



## The Human Spirit: Top 60 plus one reasons I love Israel

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Barbara Sofer, THE JERUSALEM POST

Why do I love Israel? Let me count the whys. Here, in no particular order, is an updated list, with new additions and highlights of recent years.

1. Jerusalem is so quiet on Shabbat that you can hear birds singing even on the main streets.
2. We change our calendars on Rosh Hashana, not January 1, because that's the real new year
3. Just hours after leading his Chelsea team to its first Champions League final, Petah Tikva-born coach Avram Grant joined the March of the Living in Auschwitz, and told all of Europe that his pride at Israel's emergence from the horrors of the Holocaust surpassed any football achievement.
4. We serve kosher food in the trendiest malls.
5. Streets bear the names of prophets and medieval poets. Our communications satellite is called "Amos."
6. Land of milk and honey: Big news when Israeli archeologists recently discovered evidence of the beekeeping industry - even beeswax - that goes back 3,000 years.
7. Land of milk and honey: We're so successful at making milk products that we have hundreds of choices of cheese and advise New Zealand about making sheep cheese.
8. The Nahariya-based Strauss company, started by dairy farmer immigrants from Germany in 1936, together with the Elite company started by a candy-maker immigrant from Riga in 1934, are the largest coffee manufacturers in Central and Eastern Europe, and second biggest in Brazil. Aviv Matza exports its unleavened bread to Egypt.
9. We have laboratories to check for the biblically prohibited mix of linen and wool, *shatnes*, and we're the first country to make men's suits from recycled plastic bottles, for sale soon at Sears.
10. At Jerusalem's Biblical Zoo, the loudspeaker announces "afternoon prayers (*minha*) are now being held near the elephants."
11. The Biblical Zoo is kosher for Pessah. The primates eat matza; the parrots get rice.

12. Every kindergartner knows that frogs are the second plague in the Haggada, but our "save the frogs" campaign was launched at the Biblical Zoo on Passover.
13. Mega investor Warren Buffet's first investment outside the US (\$4 billion) was in Israel's Iscar company. He got so much positive publicity that he told Iscar's CEO: "I was nobody before I bought your company."
14. Sixty years after statehood, even young people refer to something old-fashioned as "from the days of the (British) Mandate."
15. Theodor Herzl's bearded image welcomes visitors to hi-tech Herzliya, and we celebrate Herzl Day.
16. My five-year-old grandson can tell you all about Theodor Herzl. Also about Spiderman.
17. Combat soldiers aren't embarrassed to phone their moms and grandmothers.
18. While Intel Haifa workers were working in an underground shelter because of the missile attacks in the Second Lebanon War, Intel announced the new multi-core processor developed there.
19. Entire families show up for military graduations, and bring enough food to feed an army.
20. Name droppers. The poet Chaim Nachman Bialik named the Egged bus company and also the Tishbi winery
21. Youngsters travel far to visit the Kibbutz Kinneret cemetery where poet Rahel and national song laureate Naomi Shemer are buried.
22. First graders read the Bible in the original Hebrew, and celebrate with a party.
23. We follow the level of the Kinneret more faithfully than we do our stock portfolios.
24. We have only one Pessah Seder but Purim, our dress-up holiday, lasts three days. In Jerusalem on Purim, it's hard to tell who's in costume and who isn't.
25. We have the highest concentration of hi-tech companies outside Silicon Valley, and also the most yeshivot anywhere.
26. After a calamity, police have trouble keeping away bystanders who want to help.
27. Thousands of free-loan societies flourish. You can borrow wedding dresses and pacifiers.
28. Despite the tensions and political dissension, Israel has the highest Jewish birthrate in the world.
29. Despite the tensions and political dissension, Israel is the fastest growing Western country in the world.
30. "Jerusalem of Gold" is still voted the favorite national song.
31. We have timeless cuisine: You can order Israeli breakfast, business lunch and dinner simultaneously at Israeli cafes.
32. Our pilots fought over the honor of taking part in a fly-by over Auschwitz 60 years after liberation.

33. Israeli fighter jets accompanied tourists safely home from Mombasa after they were threatened.
34. We have 120 members of the Knesset because that's how many were in the ancient Great Assembly.
35. We first developed candy-sweet cherry tomatoes as a TV-watching nosh.
36. On Remembrance Day and Holocaust Remembrance Day, the act of remembering halts traffic. Even kindergartners stand silently, and understand why.
37. While dining rooms are shrinking in Western homes, Israeli dining room tables are getting longer.
38. We invite strangers for a home-cooked Shabbat meal.
39. An Israeli artichoke farmer with a sore back developed the sophisticated Hollandia beds and exports them from Sderot to many countries, including Holland.
40. Strangers feel free to tell a parent to put a hat on the baby in a country where we wear scarves, snoods, spodik, streimels, wimples, fedoras, berets, tarbushes, homburgs, kippot and keffiyot.
41. While other Western nations debate immigration, we absorb more immigrants per capita than any other country in the world. Almost immediately all learn the Hebrew word for patience, *savlanut*.
42. Our street musicians can play in symphony orchestras; our supermarket clerks know calculus.
43. Our biggest shopping seasons precede Rosh Hashana and Pessah.
44. Municipalities' decorating contests feature succot, not trees. The Succot holiday is high season in Israel; book hotel rooms a year in advance.
45. Even politicians from anti-religious parties say "*Baruch Hashem*."
46. "Where were your grandparents from?" is a common question. Where else would anyone care about my grandparents?
47. We celebrate Mother's Day, now Family Day, on the *yahrzeit* of Henrietta Szold who, with Recha Freier, organized Youth Aliya but who had no children of her own.
48. For all the talk about the greening of the planet, we're the only country in the world that started the 21st century with a net gain of trees. (Thank you, Jewish National Fund)
49. During the Second Lebanon War, JNF rangers stayed in the forests during Katyusha attacks to save the trees
50. We're among the most Internet-connected people on the planet. We invented the cellphone, instant messaging, the chat room and the silent prayer, but still talk best with our hands.
51. Before Purim, the TV weather forecast relates specially to the day the kids go to school in their costumes. For a week before Yom Kippur, the weather report focuses on the upcoming fast.
52. We love children, and have more IVF per capita than any other country. It's free up to the first two children.

53. We celebrate Independence Day with a Bible Contest.

54. Israelis developed both the system to see photos from Mars and cameras to monitor crime on buses in Brazil.

55. Despite our soul connection to chicken soup, per capita we're the world's biggest eaters of healthier turkey, bigger even than America. Go figure!

56. We're among the first to help countries that experience disasters, and the first to have our field hospitals up. When Israel helped Turkey after an earthquake, an Israeli doctor made an incubator from a matza box.

57. Jewish soccer players for Bnei Sakhnin compete against Arab players for Maccabi Tel Aviv.

58. Childbirth and burial are free. Even the homeless have health insurance.

59. On Saturday night, the radio summarizes the news for all those who don't listen on Shabbat.

60. We're agricultural high achievers, producing seven times the output with the same water we used 25 years ago. Our date trees average 182 kilos - 10 times more than the average in the Middle East. One date tree is growing from 2,000-year-old seeds found in Masada.

And, as on a birthday cake, one for next year:

61. We come from more than 100 countries and dream in Hebrew.

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