



Between Two Realities

By Brigitte Chaya Nussbächer



*Israel between remembrance, mourning, rebuilding, and joy.
Photos: private*

Israel in 2026 is a country between two realities: between bunkers and blooming gardens, between grief and the joy of life, between yesterday and tomorrow.

We meet people who, despite destruction, loss, and uncertainty, are rebuilding their lives and their country – and who deeply touch our hearts. We experience Jerusalem, the desert, Nir Oz, and places where pain and new beginnings stand side by side. And we discover why a personal visit, especially now, can make a greater difference than we might imagine.

Come with us to Israel in 2027 – and see for yourself a country and its people you will never forget.

On April 14, against all expectations, we arrived back in Israel — on [Yom HaShoah](#). A ceasefire, of which no one really knew what to make; the speed and resilience with which EL AL resumed its flights; and our decision to undertake the journey despite all the uncertainties — all of this made it possible.



Throughout the country, people commemorate the Holocaust. Photo: private

And we are by no means carefree. Rather, it feels as though we have been holding our breath ever since we left, and that this state will continue until we are safely back in Europe. The ceasefire is already scheduled to end five days before our planned departure from Israel. And with two such unpredictable parties as Iran on the one hand and US President Donald Trump on the other, anything is possible.

It will also be a major challenge for us over the next two weeks to put our personal situation aside: the fact that we now have to leave our home even earlier than feared and have so far been unable to find an alternative. Yet we want to live in the here and now and focus on the people we are visiting. But at night, the dark thoughts will keep catching up with us ...

When we finally land in [Tel Aviv](#) — until the very last moment, we had feared that the plane, like so many others before it, might have to turn around because of Iranian attacks and take us to another airport — a time begins that seems to lie between two opposing realities.

The plane is completely full, packed with families who had been unable to return to Israel because of the war. But apart from us, there are only two other foreign travelers on board; one of them is sitting right next to us — a war correspondent! As we taxi along the runway, we see dozens of American aircraft parked on both sides. These tanker aircraft have made it possible for Israeli fighter jets to fly continuously and refuel in the air. Even now, they are standing by and ready for action — yet another indication of just how fragile and uncertain this ceasefire is.



American tanker aircraft at Ben Gurion Airport. Photo: private

The large hall, which used to be crowded with hundreds of tourists, is now completely deserted; only two check-in counters are staffed. Yet as quickly as we make it through passport control, where my name change to Chaya is kindly noticed, we have to wait for what feels like an eternity at the baggage carousel. Eventually, we have to accept the fact that, for some reason, Harald's suitcase has remained in Zurich and cannot be delivered to us for at least another two days. The desk where we are supposed to pick up our rental car is also unattended. We call the number provided and are told that someone will come to pick us up and take us to another office. How naïve are we, really? Did we actually believe that everything here would simply continue as before — after more than 40 days of intense attacks that forced the majority of Israel's population into bomb shelters for hours every day?



Empty arrivals hall, unstaffed check-in counters. Photo: private

Then we make our way through the surprisingly heavy traffic to [Jerusalem](#). Much later than expected, we finally arrive at our hotel in the evening. The corridors are eerily empty and oppressively quiet. The weight on our souls grows heavier and heavier. We take a look at the bomb shelter. It is significantly better and larger than the one in our previous hotel: an entire underground floor has been specially equipped for this purpose. There is a dining room, toilets, and a lobby with sofas. In an emergency, one could stay and even work down here for days.



Over the next two weeks, we will set out every day for a destination as if there had never been a war, and every evening we will pack an “emergency bag” with the most essential things, ready to flee to the shelter if the sirens sound. Like the Israelis, we will live in a state of constant tension, flinching at every loud noise. We will follow the news and hope that the inferno will not begin again in the coming hours, or during the next night. We will make appointments and draw up plans as though there were nothing that could put them in question — and yet, in the end, we will always add “bezrat HaShem” (“God willing”), because we are all too aware of how precarious the ground is beneath our feet. We, too, will live in and between two realities.



Breakfast in the converted bomb shelter. Photo: private

The next morning greets us with sunshine and a view of the Mount of Olives. We have breakfast in the gloomy bomb shelter and are relieved when we are back outside, feeling the “golden” streets of Jerusalem beneath our feet. At first glance, the city seems unchanged. People hurry through the alleyways, cars honk, flowers brighten our path, street musicians play — everything is full of life. But at second glance, you notice the many empty and shuttered shops along the pedestrian streets. Over the past 30 months, countless reservists have been called up again and again. Those who had no one to fill in for them had to close their businesses. Everyone who depends on tourism has barely any chance of survival. Many small and young businesses have been forced to give up. Even in the bazar, half of the doors are closed. In the narrow alleyways, which are usually so crowded, all you can hear is the echo of your own footsteps. All of these are items on the balance sheet of war.



Empty streets, shuttered shops in the market. Photo: private

But Moshe and Dov are still holding on at [Hurva Square](#). No matter how deeply these years have affected them, they want to continue to be a light and a point of contact with their [Shorashim Shop](#) for those who come to Israel despite everything. The joy of seeing each other again is immense, and it makes us truly happy to hear them tell us how much our work for Israel encourages them and how they pass our messages on within their own circles. Last year, Moshe was the first person I told about the book I had been commissioned to write. And now I am able to hand him the finished copy of [Israel's Trial of Fire – The Fateful Years Around October 7, 2023](#). His trust in us is so great that he wants to stock the book in his shop and recommend it, even though he cannot read it himself.



Israel's Crucible is now also available at Moshe's shop in Jerusalem. Photo: private

The following evening, we finally have the opportunity to meet David Metzler, Director of International Relations at the [IDFWO](#) Widows & Orphans Organization (IDFWO), in person. We have arranged to meet for dinner at Jerusalem's old railway station. Today, this historic site is home to numerous restaurants, and here the joy of life seems undiminished. The tables are full, lively voices and laughter fill the air. Only the



ubiquitous signs reading “Protected Area” remind us of the latent threat. Otherwise, Israeli resilience prevails, and life is celebrated.

And we have the opportunity to exchange ideas — and make plans. Since we met Shlomi, the CEO, last year, our cooperation has gained momentum. Thanks to many people in Germany who care about the widows and orphans of fallen soldiers in Israel just as deeply as we do, a considerable amount of donations has been raised. David also wants to make the organization better known in Europe, and we will support him in this. An opportunity to do so arises within the next few days. He has written an article entitled “[The Unpaid Debt](#)” for Yom [HaZikaron](#), Israel’s Memorial Day for the Fallen, addressing the continuing responsibility we have toward the families who have already paid the highest price in defending the country. I will translate the article, we will publish it on our website and send it out to our mailing list.

He hopes to come to Germany soon and that we can organize a joint event, but at the moment the situation is still too unstable to consider concrete dates. He had already planned three trips to Europe for this year and was unable to make any of them. For Independence Day, the IDFWO had organized a week-long event in Israel for wealthy philanthropists from around the world, but it had to be cancelled because of the war. Yet David does not allow this to discourage him. He speaks about how much fulfillment he finds in his important work with the widows and orphans — work for which he gave up his own business. He tells us how creative the IDFWO sometimes has to be in order to provide help quickly and without unnecessary bureaucracy. They strive to be an anchor of hope, a home, a positive counterbalance — something that can ease the pain, loss, and suffering of the widows and orphans and help them to hope again and rebuild their lives.



With David at the Old Railway Station in Jerusalem. Photo: private

Shortly after October 7, Shlomi asked him to join the organization, which he had already been supporting as a volunteer before then. We see the light in his eyes, we hear the warmth in his voice when he tells us that he does not count the hours he invests, and we are happy to hear how much they value our support — even though, measured against



the current needs, it is very modest. And we are deeply impressed how he sets his inner reality of confidence against the reality of all the plans that have fallen through.

On Friday morning, we set off south and drive to the desert kibbutz of [Mashabei Sade](#). We want to stay here next year with a tour group, so we come to see it beforehand. It seems almost absurd to make plans for group tours in Israel, a country that is empty of tourists and ravaged by war. Many airlines have suspended their flights here for the long term. And yet, over the years, we have learned from the Israelis to place our hope in the future. It is so important to us that, especially in times like these, when so much antisemitic reporting is circulating, people have the opportunity to experience the real Israel for themselves. This kibbutz, with its swimming pool and flowers in the middle of the desert, is a perfect example of an attitude that refuses to be intimidated by anything — an example of life in the midst of, and despite, all adverse circumstances.

Although everyone wants to get home on Friday afternoon to prepare for Shabbat, the staff take us on a tour of the grounds. This weekend, they are finally fully booked again — but most of the reservations were only made the day before. Once again, the two realities: when you see how carefree and joyfully parents are playing here with their children, you would never guess that they were so afraid of the war flaring up again that they waited until just 24 hours beforehand to make their booking.

Unexpectedly, meeting the manager here becomes one of the most touching episodes of our journey. She asks me about antisemitism in Germany and is incredulous when I tell her that I have been wearing the Star of David openly, constantly, and without being harassed since October 7. She can hardly believe me when I tell her that there are also many people in Germany who love Israel. As proof, I give her some of the cards that our guests wrote for the people of Israel at the [Israel Event on January 28](#), expressing their affection and solidarity. And when I then tell her about the event and show her my book [Israel's Trial of Fire](#), she bursts into tears. “Comfort, comfort my people!” Rarely before have I had the opportunity to do this so directly — to offer love, recognition, and affirmation to someone I had never met before. And just as rarely have I felt that my words were absorbed so deeply, taken so seriously, and had such a tangible impact.



At the desert kibbutz of Mashabei Sade. Photos: private

We continue on to Shaul and Julia, who [played their songs for us in the desert](#) last year and gave us a truly heavenly moment. We show them how they can begin to bring their



vision of the Music Field to life, even though the development of the region has been delayed by the war. Because in 2027, we want to come with our tour group, and we ask them, just as they did for us a year ago, to give a concert for our participants in the middle of the desert, under the open sky. The two of them are absolutely thrilled, and during the Shabbat meal, where lively conversations take place in five different languages, we are already discussing the details. What is more real: the lack of infrastructure, or our determination not to let it hold us back?



Shabbat dinner at Shaul and Julia's. Photo: private

Above us, we hear helicopters, then suddenly an explosion. We flinch, while the others remain completely unfazed. For them, this has been everyday life for more than two years. The ceasefire that was agreed with Hamas as part of the deal to release the last living Israeli hostages is fragile. The terrorist organization is rearming, and there are repeated attacks on Israeli soldiers securing the provisional border, the Yellow Line. Violations that Israel does not leave unanswered. The conversations around the Shabbat table continue cheerfully, the candles are glowing as if nothing had happened. The people in this region have been through so much and have learned to counter the constant threat with their resilience. The next morning, Julia and Shaul set off to give a private concert for a woman celebrating a special jubilee birthday. During the war with Iran, they had been unable to perform for 40 days; larger events had been prohibited by the Home Front Command because of the danger. But as soon as the guns fall silent, they are busier than ever again.

The following day, we also visit [Roni and Ofer](#), who, after more than a year and a half of evacuation, have finally been able to return to their kibbutz, Kerem Shalom, in the tri-border area — just 30 meters from Gaza and one kilometer from Egypt. They are living in a temporary home because they first have to rebuild their own house. They hope to have it finished by the end of the year. The kibbutz is a mixture of chaos, rubble, and ... new construction. And there is a waiting list of young people who, despite all the very real dangers, want to move there, full of hope.



Roni and Ofer are building a new home in Kerem Shalom. Photo: private

On Sunday, we reach the [Rimon Therapy Centers](#), which help traumatized victims of terror and soldiers find their way back into everyday life and support the communities along the Gaza border as they rebuild their lives. We visit the very young Or Haner Farm and meet the team working at the Shekef Farm, as well as the young people who spend a year here doing voluntary service before joining the army. The conviction and enthusiasm burning in these young men and women is fascinating. They approach their mission of helping and healing people and communities with a love, dedication, and determination that is truly extraordinary. They place their inner strength on the scales to counterbalance the burden of the countless traumas caused by the Hamas massacre and the arduous, exhausting urban warfare in Gaza that followed.

What has emerged here out of nothing in the 2.5 years since October 7 is deeply impressive. You want to join them, you want to stay here and simply be part of it. Our souls begin to resonate. And yet we know that this wish will remain unfulfilled. But we can continue to support them from afar with our donations! As with the IDFWO, we also feel here the discrepancy between the enormous need and our limited means. And we are deeply moved by how much our support is nevertheless appreciated and valued.



At the Rimon Therapy Centers. Photos: private

The encounters continue over the following days. Efrat, from the former Hostages and Missing Families Forum, comes to visit us in Jerusalem, and we meet Corinne, our tour guide, in Modi'in. With every one of these people, despite their unbroken spirit, self-



confidence, and dignity, we sense the wounds and see the scars left by these 2.5 years of war and antisemitism around the world. But we also recognize the inner strength that continues to carry them forward and keeps them from giving up. We never imagined that our visit during this difficult time would mean so much to them, nor that the cards from the Israel Event would touch their hearts so deeply. It is as if every day we are living proof that another reality still exists — a reality of people who stand with Israel, who love Israelis, and who are willing to step up and help, both in words and through action.

At the same time, however, we repeatedly feel how little we can actually do, and we have to fight against the feeling of helplessness and ineffectiveness. We are only too aware that even if we were to invest all our strength, time, and resources, we could still encourage and support only a comparatively small number of people. That, too, is one of the two opposing realities between which we feel torn.

And then, we witness the swearing-in ceremony of soldiers at the Kotel, with a Bible in one hand and a rifle in the other, and experience their undiminished potential. These young people are not only Israel's future; they are also the reason that this future can exist at all.

The sun glistens over the vibrant square. Here, before this wall that has stood for thousands of years, beside the place where Abraham and Isaac experienced God's intervention, they make their pledge. As their voices rise as one and echo across the square, past and future merge. Hundreds of soldiers have fallen over the past two years, nearly 30,000 since the founding of the State of Israel. Yet here, new generations are stepping forward, ready to secure Israel's existence with the commitment of their lives — and to continue building the country. Over the past 78 years, Israel has transformed swamps and desert into a flourishing land. From the pain of Holocaust survivors and in the shadow of the memory of six million murdered Jews, a life force emerged — a young nation full of innovation, energy, and will power. And today's ceremony demonstrates their determination to take up this legacy and carry it forward.



Swearing-in ceremony at the Kotel. Photos: private

One final journey takes us south once again — to [Nir Oz](#). What has become of this once beautiful paradise, which was devastated and burned on October 7?

As we wander through the streets with [Shlomo and Smadar](#), and they point out the changes to us, the silence and emptiness are still eerie. Many of the destroyed houses have now been demolished. Only the bomb shelters remain, some of which have been transformed by the bereaved families into memorials. And yet, we hear the sounds of



construction. New rows of houses are taking shape. Sometimes right next to a burned-out ruin. Remembrance or a new beginning — or both? People's wishes differ. [Sigal](#) wants the place where Dolev fell defending the kibbutz to remain untouched. A painful memorial. But those who will soon move into the newly built homes do not want to have the horrors of the past and the potential danger they are living with constantly before their eyes. They want to be able to laugh freely again. They want this place to once again be bursting with life. That is their victory over the massacre. And yet, the many fresh graves next door remain, and the shadows of those who were murdered still lie over this place.



Nir Oz between destruction, demolition, and rebuilding. Photos: private

Finally, on April 27, we board the plane back to Germany. Incredible but true: the ceasefire with Iran had been quietly extended, and there were no attacks while we were in Israel. What a grace. We were able to meet almost everyone we had hoped to see and had already begun building bridges into the future — into 2027, when we hope to return with a [tour group](#). We had dreamed of doing this back in 2020.



Encounters with dear friends. Photos: private

We would so love to show others what touches and inspires us here — especially those who wrote to me after the publication of my book *Israel's Trial of Fire*, telling me how deeply this authentic account had moved them. Yet even though a book can convey so much, it is something entirely different to see and experience these things with your own eyes. We plan a [journey](#) to the roots and into the history of the modern Jewish state; a journey to the heart of the Jewish people; a journey that also creates a deeper understanding of what has happened in recent years. A journey to the dear friends we have made, to the families affected, and also to the organizations that are working here with tremendous dedication and passion to rebuild the country. Here in Israel, we have spoken with all of them, made plans, and coordinated the details — deliberately putting aside all the threats and the current situation.



2027 Travel Program. Our brochure

Because there is one thing we have learned over all these years: there is no “right” time to visit Israel. Every single time before we set out, there have been latent or acute threats and attacks. Yet every single time, God has guided us, protected us, and blessed us. And the greater the threat seemed to be, the more our visit meant to the people here — and the more intensely we experienced God’s presence. Which of these two realities is the defining one? Will Israel finally have peace in 2027? And will more people then fly here? Or will they come regardless of the external circumstances?

In four hours, we will be back in Germany. I deliberately do not say “home.” Because our hearts remain here, in this country, with these people. Not only Israel — we too live between and with two realities. And everything we found as a home in Germany, in Esslingen, we will have to give up in the coming months. But we are trying to look beyond the dark weeks ahead, to put the pain of saying goodbye aside, and instead search for the hidden blessing and shape the future. Until next year in Jerusalem!



Lehitraot (Goodbye for now). Photo: private

PS. On August 1st we moved to Tübingen



More articles from Chaya Nussbächer under: www.arc-to-israel.org/en/artikel

