



Flight into the Unknown

Has God Parted the Sea for Us?

by Brigitte Chaya Nussbächer



We reach Israel. Private Photo

A flight to Israel - planned for months - suddenly becomes a journey right into an escalating crisis. Rockets are falling, flights are being canceled, hotels are closing - and yet our suitcase stands packed.

Between the warnings of reason and a quiet inner voice, the decision grows. Is it irresponsible to set out - or necessary precisely now?

A story about doubt, the departure into the unknown - and a calling.



Since October 7, 2023, an annual mission in Israel has become a fixed part of our life. These are always incredibly intense days. But even if we are only two “irrelevant individuals,” we nevertheless receive the feedback that what we do touches hearts, brings comfort, and offers real help.

We have long planned the trip for 2026, flights and hotel are booked, and at our [Israel event for International Holocaust Remembrance Day](#) in January, I announce what is on the agenda this year. According to plan, we are to arrive one day before Yom HaShoah, the day on which Israel commemorates the 6 million murdered Jews, and we are invited to the official state ceremony at Yad Vashem with Prime Minister Netanyahu. I even receive permission to photograph and report on it. This invitation is a great honor for us, and I hope to convey as many authentic impressions as possible.



Yom HaShoah in Israel. Private Photo

On International Holocaust Remembrance Day, our guests wrote many greeting and solidarity cards, which we carry in our luggage in order to hand them over in Israel on Yom HaShoah. In the weeks that followed, many friends of Israel contribute to make the aid even greater.



And then the morning of February 28 comes. Israel and the United States launch a preventive strike against Iran. And only a few hours later, Iranian rockets strike Israel, and other Gulf states such as Qatar, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates are also attacked by Iran.

At the beginning, Trump speaks of an operation that is to last 4–5 weeks. We hope that it will be so. But the longer the conflict continues, the clearer it becomes that Iran, despite using only a limited number of missiles, is able to send people in Israel into shelters again and again, causing damage, injuries, and deaths. Moreover, with the Strait of Hormuz, Iran holds a strategic advantage that it is leveraging against the entire world. Public life in Israel begins to stall, and air traffic is severely rereduced. European airlines have already long since suspended their flights to the small country, but now even El Al serves only a few central hubs. Zurich, from where we are supposed to depart, is not among them.

We sit on edge as one day after another passes and trips are canceled. Friends ask us whether we still want to fly and whether we can. The first question is easy to answer, the second is not. Originally, we had planned to contact our friends, acquaintances, and the organizations we would visit in Israel at the beginning of March to arrange concrete appointments, but in this situation that feels completely surreal. Israel is under a state of emergency due to continuous bombardment; schools and gatherings are restricted, and there are temporary limitations on visits to holy sites. All plans have become obsolete. Threats from both the United States and Iran escalate daily.



When our flights are not canceled until Easter Sunday, April 5, I finally write to our friends in Israel that we still want to come and that we will contact them at short notice regarding appointments. Then I begin to pack.

This year, Easter and Passover fall at the same time. Around us, both festivals are celebrated. But for us, this year the events of the past do not stand in the foreground. Instead, I have the impression that we fight for our very own “exodus” into the “Promised Land.” Just as before Passover long ago, the situation in the Middle East worsens day by day, and our journey becomes increasingly unlikely. Still, I do not want to give up. My packed suitcase is also meant to be a sign to God that we are ready to go - even now, even in danger. That we want to be there especially in difficult times, to help where we can and to be an authentic voice for Israel.

Less than two hours later, an email from El Al arrives. All flights until April 18 are canceled - including ours. On Tuesday, April 7, Trump’s ultimatum expires, and further escalation seems imminent. Suddenly, an insurmountable wall stands before us. The Israelites must have felt similarly when they stood before the Red Sea - though at least we are not being chased by an Egyptian army.

Yet the feeling of hopelessness spreads also within us. Everything over? Because of our professional situation, projects, and deadlines, we cannot simply travel later. If this time window closes, we will likely not be able to go to Israel at all this year.

It is the evening of Easter Sunday and suddenly a thought comes: how hopeless the situation seemed on Good Friday - and yet just three days later, everything turned out differently. Not death and defeat, but resurrection and life were the outcome of Easter. What if



we refrain from drawing premature conclusions and simply wait three days?

Back then at the Red Sea, the Israelites had to step into the water first - and only then did it part. Is God expecting us to simply set out in trust? Well, my suitcase is packed - there is nothing more I can do at the moment and I leave it as it is.



Prepared to go. Private Photo

On Monday, El Al confirms the refund of our flights - and in the night from Tuesday to Wednesday, when everyone expects an inferno ... a 14-day ceasefire is declared, intended to allow negotiations between the United States and Iran. Although the positions of both sides are so far apart that an agreement seems impossible, the weapons fall silent for the first time in over 40 days on April 8.

Can this “calm” be trusted? Won’t the fighting resume within hours? Iran clearly states that it is not willing to abandon its demands and they are excessive. Surprisingly, President Trump agrees to begin negotiations based on Iran’s ten-point plan, which includes:



- A permanent cessation of attacks by the United States and Israel on Iran and the withdrawal of all U.S. troops from the Middle East.
- The complete lifting of all economic sanctions against Iran; the release of frozen Iranian assets abroad and the payment of reparations for war damages allegedly caused by the United States and Israel.
- Iran retaining control over the Strait of Hormuz; ships may only pass with permission from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and must pay transit fees.
- Most critically: the United States and the international community are to officially recognize Iran's right to enrich uranium.

Are the Americans truly willing to accept these demands, which run counter to their own and Israel's interests? In Israel, people are holding their breath.

And then, at midnight (three days after canceling our flights!) El Al sends an email titled: "Back to the skies - together!" announcing the gradual resumption of flights. From Tuesday, April 14, one daily flight is scheduled to depart from Zurich.

But does being able to fly there mean we will also be able to return? The ceasefire, if it even holds, will end before our return flight.

And does it even make sense to travel to Israel now, risking being stuck in a bunker during rocket attacks?

Have we become delusional, thinking we must be there now?

The voice of reason within us is loud and has many good arguments.



But there is another, quieter voice that asks:

Did you not promise never to stand by idly again when God's people are in need?

Did you not want to comfort and support?

If not now, when?

Did you not want to show that there are people who love them? How credible are you if that only applies in good times?

Did you not want to be a voice for this people? Do you really think you can do that from the safety of your living room far away? How can you describe what they are going through if you have no idea yourself?

How can you develop or show empathy if you do not know how it feels?

What did you say in your last lecture: that words are not enough. Do you stand by that now, or will you back down?

And the voice of reason replies: as a dead person, you can do nothing at all. You have other obligations: your job, the people who rely on you. You should not knowingly put yourself in danger or test God.

Yet the quiet voice continues to echo within us. We are torn as never before. In this state, we come across the verse of the day: God's promise to Jacob: "Behold, I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land" (Genesis 28:15). A verse drawn at random. A statement, a promise of the Bible for a person who lived thousands of years before us. Or perhaps meant for us as well? We reserve flights for Tuesday, April 14 (Yom HaShoah).



Then comes the next setback: when we try to book our hotel, there are no rooms available. I call the manager, whose number I have from previous years, and learn that the hotel has closed due to the war and will not reopen for now. This place and its staff had become dear to us over the years. We know everything, including the shelters we had to take refuge in during [the first Iranian attack on April 14, 2024](#). The rooftop terrace where we met [Smadar and Shlomo](#), the restaurant where we ate with Corinne, [Rony, and Ofer](#). It was our “headquarters.” Does this mean we should not go after all?

First, we look for whether we can even find a hotel that is close to the old town and has its own bunker (so that you don’t have to run to a public one, probably in the middle of the night). This is essential for me. And indeed, we find one. Should we book it? Our flights can be canceled up to 24 hours before departure thanks to the El Al Protect special program, but the hotel cannot.

We ask for a second confirmation - through the reaction of the people we want to visit. If it turns out rather indifferent, we are not needed there and perhaps should postpone after all? It is Saturday, Shabbat. I still write to them, suggest dates, and ask them to give me feedback by Sunday evening at the latest. I receive the first replies just a few minutes later. And I am amazed to see that everyone responds quickly and our schedule fills up within 24 hours. The partners who are most important to us meet us in the very first few days. And everyone emphasizes how impressed they are and how much our visit means to them. Accordingly, we book the hotel as well.



Still, there is that voice that says: what if you don't come back? Two years ago, when a potential Iranian attack loomed, we updated our will and farewell speech. A lot has happened in the meantime, and new priorities have emerged. It is important to us to record this, both in how we distribute our savings in the event of our death, and in the final words that are spoken about us. And so, on Sunday, we update our joint will once again in case of simultaneous death, and we also inform Harald's sister and my cousin about the changes.

Also on Sunday, the talks between the US and Iran are declared to have failed, and JD Vance, who led the negotiations on the American side, leaves Islamabad.

Yet we still set off for Zurich without knowing whether the situation will escalate again during the next hours and whether we will even reach Israel. We take our work laptops with us, just in case, so that we can continue working from the bunker if necessary.

The next few hours become a true ordeal for us. That is precisely why we try to enjoy the evening, dining at my favorite restaurant. I post a photo with the caption: "Tonight in Zurich, tomorrow night in ???"



"Tonight in Zurich, tomorrow night in ???" Private Photo



Many who knew that we were planning to travel to Israel reach out and wish us a safe journey and a good time. I had, in fact, meant the question marks quite seriously. We have no idea whether we will actually land in Israel, whether the flights will be cancelled again, or whether....

And something else happens on this last evening before departure. We have known for a few months already that the apartment in which we were happy for 17 years is going to be sold. We have already looked for alternatives but haven't found any so far. Now our landlord informs us that a buyer has been found who insists that we move out as quickly as possible. We are asked to confirm this in writing immediately.

At the moment I hear this, I think I can't go on anymore. Everything is coming together:

the extremely difficult past year,

my migraines, which have worsened dramatically as a result,

the situation at Harald's company, which is suffering from the decline of print products in its market niche and is now also facing an IT transition that poses an existential challenge. As a result, Harald's job is potentially at risk as well.

The particular strain of the past weeks, the exhaustion, the pain of losing our home, the total uncertainty about the future, both in terms of the coming days and more generally about where and how our lives will continue.

It is a night without a single minute of sleep, and it feels like (my) complete bankruptcy. I see no way out anymore; I only see darkness. I have rarely felt as alone as I do in this night. In this state, I am supposed to fly to Israel?



And yet it is precisely this goal, to do good for the people affected there, that is the only thing that still feels meaningful and valuable in my life.

Yes, we are flying to Israel and will try to give as much love, comfort, and help as possible - completely independent of how we ourselves are doing.

Jacob, whose affirmation we had read a few days earlier, once found himself in a similar situation. He wanted to return to his homeland but feared his brother Esau, whom he had once deprived of his father's blessing. He, too, was afraid; he, too, tried to take precautionary measures for every eventuality. And he, too, experienced a night that pushed him beyond his limits and marked his life. Yet even in his darkest hour, he did not give up and asked God: "I will not let you go unless you bless me." And indeed, he received a great blessing, became the forefather of Israel, and was given a new name. Not that his life afterward became easy, but that blessing still remained with him.

I too want to hold on to God until blessing arises from the broken pieces of our lives. Will I succeed?



Zurich Airport – before our departure. Private Photo



A few hours later, we are sitting on the El Al flight. We take off more than an hour late and with a police escort to the runway, but we do take off. And you can hear in the stewardess's voice how moved she is when she explains how happy and proud they are to be carrying passengers again.

Did God part the sea for us? Is there, behind everything we are experiencing, an additional different purpose that we are only meant to recognize and reach later? Will this journey become a literally fatal mistake? Or will it become the beginning of a new chapter of life? We do not know. We can only trust that whatever happens will ultimately serve for the best.



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