). I remember standing at the Frankfurt airport looking suspicious to the group of Israelis standing near me and trying to ignore the fact that I also knew how to speak Hebrew. The group was so loud and harsh - so different from the gentle Brazilians. I was smiling my Brazilian smile and waiting to board. I was thinking to myself - so this is my "mishpuche" so I belong to "this"!

It's true that the best friends of my parents at Sao Paulo were Israeli - the old good "chalutzim" (the pioneers) - with memories of conquering the six days war. And my memories were full of "iordim" (the going-down-the Israeli that dared to abandoned the Land) in nights full of songs and wonderful memories of the 60's when Israel was still a place full of idealistic people that didn't care about comfort...or at least this was my idea of them.

The group as I found out was a folk dance group. Almost the whole trip they yelled to the flight attendant complaining about the food. I was silent, understanding the Spanish from the flight attendant that was trying desperately to calm down and control the group, caught in the middle of these two cultures.

Maybe I should start talking about Israel. Artzenu ha ctanonet - our little little country - Or like the Greek poet said "to every place that I go, "Greece hurts me" - ...to every place that I go, Israel hurts me...I could say.

Thousand years of hope to returning to Israel - the permanent melancholy of the Jewish exile - "Meal Pizgat Har Hatzofim Eshtachave lach apaim, meal pizgat har hatzofim shalom lach Ierushalaim", the rabbi longing for Jerusalem (over the tzofim mountain I kneel for you, over the pick of the Tzsofim Mountain shalom my dear Jerusalem). And the final return and the start of a new (safe?) land for the Jews all spread out - the Yemenites, the Iekes, the Sfaradim the Ashekanzim, all sort of people with different histories different memories-and the Russians that started kibbutzim. The effort of finding an Israeli "type"-and unifying this soup of cultural differences. This effort was not easy and Israel still today carry resentments from all sort of groups against this "cultural homogeneity" .

"Lo Sharti Lach Artzi ve Lo pearti shemech" - I didn't sang to you, my land and didn't embellish your name, "...achen dala meod, iadati zot haem", and you were so poor (and needed this so much), I knew it, mother. Rachel, the Israeli poet that died in exile from Kineret, expelled from her Kibbutz.

Rachel's poem that uses the Tanach's Hebrew like the songs of the songs from King David. Rachel came in the second aliah, in the 20's from a wealthy cultural Russian

family, very religious-like many from the second aliah she lost her faith but was still using the biblical Hebrew in her poems. Her father when he died left all his money to the Yeshivas. Her family blamed her for convincing her sisters to join her and abandoning promising carriers in music and painting.

She and Bat Sheva her sister decided to stop speaking Russian and only spoke Hebrew. They had only one day per week when they could speak Russian. As they didn't know much of Hebrew these days were used to update each other in all the gossip and daily matters that were happening in their lives. She entered to a kibbutz, went to France to learn agriculture so she could come back and help Israel to start to plant apples, until she got the news that she had tuberculoses-and like the biblical times, when somebody that had a contagious disease in order not to contaminate the community, she was put aside-suddenly one day notified that she had to move out and be in her own. Rachel died far away from her Kineret, in exile, "Lama Caratem Li Chofei Hapele? Lama Cazavtem, Orot Rechokim?" why you called me distant voices why my heart follow the sound....asking herself why she followed her heart and came to Israel.

My parents, like Rachel, decided when they did Aliah in 1967 to stop communicating in a foreign language, English and I grow up in a home when only Hebrew was allowed. So there was me standing in the airport glancing the Israeli women dressed for the army - *a nice view*...The policemen asked for my passport - "passport...the Israeli one", and I was speaking a fast fluent nervous Hebrew - and he started to argue harshly how I didn't went to the army - how it was possible that a 22 years old girl tried to escape the army - until I started to get tired, my Hebrew slowed down-and he smiled "from Spain?" The Brazilian melody that infiltrated in my Hebrew and gentle stretched the phrases...later on I learned that besides the melody my Hebrew had so many peculiarities - the same peculiarities as my sister - small mistakes that my parents had learn. My exiled American Hebrew with the Brazilian melody.

On that first visit I went with my brother-in-law and my sister to visit my childhood house - The last time that I saw it was when I was 9 years old. my parents still living in Brazil, couldn't bring themselves to sell the house. So there was my house - still in Haifa, Rechov Einstein Shishim ve Sheva alef, coma bet, (Einstein St. 67a, second floor) standing silently waiting for someone from the Opher's family to come back. My sister did aliah couple of years before that but only came once to the apartment - I stepped carefully in the floors - the lights were off - and we decided to maintain them like that (for safety reasons) - so I left some time for my eyes to get used to the darkness - I was searching for the art objects and metal Yemenite sculptures that my mother collected - I turned the flashlight to the books case - the wood was dark-the 70's furniture - full of painting books (my mother was a painter) all the books that I heard her talking - Michelangelo drawings, the life of Rembrandt etc etc. I remember the last day that we left the house - a year - no two maximum two years maximum was the period that I said to my friend Eyal - that we will be in our sabbatical year in where it was SAU PAOLO - I couldn't even point in the map where this strange place was. And there was in the kitchen hanging in the wall the Pessach list that my mom was making - "buy 3 chickens, wine..." The apartment looks like the family went away in a hurry - refugees - and will be back- soon, soon...

I entered with the flashlights to the room just left from the living room-and there it was-the two beds facing each other and the little shelf where I used to put the

Winnie, the Pooh - only in Israel and US people knew what it was Pooh - Brazil never heard of such a strange creature! I looked to the wall above Michal, my sister's bed-and there were our drawings - I forgot those drawing-and I looked to Michal that just came behind me smiling,"look - the one when we did at Kita Bet, at the second degree, about the president." That he was like our super hero - how he was great - Brazilian kids will never draw figures of president with such a Zionistic communist vision of the land.

I never was able when I was little in Brazil to stand up when the hymn of Brazil was chanted-I always in protest kept my mouth closed - now I feel guilty - growing up in Brazil and as time passed my home sickness to Brazil just grows - but "Ha Tykva-Ha Tykva..." I always screamed in full voice the Tykva....even all wrong because I never was able to memorize correctly the verses. My school in Sao Paulo was orthodox and everyday we had in the morning both hymns played. I used to be in the race team thinking I want to win an Olympiad - I just want to win any competition in the Olympiad to see the Israeli flag goes up. Later on I had the idea of being a movie director and I cherished for a long period the idea to see the Israeli flag in Cannes - a night when you can stand to receive a prize in name of your little country.

This was my first visit to Israel. A month. When I came back I announced to my parents-that I didn't feel as I traveled - everything that I saw was identical of what they have told me. In my second visit I stayed in Technion, the university of Haifa - for a visit to the Physics Dept. I stayed with my sister for three months-The bright light of the morning in Haifa that blinds you - there are no clouds in the sky's I surprised to notices. (The same skies that I Los Angeles has some days same luminescence).

In late morning and late afternoons there was this ritual in the department of going to have coffee - a friend of Michal that become close to me used to come to my office and call me. I remember seating there smiling my Brazilian smile - the only one not to react to the jokes - the majority full of references to the army - I was too shy to ask what was mem-mem mem-alef-which division this was? I think they liked me but although they might thought that I was maybe a bit slow-why is she smiling so much? why is she so nice and happy? The Arab men in the cafeteria was the only one that had this Brazilian quality of chatting. I loved to spent time with him.

In 99 I came to Los Angeles- LA — LA...the Hollywood place. It was not a short, quick adaptation-considering that I was also coming out! In second week I decided to explore the city-how LA is spread out - I thought stepping in the accelerator-where is this Beit Chaim....Beit Chaim Chadashim?

I was glancing the page that I pulled out from the Internet the night before - How it was strange to see all the kippot - the rainbow kippot and Rabbi - a female and a Chazanit - all my life I had loved the orthodox way of telling us the Jewish history - And at the end of the night - it not that I left in peace with all the new changes that I was seeing in this strange synagogue - but somehow my heart recognized that this is a home - a different home - but it feels so orto-reform-heimishly-this place!!!!

Imagine in a strange night a strange place-a strange country when you drive and park your car and walk into a place not knowing that you have found a new home!

Before I finish I would like to tell a story that I carry about Israel. In the six day war-when finally the "araiot", lions, the affection name for the Israeli soldairs, entered and approached the Kotel Hamaaravi-

the western wall, and Jerusalem was re-conquered on foot without shooting from airplanes as the Israeli were afraid to damage the old city-when they finally approached the Kotel-

somebody remembered to call the main rabbi of the army and he asked to stop the advance of the troupes-wait for me-and he raced in his jeep to be able to with them step into the holy city to the Kotel and blows the shofar. I like this story because Israelis in majority are not religious and will not care to have a rabbi or not-they are the harsh chutzpadnik lions and there was this moment when all the puzzelness of the foundation of Israel come together-the

atheists Israelis waiting for the rabbi to come to a conclusion to a war-and there were those images of these lions crying in the kotel-

Deixai me nascer de novo -nunca mais em terra estranha-Let me born again never more in a strange country.

Many places, many scents-how many homes and languages a person can carry?

For every place that I go, Israel hurts,

the suffering love to be carrying to every place that I go, the little country where my heart beat strongly.