

## Israel Tour 2008

For Lila and me, the trip to Israel began with our landing at 3:40 PM on Saturday, March 22 at Ben Gurion Airport, where we were met by my brother and sister-in-law who promptly whisked us off to their apartment in a suburb of Tel Aviv. After a short visit with my youngest nephew and his family who had dropped in, a shower and change, we were off to the Tel Aviv opera for what turned out to be an amazing production of Turandot. What was even more amazing, perhaps, was the fact that both of us managed to stay wide awake during the performance despite the 11 or so hour flight and the 7 hours time change.

The next couple of days involved a number of family visits interspersed with visits with local Urantia Book readers – Sara Bechor, who reads the English version, on Monday, 3/24; Naftali Uvaidov and his group, who read the book in Russian, on Tuesday, 3/25. Sara, a management consultant, met us in her office in Hertzelia where we spent a couple of hours talking and Naftali and his group received us during their regular Tuesday night group in Bat Yam. There were some 20 Russian speaking people at the meeting – mostly women, Naftali and one other being the only men. It became quickly apparent that this wasn't to be one of their usual group meetings as a large cake, candy, wine and various soft drinks were placed on the table as one of the women explained that they were celebrating one of the member's birthday. Naftali toasted the birthday girl and banter and merriment ensued; a bottle of scotch appeared at the request of one of the women and some shots were knocked back, mostly by the woman, of some considerable girth and easy rolling laughter, who had requested it.

The more serious part of the meeting started as Naftali, a nearly blind healer who uses cosmic energy in the practice of his craft, began to speak about levels of consciousness and other related metaphysical and esoteric subjects. While the hour and a half devoted to this segment was dominated by him, Naftali allowed for many interruptions by members of the group with questions and comments. My meager knowledge of Russian was inadequate to keeping up with any of this and Lila made a heroic effort to render simultaneous interpretation for me, indicating from time to time that the subject was tough to follow even if your Russian is pretty damned good. When this part was over, Naftali turned to us and asked if we could speak about the Russian translation (We had brought with us a bunch of New York society produced CD Roms of the Russian translation for distribution to the group) and differences between "our" translation and our translation policy to those of Urantia Foundation. This took us into another hour or so of questions and answers revealing, not surprisingly, a great deal of curiosity and naiveté regarding the book and matters surrounding it on the part of the group. It didn't appear to us that there were many serious students of the UB in this group, but it certainly seemed that there was a deep appreciation, somehow, for the importance of the book.

**Wednesday, March 26** in the late afternoon marked the start of the tour. Lila & I met Hagai, our tour guide, a 38 year old spry, wiry and easy going man, at Kos Café, a coffee shop in the reception hall at Ben Gurion Airport. Most of the group including Bob & Charlotte Bruyn, Tom & Jannie Choquette and their three children, Jesse, Janae and Jolie, Bill Choquette & Debbie Williams, Evelyn Drake, Mike McLaughlin, Eve McMahon and Veldon & Charlene Morrow, were to arrive from JFK. John Hales, Doreen Heyne and Dale Szejnberg who had arrived in Israel a couple of days earlier and had visited Petra, the ancient Nabatian city hewn into red rocks in Jordan, were to arrive by a domestic flight from Eilat; and Steve & Bobbie Dreier, who had arrived that morning, were assumed to be in the Dan Panorama Hotel in Jerusalem, the group's destination that evening. Following a flurry of telephone calls

between Hagai and two of his colleagues and about an hour's time, the nineteen Urantians gathering in the airport were on the bus headed for Jerusalem via Route 1, the Tel Aviv – Jerusalem road. As the bus climbed the final stretch toward the city, Hagai pointed out the charred remains of an armored convoy by the side of the road at a spot Israelis know as “Bab El Wa’ad” (Arabic for “gate to the valley”) where in the 1948 war of independence the vehicles and most of their occupants met their demise while hauling supplies to their Israeli comrades under siege in Jerusalem. Upon arriving at the hotel, we met the Dreiers in the lobby, checked in and reconvened for a short ride to a restaurant called “Vino” for dinner.

**Thursday, March 27:** Early morning ride to the Haas Promenade, a large paved promontory on the western edge of Jerusalem, the site of the signing of the truce between Jordanian and Israeli forces at the end of the 1948 war, overlooking the old city and its environs. From there we proceeded to the old city, entering through Zion Gate, visiting King David's (supposed) Tomb, where devout orthodox Jews could be seen praying, and moved on to a room built by the crusaders who termed it the “Room of the Last Supper” which includes a famed column displaying a carving of pelicans feeding their young. In the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the room became a mosque. From there we continued on to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher (the supposed tomb of Jesus, according to much of Christendom). Custody of the church is shared primarily by the Eastern Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic and the Roman Catholic churches, with minor ceremonial roles performed by the Coptic Orthodox, Ethiopian Orthodox and Syriac Orthodox churches. The schedule of services and ceremonies by these groups is highly regulated and skirmishes among them have occurred frequently over the centuries, a fist fight erupting over a perceived violation as late as 2004. During our visit, the square in front of the church was crowded with pilgrims, sightseers, police and various security personnel and camera crews. We learned that a man in a dark suit with a microphone thrust before him was the Bulgarian prime minister. Thanks to the presence of this dignitary, we were able to follow behind his entourage and enter a room, normally closed to the public, where, according to some arcane tradition, is the center of the world.

Next we were off to the Davidson Center at the foot of the Western (Wailing) Wall, where we watched an animation video depicting a theory of the Herodian temple's construction at the crux of which are the supposed methods used to move and assemble the huge stones. We walked out of the center and assembled for a short walk and a talk along a street Herod had paved 2,000 year ago strewn with some of the large stones that toppled off the retaining wall surrounding the temple during the destruction of 70 AD. We then descended along walkways inside the Warren Shaft, a 3,000 year old tunnel named after its discoverer Charles Warren, a British officer, who discovered it in 1867 while exploring the connecting Hezekiah's Tunnel. Both tunnels were designed to connect the inhabitants of Jerusalem to water sources in times of siege, Hezekiah's tunnel terminating at the Pool of Siloam. We emerged in an Arab village on the site of what was the City of David. Tom Choquette entertained a bunch of giggling Arab children with his disappearing thumb act. The day ended with dinner at Ticho House, one of the first houses built outside the Jerusalem city walls in the second half of the nineteenth century and bought in 1924 by the Moravian born and Viennese trained ophthalmologist, Avraham Ticho, who turned part of it into an eye clinic, serving Jerusalem's rich and poor until 1960, and lived there till that time with his artist wife (and cousin) Anna. Today, the house serves as both a restaurant and an art gallery.

**On Friday, March 28,** we traveled to Beit Guvrin, about an hour's ride south west of Jerusalem, where we got down and dirty in the Maresha caves. These are bell shaped caves dug by the Edomites into the limestone under their houses for storage and for protection of their property from their enemies. After

we descended to the bottom of one of these caves, Evelyn treated us to her rendition of “Amazing Grace” that seemed to gain an extra dimension with the acoustic reverberations enveloping us. We were then given pails, picks, shovels and a brief pep talk by a twenty-something lanky fellow called El’ad and went to work on the bottom of the caves in pursuit of shards, bones and, perhaps, coins. We turned up quite a few shards and some bones (pigeon, most likely), one of the most interesting finds being a base of an amphora, a clay vessel used for transporting olive oil across the sea. Our finds had to be deposited for later identification and classification by the professionals, but we were later allowed to take a few souvenir shards from a bin provided for that purpose. We then gathered into a large shed where El’ad gave us an entertaining and informative demonstration of various found objects including, earthenware, coins, gold jewelry and a clay ketubbah (marriage contract) spanning from the second century BC to the first century AD. Following this brief foray into the dusty realm of archeology, we were back on the bus to the nearby spice farm of Eshtaol where we had lunch at a place called Tavlin (literally, spice) where the food was prepared with the use of the local herbs and spices.

From there, we took another bus ride to Sataf, the site of ancient terraced gardens on the Judean Hills west of Jerusalem, that have been reclaimed and cultivated. The area is irrigated by two natural springs emanating from the rocks. A bunch of us crawled through a narrow tunnel into a cave – a feat that would easily induce panic in a claustrophobe – to view the source of one of these springs.

Back to the hotel for a quick shower and then off to a well earned dinner at Adom restaurant, in a quiet Jerusalem alley, where lamb risotto, American style burgers and tahini ice cream were to be had.

**On Saturday, March 29<sup>th</sup>**, we were off to Masada, traveling first east from Jerusalem and then south along the shore of the Dead Sea. Bedouin huts dotted the largely barren hills; an occasional camel could be seen as well as a few palm groves. Hagai pointed out the Qumran caves, visible from the road, where the Dead Sea Scrolls had been discovered almost sixty years ago. From the base of Masada, we took the cable car to the top and walked around the ruins of Herod’s palace and the fortifications of the zealots defending the site against the Roman siege of 68-71 AD. Outlines of the Roman encampments as well as the partly eroded ramp, upon which the war machines climbed toward the besieged, could be plainly seen from the top.

Leaving Masada, we traveled back up the coast of the Dead Sea to Ein Gedi and walked up the trails of Nachal David to a series of water falls and a refreshing dip in a chest- deep pool of cool water. Later, some of us took a dip in the briny Dead Sea, where the salt content is ten times that of normal sea water, and a few covered themselves in the (purportedly) medicinal black mud. (They say it’s really good for your skin.)

Dinner that evening was at Darna, a fine Moroccan restaurant in Jerusalem where we were greeted warmly by the proprietor who explained the menu. Shortly thereafter we were joined by Sara Bechor – who, incidentally, knew the proprietor – who brought with her a friend, Mickey Alon, who, in turn, brought two of her friends, Shiran Raz and Ophir Akiva. All of them had an interest in things spiritual and asked questions about the Urantia Book. When Ophir saw, Hagai, our guide, he exclaimed in astonishment with the Hebrew equivalent of “What the heck are you doing here?” As it turned out, the two are close friends and colleagues. Sara, Shiran and Ophir joined us in our hotel lobby after dinner, where we continued our discussion into the night. Charlene gifted to Mickey a copy of the book she had brought with her for just such contingency. Mickey was ecstatic.

**Sunday, March 30<sup>th</sup>** was a “free day”, not a part of the “official” tour. Tom, Jannie and their family took a taxi to Bethlehem, off limits to organized tours and to Israelis for security reasons, but otherwise accessible to individual tourists. A bunch of us, yours truly included, met my brother and sister-in-law at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, where we spent a few hours. Quite a bit of time was spent by a group of us who examined in some detail a 1:50 model of the old city as it is supposed to have appeared in the time of Jesus.

We then took an English language tour of the Shrine of the Book, a domed shaped white building housing some of the Dead Sea Scrolls and various Essene artifacts. The tour was conducted over some two hours by a seventy-something modern (Jewish) Orthodox scholar whose face shone with enthusiasm and exuded a deep love for and commitment to the subject at hand. He covered at some length and considerable depth the techniques of the writing of the scrolls, the composition of the ink (lamp black, tree sap, olive oil and water) and the current methods of displaying the scrolls while preventing their degradation. He delved into the politics of assembling the Old Testament, explaining that the book of the prophet Ben Sira was excluded from the Bible because Ben Sira had said that not all intelligence is concentrated in the Jewish people and some can be found among others; he also explained the absence, on grounds of pornography, of the thirteenth chapter of the book of Daniel that dealt with Susannah, the wife of a judge, who found herself embroiled in sex and libel. When asked at the end of the tour what his particular professional specialization was, our guide revealed that he was a surgeon from Chicago who had moved to Israel 19 years ago and is a volunteer guide at the museum.

From the museum, we piled into three cabs and went for an early dinner at Minaret, an Arab restaurant on Queen Shlomzion Street in Jerusalem featuring tasty salads and skewered meats.

At 7:00 that evening, the “official” tour resumed with a guided walk through the Kotel tunnel dug along the western wall of the old city, featuring massive Herodian stones, Mameluke and Roman arches and cisterns.

**Monday, March 31<sup>st</sup>**, we took a morning tour of the Garden Tomb, another site containing a first century tomb assumed by the Christian group administering it to be the tomb of Jesus. Adjacent to the garden, and overlooking a bus station, a skull shaped rock (Golgotha?) can be plainly seen.

Then on to the Mt. of Olives, east of the old city. From the summit, Bill, Eve, Charlene and Veldon took a cab to Bethlehem. The rest of us began our descent on foot down the western slope in the direction of the old city. We stopped at the Church of Tears, or Dominos Flavis, then continued down to the golden onion domed Russian Orthodox church of Mary Magdalene, where Lila needed to negotiate our entry (in Russian) with a nun who had originally appeared intent on keeping us out since we had come on a day when the place was not open to tourists. Following a walk through the serene and well tended grounds, we passed by the walled grounds of Gethsemene, but were not able to enter as the gate was locked and there was no one around who could open it. We then walked across the valley and entered the old city through Lion’s Gate into the Arab quarter and had pizza (or falafel) for lunch at what, according to the declaration of the professed nephew of the original proprietor of the joint, was “the best pizza place in Israel”. None of those who had partaken seemed disappointed.

Bellies full, we proceeded toward a security gate at a ramp that led to the temple mount. Since access to the mount is limited, the lines get rather long, but the experience was well worth the wait. While we

could not enter the golden domed Moslem shrine built over the site that once held the Herodian temple's "holy of holies" or the Al Aksa mosque, the two main features on the grounds, we were able to saunter about and take in the enormity of the ancient site that had once accommodated throngs of Jewish pilgrims from all over the Levant during the major festivals.

Then back on the bus, a short stop at the hotel, and we re-boarded at 4:30 PM for a ride to what someone with bad taste decided to call "Eretz Bereshit" (land of genesis). There, on a hill sporting a handful of camels, we were greeted by a robed callow youth who had the temerity to introduce himself as Eliezer, the servant of Abraham. The upstart tried his hand at a few witty remarks and instructed the group in the proper technique of mounting and dismounting (in pairs, no less) these rather large humped beasts that are known to occasionally froth at the mouth and spit. In spite of all this, a surprisingly large number of us decided to hop on top of these animals who, led by their bored handlers, proceeded to sway up and down a well trodden segment of a dung covered path. Grins abounded, cameras clicked and no outward signs of panic or vertigo were noticeable.

The path further up the hill led to a large lean-to sort of tent with its opening facing east toward the valley – a beautiful spot indeed. A bearded middle aged gentleman in a flowing robe calling himself Abraham and speaking in Australian accented English, greeted us in what he undoubtedly took to be the most highly mannered hospitality of the father of the Hebrews. After bestowing tributes and honorifics upon his guests, (there was another large group from Santa Barbara that had joined us in the tent for the meal.) Abraham proceeded to render a brief description of the menu (salads, chicken in date honey sauce, kebabs), and we got down on the mats to partake of the altogether passable meal laid before us. We were all pretty good sports about this hokey "genesis" experience and so was Hagai, who volunteered that this was the first and last time he would bring a group to that place.

**Tuesday, April 1<sup>st</sup>** we checked out of the hotel in Jerusalem and traveled north along the west bank and then west toward Caesarea, an ancient city on the Mediterranean coast, built by Herod. The large amphitheatre, its stage set against the backdrop of the sea, is fully restored and serves today as a forum for various concerts and shows. We walked along the hippodrome, where the chariots once raced, and the bathhouses along the shore. A leisurely lunch was taken outdoors on a patio by the beach overlooking the ruins of the city walls upon which Jesus was said to have walked.

From Caesarea we traveled northeast to Nazareth, which today is a moderately sized, busy Arab city in the lower Galilee while, in the time of Jesus it was a small town housing no more than 30 Jewish families. The first stop on the outskirts of town, was a mountaintop overlook on the south side offering a great view of the fertile Jezrael Valley to the south and the city to the north. In town, we first visited the Church of the Annunciation, where multiple renditions of Mary loom large, one of which is a sculpture by the American Charles Madden. Outside, along the walls surrounding the courtyard, are displayed large paintings from numerous countries, all on the theme of the annunciation. From there, proceeding on a private tip, we went to small crusader church built on top what was thought to be a first century synagogue. (There was only one in town in those days.) The acoustics seemed rather good in that church and Evelyn was good enough to treat us to a beautiful rendition of "Our Father." In our continuing search for places where Jesus might have hung out, we looked for the only spring in town, which today is ensconced at the bottom of a Greek Orthodox church. We then asked Hagai to take us to the highest point in Nazareth on the western side of town and he did. Baruch, our driver, parked the bus and we

walked around the area, which sadly but inevitably is all built up today. Nevertheless, we could see the city of Haifa to the west and Mt. Tabor to the southeast (and, you guessed it, no hills of Moab).

Out of Nazareth, northeast through the Galilee, skirting the Kinneret (Sea of Galilee), visible from the bus, and climbing onto the Ramot Guest House, our temporary abode on the lower part of the Golan Heights, overlooking the harp-shaped lake from the east. What a spot...

JJ Johnson arrived at the hotel in time to join us for dinner. He had traveled from the Sinai – a long day's journey – where he is serving as a civilian observer employed by the U.S. state department. It was great fun catching up with him.

**Wednesday, April 2<sup>nd</sup>.** We start our exploration along the shores of the lake at the Mt. of the Beatitudes on the northeastern side between Capernaum and Tabgha. The chapel at the top of the hill, built by the Franciscan Sisters in 1939 with the help of Mussolini, was designed by Antonio Barluzzi, the same architect who designed the Dominus Flevit in Jerusalem. The striking interior of the chapel features alabaster walls and a golden dome. In the garden, in the shade, we sat together in the round and read portions of the Urantia Book's Ordination Sermon.

We then visited Capernaum, where we wished they could have left things alone, but why would they? The good people who have jurisdiction over the place saw fit to build a futuristic looking chapel over the ruins of what is termed Peter's House (hardly), so that kind of detracts from the sought after authenticity of things – but enough whining... The ruins of the old synagogue are impressive enough. But for us, Urantia types, it's not nearly old enough... It's a 4<sup>th</sup> century structure which may have been built over the synagogue in which Jesus delivered his Saturday evening "I have no mother" address prior to his hasty flight across the lake from the Sanhedrin officers.

We then went to the Jordan River and stopped at the spot where hoards of Christians come to get baptized. Buses marked "Hagee Ministries" were parked solid across the parking lot. We moved on to a more secluded spot along the river, where Tom took a dip and Evelyn sang a lovely hymn.

From there, we drove on to Kibbutz Ginnosar, and embarked on a boat ride across the lake. Tom and Hagai tossed around a Frisbee emblazoned with three concentric circles and it wound up in the drink, destined to float into eternity, displaying the banner of Michael for all to see – or to be plucked out of the water by a brave kid *really* wanting a Frisbee.

From Ginnosar we took a short ride to Mt. Arbel where we found a spring and took a walk along a path that Tom thought would bring us to a Roman road. Instead we found a few grazing cows and some nursing calves. The young Arabs tending the animals nodded and we nodded back. Why the heck can't we all get along?

By late afternoon, we got to the hot sulfur springs of Hamat Gader, east of the southern tip of the Sea of Galilee near the Jordanian border. My brother and sister-in-law met us at the entrance to the pools greeting us with a crate of fresh strawberries that disappeared within minutes – members of the group are still shaking their heads with amazement at the "best strawberries" they ever tasted. After a dip in the salubrious waters, we got together for dinner at a Thai restaurant on the grounds.

**Thursday, April 3<sup>rd</sup>.** JJ departs back to the Sinai and the rest of us are off to Tzfat, north by northeast of the Sea of Galilee, an ancient city established in the first century AD and home of the Kabbalah. We enter the Aboav Synagogue established in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by Sefardi Jews after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492. We share the space with a family celebrating a young son's Bar Mitzva as we listen to our guide. The first book printed in the middle-east came off a printing press in this town. It is hilly and picturesque. It's a place you don't want to miss.

My niece, Tamar, meets us in Tzfat. She has some business there – providing supervision to a social work student. We walk for a bit along the streets, talking, and she needs to peel off for her meeting – ain't it a trip, walking together as we walk by?

A short bus ride from Tzfat to Rosh Pina and we stop for the best falafel we have had yet –these guys mix in some fava beans with the chick peas; they sure know what they're doing...

After this quick lunch, we are off to the nature trail along the Dan River, a tributary to the Jordan coming off Mt. Hermon. The trail is lovely and its teeming with young people including kids from yeshivas and girls from Moslem schools fully decked in their concealing garments.

From there we were on to Omrit, an archeological site near the foot of Mt. Hermon, not yet open to the public, discovered after a brush fire in 1999 unveiled the ruins of what is now thought to be Caesarea Philippi. Heretofore, it was the neighboring Banias that was thought to be that ancient town built by the Tetrarch Philip. The bus stopped on a dirt road past marked old Syrian mine fields. The temple at the top of the hill built by Herod in honor of Augustus was visible from the road. We had to get past a couple of rudimentary barbed wire fences to get to the site. Once at the temple site, remnants of the town destroyed hundreds of years ago by an earthquake could be seen all around. Most of it has yet to be dug up. It was here that Jesus camped on the way to Mt. Hermon with the lad Tiglath prior to his final confrontation with the system rebels. It was here that Peter confessed the identity of the Master as the Son of the living God.

From Caesarea Philippi we moved on to the top of Mt. Ben Tal from which the summit of Mt. Hermon could be clearly seen along with stretches of Syria and Lebanon beyond the Golan.

At sunset, we departed from the summit of Ben Tal and moved on to a nearby restaurant, Dag al ha'Dan (fish on the Dan). My niece, Tami, her husband and two children joined us for dinner.

**Friday, April 4:** We're off to Sephorris, ("Tzipori" in Hebrew, meaning "of a bird" for the bird's eye view one gets of the surrounding area) a stone's throw, north by northwest of Nazareth, where archeologists have uncovered one of the finest mosaic floors to be found anywhere. The ruins clearly indicate that a good number of the city dwellers were quite well heeled. We know that Joseph, Jesus' father, did quite a bit of carpentry work in town and it was there that he met his untimely demise. From there, we traveled south to Meggido (Armageddon) an enormous archeological site in the Jezrael Valley with remains spanning six millennia and several cultures including Canaanite, Hebraic, Assyrian and Egyptian. Among the finds is a deep 8<sup>th</sup> century BC tunnel, dug through bedrock, leading from within the fortified city on the hill to a cistern outside the city walls.

From Megiddo, we traveled northwest to Haifa where we first stopped in the lower city for a quick lunch of falafels and shawarmas, and then climbed up onto the Carmel for a view of the golden domed Ba'hai shrine and its surrounding gardens. Then back on the bus and off, again, to Nazareth where, we've heard, there is supposed to be a dig of a first century Jewish house under the convent of the Sisters of Nazareth. Hagai is on the phone with Sister Stephania. She has an opening at around 3 o'clock – sounds like she can squeeze us in. It could be close but it's worth a shot. We make it. Sister Stephania is dressed in a modern habit. She is matter of fact; doesn't make any claims. All she knows, she says as we descend down the stairs and into the dig under the twentieth century convent, is what the archeologists are saying; there is this crusader prayer hall built over this first century house – she points at the stone wall built into the hill. Nobody can say who the house belonged to, but it was from around the time of Jesus. There is a tomb with two burial niches and a round cover stone at the opening under the house. Some archeologists say that Jews never built tombs under their houses, but they also know for sure that this is a Jewish house and the tomb is definitely a Jewish tomb. That's all Sister Stephania knows, and she shares the facts as she know them. Just please be careful, she says, and don't touch anything; and you almost want to stop breathing so you won't contaminate the site – if it wasn't Jesus, someone who knew him, in the flesh, may well have lived there. Is this a little fetishism creeping in, or just nostalgia for things we wished to have been intimate with? We thank Sister Stephania and bid her farewell. And we are back on the bus for our last night at Ramot. My nephew, Yuval, his wife Rachel and their older son, soon to be drafted, Li'or, join us for dinner.

**Saturday, April 5:** The day starts with a detour to “our” quiet spot on the Jordan where Tom Choquette takes a dip with daughter Jolie for a mutual baptism. Janae also jumps in for a secular swim, while the rest of us hang out on the river bank enjoying the shade of the eucalyptus trees (a 20<sup>th</sup> century import). We then have a remembrance supper, standing in a circle, passing around a loaf of bread and a bottle of wine. (The technique of soaking the bread in the wine is utilized by some and comments are made about the virtues of this little known method.) On to Beit She'an (Scythopolis), due south along the Jordan, where much of the 2,000 year old city has been excavated, the main street and a number of side streets dug up, columns that had toppled righted, and a huge stadium uncovered. It was one of the largest Roman cities in Palestine at the time of Jesus and it looks the part, even in its partially reconstructed state.

Then on to the Sachne', a series of large natural pools surrounded by lawns where picnickers loll about and relax. Most of us gathered around a table where Hagai reviewed with us the course of our tour on a map. We are summing it up; it's hard to imagine that it's almost over. Hagai has been a great guide. Easygoing, energetic and good humored, he was eager to teach as well as to learn. (He had familiarized himself with the UB on the web in preparation for meeting us.) He thanked us for pointing him to some sites he had never been to. He too, would receive a copy of the UB (another one that Charlene and Veldon had brought along) as we say our farewells.

We then joined a stream of cars headed toward Tel Aviv where we were to spend what remained of our final day in Israel. We dropped off the Dreiers, Doreen, Dale and John at a hotel in southern Tel Aviv by the seashore, where they were to spend one night. John was to depart before dawn for his flight home, Dale and Doreen later in the morning to do the same. Steve and Bobbie were to spend a day in Tel Aviv and Jaffa in the company of Yehuda and Hanna and then return to Jerusalem for another couple of days. The rest of us were to head off to Ben Gurion Airport after dinner at a Yemenite restaurant called Maganda in the Carmel Market section of the city. We had plenty of time to kill before dinner and a



bunch of us went for a leisurely stroll along the Tel Aviv boardwalk, while others parked themselves in a local watering hole facing the surf and the setting sun. A slight miscalculation on the part of our tour agent required our dinner to start at 8:00 PM rather than at 7:00, the miscalculation being the failure to take into account the hour's delay in the setting of the sun on that Saturday evening due to the local change to daylight savings time. This wouldn't have mattered had we had reservations in a non-kosher place – and there are plenty of those in Tel Aviv – but, for perfectly good reasons, our tour agent had planned this particular culinary experience for us as our last supper in Israel and there we were. Consequently, we had to wolf down the excellent fare of hummus, babba ganush, shepherd and various other salads, followed by main dishes of grilled meats and topped off by baklava. We didn't have time for the Turkish coffee or tea, for fear of missing our flights, but – no complaints. It was all good. My sister in law, who is not known to mince her words much, observed during one of her meetings with our group that there is a conspicuous lack of complaining among us, something that in her mind distinguished us from the social groups to which she is accustomed. I didn't think it was because we were particularly docile. I'll let you speculate on why that might be.