

THE JERUSALEM POST

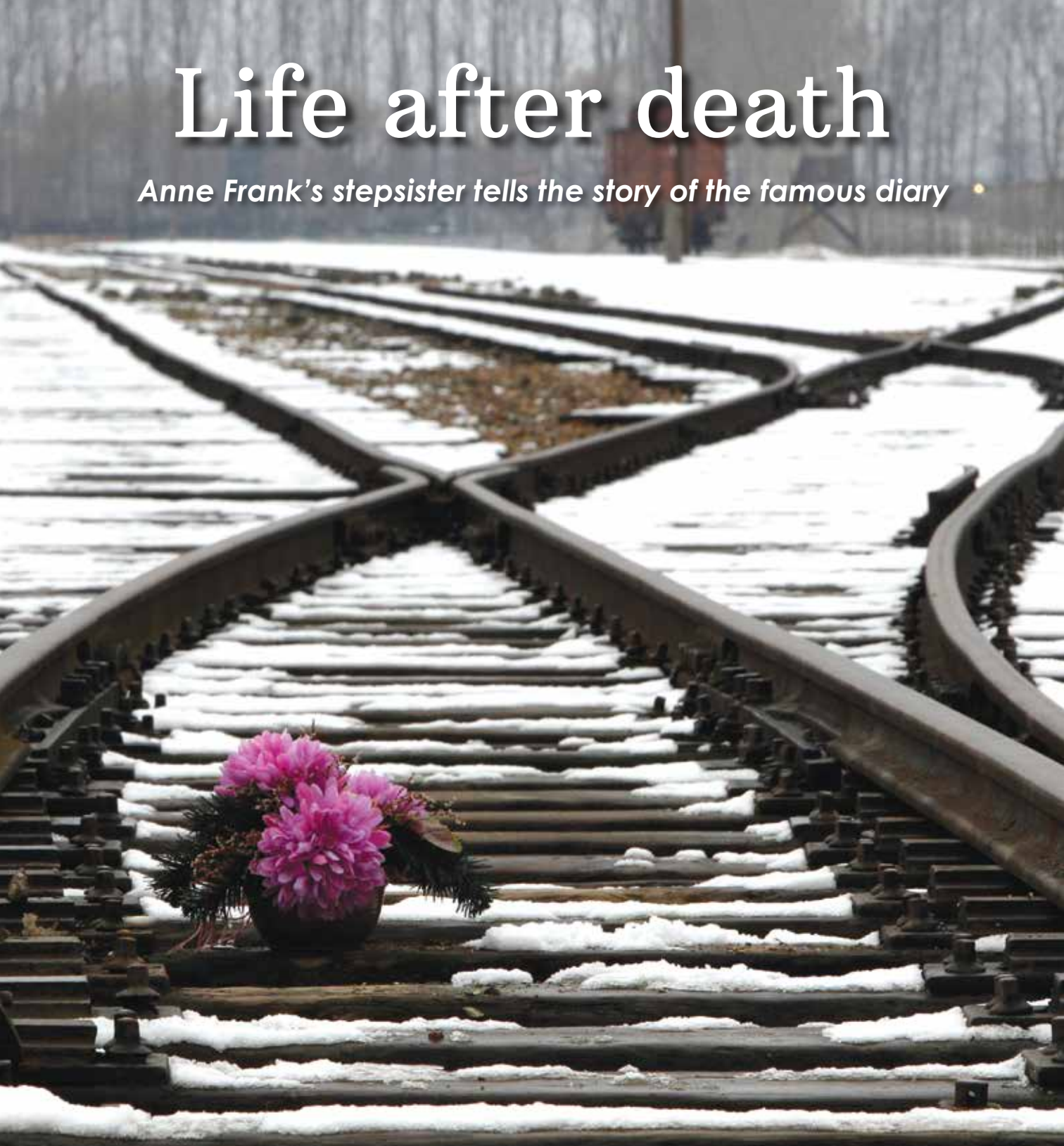
JANUARY 2018

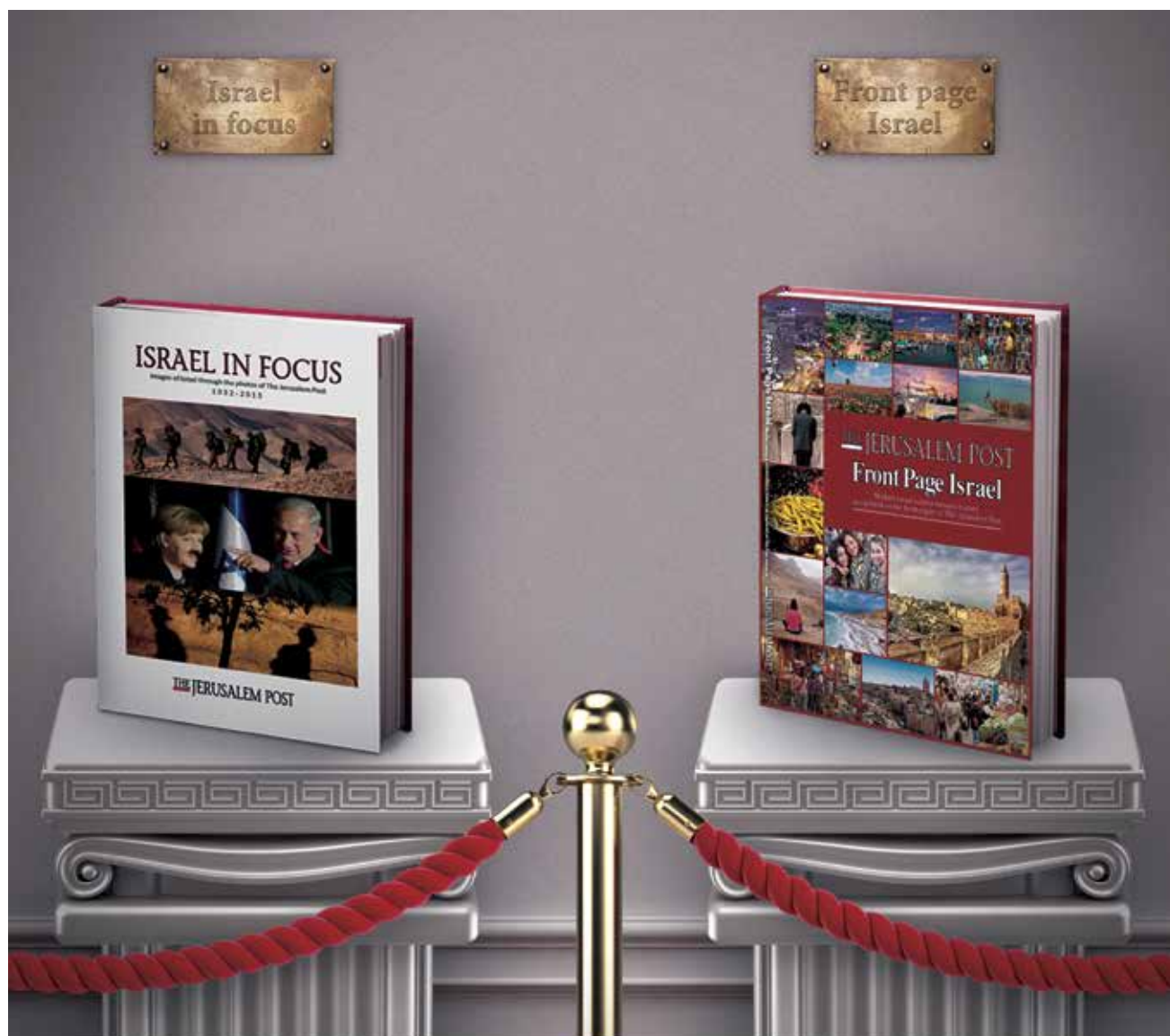
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COVER: Flowers for the victims of the Nazi death camp of Auschwitz are seen on a railway track during ceremonies marking the 66th anniversary of the camp's liberation, January 27, 2011.

(Kacper Pempel/Reuters)



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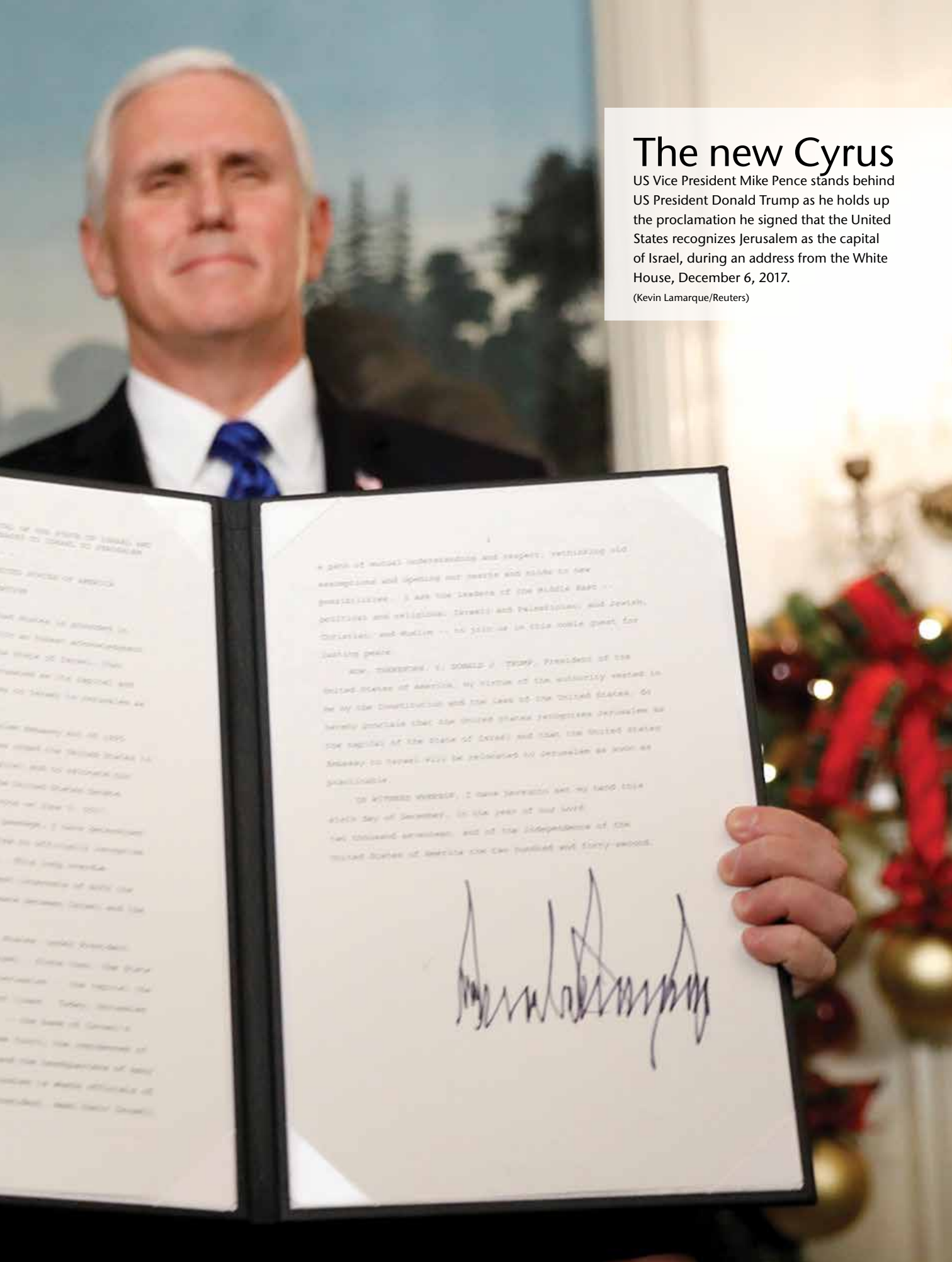


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The new Cyrus

US Vice President Mike Pence stands behind US President Donald Trump as he holds up the proclamation he signed that the United States recognizes Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, during an address from the White House, December 6, 2017.

(Kevin Lamarque/Reuters)

A path of mutual understanding and respect, recognizing old
exceptions and signing our hearts and minds to new
possibilities. I ask the leaders of the Middle East --
politicians and religious, Israeli and Palestinian, and Jewish,
Christian, and Muslim -- to join me in this noble quest for
lasting peace.

Now, therefore, I, Donald J. Trump, President of the
United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in
me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, do
hereby proclaim that the United States recognizes Jerusalem as
the capital of the State of Israel and that the United States
Embassy to Israel will be relocated to Jerusalem as soon as
practicable.

On Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this
sixth day of December, in the year of our Lord
two thousand seventeen, and of the Independence of the
United States of America one hundred and sixty-second.

Fill it up

A worker at Jerusalem's Marzipan bakery sets up sufganiyot (fried and filled doughnuts) prior to Hanukka, December 10, 2017. (Marc Israel Sellem/The Jerusalem Post)



Victory lap

Actors take part in a reenactment of Gen. Edmund Allenby's entry to Jerusalem as it occurred exactly 100 years ago, near Jaffa Gate, outside Jerusalem's Old City, December 11, 2017. *See news story, Page 13.*

(Marc Israel Sellem/The Jerusalem Post)



In the moonlight

Migrating birds are seen across the backdrop of a full moon over Hula Lake during the early morning before sunrise, December 4, 2017. (KKL-JNF)





Gotcha!

An undercover Israeli security personnel detains a Palestinian during clashes near Beit El, December 13, 2017.

(Mohamad Torokman/Reuters)



(Wikimedia Commons)

Disappearance of Raoul Wallenberg, 17 January 1945

Photo by Swedish photo agency Pressensbild of Raoul Wallenberg at his desk, before 1945

Seventy-three years ago, on January 17, 1945, Sweden's special envoy in Budapest Raoul Wallenberg – a rescuer of tens of thousands of Jews during the Holocaust – was taken in for questioning by the Soviet forces on charges of espionage, and subsequently disappeared. In early 1944, after the Nazis had occupied Hungary and had already begun deporting hundreds of thousands of Jews to the death camps in southern Poland, Wallenberg was sent to Budapest under diplomatic cover to organize a rescue program for the nation's Jews. He and fellow Swedish diplomat Per Anger distributed Swedish passports, set up extraterritorial safe houses that he declared were protected by diplomatic immunity and negotiated with high-ranking Hungarian fascist and Nazi officials, thus utilizing Sweden's neutrality to stave off the Jews' deportation. In 1966 Yad Vashem recognized him as a Righteous Among the Nations.

Editor's note

It's now a month after the 100th anniversary of Gen. Edmund Allenby's triumphant, yet solemn, entrance into Jerusalem during the First World War (See pages 7 and 13 to learn more about the 2017 reenactment), and we're still in the euphoria of hearing US President Donald Trump recognize Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel (see pages 44, 45, 48 and 50 by Earl Cox, Lahav Harkov, Mark Glatt and Tomas Sandell, respectively, to read various opinions on what this move means) and instructing the State Department to start coming up with plans to move the embassy there.

But as the People of Israel do on all the major holidays and celebrations, there is always a special time set aside to remember those who are not here to share these special moments. On the three pilgrimage festivals and Yom Kippur, as well during the height of each wedding ceremony, the congregation switches gears to contemplate that no matter how happy the occasion, there are still components missing.

On the holidays, the prayer services come to a halt, and everyone in attendance takes time to say or listen to the Yizkor prayers. First, each individual remembers his personal losses, and then for those who, thank God, have not been affected by a close, personal loss, the cantor recites the national remembrance prayers, remembering the victims of the Holocaust and those who were killed defending the State of Israel. So too does the master of ceremonies at each wedding take the time to mention all those attending only in spirit, and of course, the groom will then at some point break a glass to remind everyone that Jerusalem has not yet been fully built, which is followed by him solemnly saying the verse in Psalm 137:5, "If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill."

Israel has three national days of remembrance. On the 27th of Nissan, Holocaust Remembrance Day is marked. Less than a week later, Remembrance Day for the Fallen of Israel's Wars is observed on the fourth of Iyyar. In the summer, the national day of mourning for the two destroyed temples and a number of other disasters takes place on the ninth of Av.

One of the most fulfilling yet difficult periods in the Jewish calendar is making the transition from Passover to Holocaust Remembrance Day to Remembrance Day for the Fallen of Israel's Wars to Independence Day only a day later.

Holocaust Remembrance Day is a day that is filled

with courage. The date was originally planned to be the date marking the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, but because it fell on the first day of Passover, the state decided to postpone it to the week after the holiday. But, nonetheless, the day's full name – Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day – is quite indicative to the courage of the ghetto uprising and so many other inspiring stories.

However, because the period is so dense with holidays, there is not always time for everyone to contemplate on the horrors of the Holocaust, nor to gain strength from the unbelievable stories of Jewish courage, and to think about how we need to approach the future of the memory of the Holocaust, when in a decade or so the last survivor will have passed away.

On January 27, 1945, Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest Nazi concentration and death camp, was liberated by the Red Army, and this was date was chosen in 2005 by the UN to be International Holocaust Remembrance Day, urging every member nation to use this date to honor the memory of the victims.

Seeing as how this publication is not bound to Israeli government protocols denoting Holocaust Remembrance Day be observed specifically in the spring on the 27th of Nissan, and that this publication is for a global audience, using the international January date seems more than appropriate.

Two stories that feature in this month's issue on the topic are about how Germans deal with their family's Nazi past ("Was grandpa really a Nazi? Page 29), and taking a more in-depth look at Anne Frank's diary after the war ("Behind the pages," Page 34).

In the former story, reporter Orit Arfa asks how do non-Jews deal with the past, knowing that their parents or grandparents may have killed Jews simply because of the inexplicable antisemitism that had fostered inside them?

In the latter, Anne Frank's stepsister and Holocaust survivor Eva Schloss explains how critical it was that Anne's diary would see the light of day, and of how Anne's father, Otto, went to great lengths to make sure that the entire world would be aware of the enormous braveness his daughter – and hundreds of thousands of others – had during one of the most difficult times in the history of the world.

There is no better way to start the new year by remembering the past, and learning its lessons to build a better present and future.

– Benjamin Glatt, Editor

'Every Holocaust survivor is like a candle'

Hanukka lighting at Kotel dedicated to survivors' emergence from darkness

BY TAMARA ZIEVE

Holocaust survivors in Jerusalem, New York City and Berlin attended Hanukka candle-lighting ceremonies held in their honor on December 14.

In Jerusalem, the official state candle-lighting ceremony was, for the first time, dedicated to survivors and their reemergence from darkness into light, at the initiative of the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (Claims Conference) in cooperation with the Western Wall Heritage Foundation.

Hundreds of survivors attended the event at the Western Wall along with their families and members of youth organizations.

Participating in the ceremony were Social Equality Minister Gila Gamliel, Migdal Ha'emek Chief Rabbi Yitzchak David Grossman, Rabbi of the Western Wall and the Holy Sites Shmuel Rabinowitz, and the Claims Conference's executive vice president Greg Schneider and vice president for Israel Shlomo Gur.

Similar candle-lighting events were set to be held in Berlin, hosted by the President of the Bundestag Dr. Wolfgang Schäuble, and in New York City.

In the capital, the survivors participated in guided tours of the Wall's sites and tunnels, where they were greeted by Gamliel and Schneider and enjoyed sufganiyot, traditional donuts.

"I am honored to be here, today, with you... my brother's, the heroes of my nation, survivors of the Holocaust, who endured hell, and made aliya to our country, allowed desolation to flower, built Jerusalem and established the State of Israel," Schneider said in an address.

"Every Holocaust survivor among us is like a candle," he said. "Survivors should be a memory for us and our children, to remember the dark time before the establishment of the State of Israel. Just as we are commanded to present Hanukka candles at the window of the house, we must commemorate the stories of heroism, the meaningful life, the resurrection, and the contribution of those who have had everything taken from them."

Romanian-born Holocaust survivor Pnina Katzir, 88, told the gathering about her life in a ghetto in Transnistria during the Holocaust, fighting starvation, cold, lice, typhus, fear and despair.

"Just survive,' we heard our parents repeatedly telling



Holocaust survivors gather for a candle-lighting ceremony at the Kotel. (Raanan Cohen)

us, 'and fight for life,' every day, hour-by-hour and minute-by-minute. We did it and survived and we even revived. We immigrated to Israel and built a home and raised families, and that is our pride and victory," she said.

Most of her life, Katzir did not talk about the Holocaust. But 12 years ago she joined the Amcha day club for Holocaust survivors in Jerusalem, which is supported by the Claims Conference. She has since learned to speak about her experiences to students, soldiers, policemen, and even audiences in Germany.

"It's a sacred duty, because we won't be here for long and it's important for our stories to be told. Very important," she said.

"Light is very symbolic for us. It symbolizes our exodus from great darkness into the light," Katzir continued. "I stand here thrilled and moved, in our people's holiest place and in Jerusalem that celebrates 50 years of its reunification, and in our country, Israel, that will celebrate 70 years of independence, and I cannot find the words to describe how great the occasion is and what it means to Holocaust survivors."

"There's no other country or home for us. We don't have another people. Our place is here, for better or worse. I am proud to be part of this people," Katzir said.

J'lem celebrates 100 years to Allenby's victory

BY GREER FAY CASHMAN

The festive mood in Jerusalem's Old City on December 11 belied the fact that there had been a terrorist attack in the capital less than 24 hours earlier.

Hundreds – Jews, Christians, Muslims, locals and tourists – crowded the plaza outside the Jaffa Gate and the road bordering the Tower of David to watch the reenactment of Gen. Edmund Allenby's entry into Jerusalem 100 years ago.

There was a brass band. People were waving flags and the attire of a considerable number of those present was far from current vogue.

Faces were wreathed in smiles and the air of anticipation was almost tangible.

Allenby's entry into Jerusalem on December 11, 1917, was celebrated by a crowd that reached back in time to grasp that same feeling of hope that had permeated through the old city with his proclamation of martial law in Jerusalem, thereby freeing the city from four centuries of Turkish rule.

It was the beginning of a new era. The Jews during that time saw it as a Hanukkah miracle, which heralded the possibility that Zionist aspirations would be realized.

The Christians saw it as Christmas present for civilization and the Muslims regarded it as a message from the Prophet Mohammed.

Allenby, who assured the population that it was his desire that every person should pursue his profession, way of life, his traditions and his religion without fear, had the proclamation read out in seven languages by six representatives of communities living in the old city in the languages most familiar to them, and the original English version was read by Allenby himself.

On December 11, this was reenacted from the very spot where Allenby stood a century ago.

This time the English was read by

An actor dressed up as Gen. Edmund Allenby. (Marc Israel Sellem/The Jerusalem Post)



Viscount Henry J.H. Allenby of Megiddo and Felixstowe who is in Israel for the first time, and the proclamations in other languages were read by and large by representatives of the various religious denominations.

Moderator Avshalom Kor, who is an expert on Hebrew language, noted that when the proclamation was read out in Hebrew in 1917, it was the first time since the Second Temple period that Hebrew been officially recognized as a language.

Kor also underscored the sharp contrast between Allenby's humble entry into the city on foot and that of Kaiser Wilhelm II's haughty entry on horseback in 1898.

For Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat, this was not just another noblesse oblige ceremony. Barkat spent the first 10 years of his life in Mahaneh Allenby, a somewhat downtrodden neighborhood in the capital's East Talpiot, which these days is a luxury neighborhood known as Armon HaNatziv. So for him honoring Allenby's memory carried a certain degree of personal nostalgia.

Barkat credited Allenby with knowing that Jerusalem was a uniting force for the whole world. "He was an essential part of the city's history," said Barkat. "He understood the role of Jerusalem and that religious tolerance and mutual respect were the highest values.

NEWS IN BRIEF

20% increase in pilgrims expected

Tens of thousands of Christian pilgrims were expected to arrive in the country over the Christmas holiday, capping a record-breaking year that included 3.5 million tourists, the Tourism Ministry said Dec. 20. Noting that a 20% increase of Christian visitors is expected over Christmas compared to last year, Tourism Minister Yariv Levin expressed pride in the record numbers of annual visitors. "Israel invites the faithful from all religions to pray, worship and visit all the holy sites in Israel in freedom and security," he said. (TJP)

IDF births Syrian maternity hospital

Responding to a request from Syrian doctors, the IDF has facilitated the opening of a maternity hospital on the Syrian side of the Golan Heights as part of Operation Good Neighbor, which provides Israeli assistance to war-ravaged villages near the border. According to Lt.-Col. E., the commander of Operation Good Neighbor whose full name has been withheld for security reasons, its main motive is humanitarian. "You can't stand from the side and see your neighbor dying and living in hard conditions and know that you can help them and not do so," he said. (TJP)

NEWS IN BRIEF

Menorah found on Muslim coins

Researchers recently discovered that menorahs prominently adorned Muslim coins and vessels during the early Islamic period 1,300 years ago. Relics inscribed with the Jewish symbol dating to the Umayyad dynasty during the seventh-eighth centuries were found at various archeological sites in Israel and are now being exhibited to the public. Last year, archeologists Assaf Avraham of Bar-Ilan University, and Peretz Reuven of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem exposed an early Islamic inscription referring to the Dome of the Rock as "Beit al-Maqdis." (TJP)

Mom, daughter discover clay lamp

An afternoon hike through Beit She'an Valley turned into much more when a mother and daughter discovered a clay candle-holder dating to the Hellenistic period 2,200 years ago – when Judah Maccabee fought the ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes. While making their way through the mounds near the historic area by the Jordan River Valley in December, Hadas Goldberg-Kedar, seven, and her mother, Ayelet, first noticed the well-preserved pottery vessel near the entrance to a porcupine cave. (TJP)

Menorah inscribed on basalt discovered in Tiberias mosque

BY DANIEL K. EISENBUD

An ancient seven-branched menorah inscribed on a large slab of basalt originally used as a door at a Jewish cemetery between the 2nd and 4th centuries CE has been unearthed from a mosque dating to the Muslim period at an archeological site in Tiberias.

The excavation, which commenced in 2009, was overseen by Dr. Katia Cytryn-Silverman of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem's Institute of Archeology and the Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies.

According to Cytryn-Silverman, the ornate doorway was taken from the nearby cemetery and used as part of the mosque's foundation. It later served as a step in a sugar warehouse built during the Crusader period.

"The stone is engraved in splendor with a seven-branched menorah," she said on December 11.

"The incarnations of the stone adorned with the menorah reflect 1,000 years in the ancient history of Tiberias between the 2nd and 12th centuries CE, and covers Jewish, Muslim and Christian periods."

Tiberias was a central city in the Galilee and served as a seat for the Sanhedrin.

"The Jews of the city during the Mishna and Talmud period also had a magnificent cemetery, and the doors of the burial systems were made of thick basalt slabs, decorated with various symbols," she explained.

Tiberias, which was conquered by the Muslims in 635 CE, became a district capital, and a mosque was subsequently built there.

"The mosque's builders made use of accessible building materials that were in the vicinity, and also recycled stones that had symbolic significance – a message of the victory of Islam over the cultures and religions that preceded it," Cytryn-Silverman said.

"Thus, Jewish burial doors were exposed in the excavations, which served as bases for the columns of the building."

The mosque was destroyed during an earthquake in 1068 CE, she noted.

However, the menorah-adorned door was used once again as a step at a sugar warehouse built during the Crusader period.

"One of the steps in this building was made of the basalt door, which was fashioned and adapted to the extent necessary," said Cytryn-Silverman. "This indicates that the Crusaders were reconstructing stones that were uprooted from the ruins of the mosque."

The sugar industry, she said, was widespread in the Jordan Valley and Tiberias during and after the Crusader periods.

"For example, a letter from 1182 CE sent by the Hospitaller Crusader Order of Jerusalem, requesting the shipment of sugar from Tiberias for the production of medicines and syrup for patients in the hospital of the Order was found in the area," the researcher said.

"So, the menorah had a sweet ending."

Dr. Katia Cytryn-Silverman poses with the rare find. (Tal Rogovsky)



Artifacts from 1,500-year-old monastery unearthed

Well-preserved Byzantine-era mosaic floors discovered

BY DANIEL K. EISENBUD

With help from over 1,000 teen-aged volunteers, archeologists recently unearthed the well-preserved remains of a 1,500-year-old Byzantine-era monastery and church in Beit Shemesh decorated with colorful mosaic tiles and imported marble antiquities.

The excavation, supervised by the Antiquities Authority, is being conducted ahead of the expansion of Ramat Beit Shemesh, located some 30 kilometers west of Jerusalem.

The building may have served as a meeting ground for pilgrims, according to Benyamin Storchan, director of the excavation for the Antiquities Authority.

"We were surprised by the wonderful state of preservation of the ancient remains, and the richness of the finds being uncovered," he said on December 20.

"The artifacts found in the large building, which seems to be a monastic compound, may indicate that the site was important and perhaps a center for ancient pilgrims in the Judean Shfela [Judean foothills] region."

During the excavation, Storchan said, the teens and archeologists uncovered walls built of large worked stone masonry, as well as a number of architectural elements, including a marble pillar base decorated with crosses and marble window screens.

"The marble artifacts were brought from the region of Turkey, and further inland by wagon," he said. "In one of the rooms we uncovered a beautiful mosaic floor decorated with birds, leafs, and pomegranates."

Storchan continued: "We already know of a number of ancient churches and monasteries in the Judean Shfela, but this one has outstanding preservation."

Until now, only a small portion of the

monastery has been uncovered, which was abandoned in the 7th century CE for unknown reasons, he said.

Since the excavation began last summer, teenagers from various groups and organizations, including schools and pre-military associations, have participated.

"We searched for a way to fund-raise for our class trip to Poland, and we decided to take part in the archeological excavations," said Hadas Keich, a 16-year-old student at the Sde Boker Field School. "Little by little, we uncovered exciting finds here, which helped to connect us to our country and its history.

"Amazing what is hidden here beneath our feet!" Keich said.



The excavation team. (Assaf Peretz/IAA)

NEWS IN BRIEF

Young Christians support dropping

A survey has found declining levels of support for Israel among younger evangelicals. 58% of those ages 18 to 34 have a positive view of Israel, compared with around 70% of those over 50. The trend is similar to the challenge Israel faces in reaching out to millennials in general, say Israelis who work with evangelical supporters. "If you extrapolate that, in 10 years you have a crisis, but now we have a challenge," said Joel C. Rosenberg, *The New York Times* best-selling author who co-sponsored the survey with Chosen People Ministries. (TJP)

Gal Gadot not as popular here

Google published its search trends both globally and broken down by country on Dec. 13, and the rankings may surprise. Rosh Ha'ayin native Gal Gadot was the No. 6 most searched person in the world of the year, and the No. 3 most searched actor. In the US, she was the No. 10 most searched person and the No. 3 most searched actor. In Israel, Gadot didn't crack the top 10. The most searched-for news story in 2017 was of Amir Guttman, a singer who tragically drowned in July at age 41 while saving the life of his young niece. (TJP)

NEWS IN BRIEF

Italian Holocaust museum opens

The National Museum of Italian Judaism and the Shoah, MEIS, opened on Dec. 20 with an inaugural temporary exhibit called “Jews, an Italian Story: The First Thousand Years” that illustrates the history of Jewish presence in Italy from ancient Roman times until the Middle Ages. The exhibit, which will run until Sep. 16, is the first step in a multi-year program of exhibits and events that will culminate in the final form of the museum and its permanent core exhibit, expected in late 2020.

(JTA)

Pence again delays Israel trip

Vice President Mike Pence has once again delayed his visit to the Middle East, including a stop in Israel, citing the upcoming vote in Congress on tax reform. As part of his first official trip to Israel as vice president, Pence was scheduled to arrive by Dec. 20 after originally planning to visit the country earlier in December during Hanukkah. He had been slated to meet with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other senior Israeli officials in Jerusalem, and was reportedly set to address the Knesset. He is now planning on coming in mid-January.

(JNS)

Friends of Zion honors Trump in White House

President Donald Trump received the Friends of Zion Award from the founder of the Friends of Zion Museum in Jerusalem, Dr. Mike Evans, in a ceremony at the White House on December 12.

The event was attended by Vice President Mike Pence, senior advisers Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump, and faith leaders representing more than 150 million Christians globally.

“No president in history has ever built such an alliance for the State of Israel and the Jewish people, and no president has courageously stood up for the State of Israel on the global stage as you had Mr. President,” Evans declared at the ceremony. “President Trump’s historic recognition of Jerusalem will secure his place in history as the first American president to take that step since the founding of the State of Israel in 1948.”

The Friends of Zion Award was previously been bestowed on world leaders such as president George W. Bush, Prince Albert II of Monaco and president Rosen Plevneliev of Bulgaria. Evans presented those awards together with the late president Shimon Peres, former chairman of the Friends of Zion Museum, to honor their courageous support of the State of Israel and the Jewish people.

The Friends of Zion Heritage Center has

become one of the central institutions in the State of Israel, influencing the world and strengthening Israel’s relations globally while fortifying the pillars of the State of Israel.

In addition to more than 31 million members globally, the museum has hosted more than 100 diplomats such as US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman, President Reuven Rivlin, tens of thousands of Christian and Jewish leaders, NBA and NFL superstars, leading Hollywood actors and singers, and has become a must-see site in Jerusalem.

“President Trump’s historic declaration regarding Jerusalem takes its place as one of Israel’s historic milestones, from the Balfour Declaration to President Truman’s acceptance of Israel into the family of nations,” the museum said in a statement. “These heroes presented in the Friends of Zion Museum in Jerusalem tell the stories of characters throughout history who have stood by the Jewish people and helped establish the State of Israel. These non-Jewish Zionists are engraved in history, and millions of people worldwide have learned of their heroism thanks to the groundbreaking work of Dr. Evans and the Friends of Zion Museum.”

(TJP)



President Donald Trump, flanked by Christian global faith leaders, receives the Friends of Zion Award in the Oval Office. (D. Myles Cullen/White House)

J'lem monument remembers 1948 overseas volunteers

BY TOM TUGEND

Nearly 70 years after volunteers from five continents left homes and jobs to fight for the newly proclaimed State of Israel, a memorial will be dedicated in their honor in Jerusalem.

During the War of Independence, 4,922 volunteers from 59 countries joined Machal (the Hebrew acronym for volunteers from abroad), 123 of whom died in the line of duty.

The three-meter-wide and 2.4-meter-high memorial is made of stone, concrete and steel. It has inscribed on it in Hebrew the words of Yitzhak Rabin: "You came to us when we needed you most, during those dark and uncertain days of our War of Independence."

The largest contingents of Machal volunteers hailed from the US, South Africa, UK, Canada and France. Almost all, including 168 gentiles, had fought for their home countries during the Second World War and brought valuable experience and skills, particularly to the air force and navy, which had to be built from scratch.

Over the decades, the contributions of the volunteers to the outcome of the war have been either ignored in Israel and their home countries or overblown "Hollywood style."

A blunt and slightly exaggerated description came from California novelist Harold Livingston, who flew for the Israeli Air Transport Command. He wrote: "Ben-Gurion's Foreign Legion. They took anyone. Misfits from America, English communists, South African Zionists, Soviet army deserters, Polish noblemen, ne'er-do-well soldiers of fortune. If you want excitement and adventure, come on over... If you want to write a book. If you're running from the police. If you want to get away from your wife. If you want to prove



An artist's rendering of the monument near the Ammunition Hill National Heritage and Memorial Site in Jerusalem. (Courtesy Jerry Klinger)

that Jews can fight. If you want to build a new land."

Motives for enlistment were mixed.

This reporter was one of the soldiers who volunteered from the United States.

My time as an American infantryman in France and Germany during WWII had left me restless; my early exposure to Zionism in a Jewish school and youth organization in Berlin during the mid-1930s had left an imprint; and since a new Jewish state arises only every 2,000 years or so, I figured I probably wouldn't be around for the next time.

But whatever the Machal contributions, on the ground – where ultimately wars are still won – the Israelis did most of the job themselves and paid a high price. The War of Independence claimed the lives of some 6,200 Israeli soldiers and civilians.

But perhaps Machal's most important contribution was to boost the morale of Israelis, knowing that their Diaspora brethren were with them.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Chanel worked with Nazis: film

A new film that played at the Jerusalem Jewish Film Festival last month alleges that Coco Chanel collaborated with the Nazis during World War II against her own Jewish partners. It has been almost 50 years since the death of famed French fashion designer Coco Chanel, and the legacy of the chic Parisian has begun to really reek. The new French documentary, *The No. 5 War* – a reference to the famed scent Chanel No. 5 – claims that Chanel worked with Nazi occupiers of France and used their anti-Jewish laws to get rid of her Jewish associates, brothers Pierre and Paul Wertheimer. (TJP)

Brazilian 'oleh' foils attack

Less than three months after Cpl. Marcelo Perez thwarted a stabbing attack at the Gush Etzion junction in the West Bank, the Brazilian immigrant has received an award. Having made aliya from Sao Paulo, at age 25, Peretz wasn't obligated to enlist, "but it was important for me to join the army," he told *The Jerusalem Post*. "I always thought about moving to Israel, and when my mother passed away four years ago I said to myself now is the time." (TJP)

VOLUNTEERING

(Bridges for Peace)



Called to stand with Israel

Christian volunteers in the Promised Land

BY ILSE POSSELT

The promise is ancient, spoken by Isaiah roughly 2,700 years ago. The day would come, the ancient Hebrew prophet pledged, when foreigners would come to Zion to stand with its people and build up its

walls (Isaiah 60:10). Today, well over two and a half millennia after the prophet penned God's promise, the prophecy sees its partial fulfillment in the hundreds of men, women and families from the nations who come to the Promised Land as volunteers.

Every year, Christians from Norway

to Namibia, America to Australia – and everywhere else in between – arrive in Israel as handymen, farmers, food packers, journalists, bookkeepers and general managers to serve in volunteer organizations like Bridges for Peace, Christian Friends of Israel, HaYovel and the International Christian Embassy

Volunteers unloading food boxes. (CFI)



Jerusalem and many others.

Some come for a few weeks or a month. Others commit for a number of years. Yet regardless of the organization with which they serve or the position in which they function, there is one deciding factor that unites them all: every volunteer – especially those who are in it for the long haul – chose to sacrifice the chance of a perfectly comfortable life in a seemingly safe home country and opted to forgo the promise of job security, financial stability and the familiarity of family and loved ones to sow their time, talent and effort to a people who are not their own in a nation located in one of the most hostile neighborhoods in the world, spending months and years working long hours for absolutely no pay.

From any logical perspective, spending a life – or even part thereof – as a volunteer in Israel hardly makes sense. What is it then that motivates Christians to choose this path? The answer, I learned, is a combination of three aspects: love for the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and for the people He calls His own; the yearning to form part of one of the Almighty's biggest plans currently unfolding in the world; and a calling to serve and support Israel and the Jewish people with unconditional love. This is the story of two such volunteers who answered God's call.

THIRTY YEARS OF LOVE

Cheryl Hauer's life is marked by two distinct turning points where God stepped in to alter the course of her path – radically, irreversibly and for her absolute good. The first was when she was born again. The second came years

later during her first trip to the Promised Land, when the Lord shared His love and steadfast commitment toward Israel with her – and gave her a taste of an incredible Hebraic heritage that was hers because of her relationship with Jesus.

The revelation, she remembers, infused everything she already believed with added life and vitality, and launched her on a path of sharing these wonderful truths and insights. Today, Hauer looks back on well over 30 years of teaching Believers about God's heart and plans for His people and Christians' largely unexplored Hebraic legacy. Twenty of those years were spent with Bridges for Peace. And for the past 10 years, Hauer and her husband, Steven, lived in the heart of the Promised Land, where she served as international development director at the organization's Jerusalem headquarters. Her tale is a testimony of unconditional love poured out over three decades, yielding to God, who promised that He would teach her to love Israel and the Jewish people with a heart that mirrored His own – if she would let Him.

MEETING THE FAMILY

"My husband and I came to the Lord in a dramatic, profound way when we were already in our twenties," Hauer explains. "I fell instantly, passionately in love with Him." The couple went into full-time Christian ministry almost immediately, launching what would eventually become an open home ministry. "It started with 24-hours-per-day, 7-days-a-week Christian child care in our home. Then we added a preschool and a crisis pregnancy center. We had 20 to 30 people at every meal. It was a very busy, very joyful place."

Hauer's life took another radical turn during a surprise trip to Israel. A friend had booked a tour, but did not want to go alone and offered to pay all Hauer's expenses to come along. The gift transformed her life. "As I prepared to go, I remember thinking, 'I'm going to see all the places where Jesus walked, talked, lived and breathed.' And I did. But in addition, the Lord continually drew me aside and pointed me backward to this incredible Hebraic heritage that was mine because of my relationship with Jesus, a heritage I never knew existed."

Her first taste of God's revelation came at Masada, the ruins of a 2,000-year-old fortress in the Judean Desert, where a handful of Hebrew warriors and their families formed the final Jewish stronghold against a Roman invasion. While standing at the edge of an ancient mikve (a bath used for ritual immersion), the group's Jewish-Israeli guide dropped a proverbial bombshell. "He spoke at length about ritual purity in Judaism," Hauer recalls. "Then he added, 'This is where you Christians get your ritual of baptism.'"

As the words and their implication sank in, Hauer stood dumbstruck, staring into the rocky hole that somehow represented a largely unknown part of her heritage as a Believer. For the first time she realized that many of the things she held as distinctively and exclusively Christian actually had much deeper, richer and more meaningful roots.

"Everywhere we went after that, at nearly every site we visited, the Lord drew me aside and pointed me back to the gem of insight from a

Hebraic heritage. I was blown away by the awareness of God being actively involved with mankind. As I walked the land, I felt like a bride whose bridegroom had taken her home to meet his family."

CELEBRATING ISRAEL

Hauer returned to the US, feeling like she was "born again – again." Yet her newfound revelation, she believed, also came with a responsibility. "The Bible became a living, breathing experience with one truth after the other leaping from the page. The incredible things God had revealed to me changed my life – and I wanted to share it with other Christians." Her solution was to put together a one-day program, called "Celebrate Israel," complete with the history of the ancient and modern state, God's plans and prophecies for the land and its people, craft projects, activities like traditional Jewish dances and a gourmet buffet offering the best of Israeli delicacies.

"I thought I would probably present it once, for the first group. But the next day, my phone rang off the hook.

Everybody wanted to attend a Celebrate Israel session." Hauer set to work immediately. She adapted the program, put together a team and spent the next several years traveling the Midwest of America, celebrating Israel with churches, Sunday schools, Bible schools and home school groups.

BUILDING BRIDGES

While Hauer worked passionately to bring an understanding of God's heart for Israel to Christians in America, it was her service with Bridges for Peace that ultimately brought her to the Promised Land as a volunteer. As she looked for resources while preparing the first Celebrate Israel program, someone put her in contact with the local Bridges for Peace representative. "When she explained the Bridges for Peace vision of building relationships between Jews and Christians, I wept, because I knew I was hearing the heart of God. That was it. I knew I wanted to be part of that, so I signed up as a local volunteer. A year later, Bridges for Peace asked me to come aboard and do the type of Israel education I had been doing – now on their behalf. Eventually, I came on staff as the national education director in the US and then the deputy national director, which is what I did for seven years – until I was invited to join the team in Jerusalem as the international development director."

Although Hauer had been to Israel numerous times at that point, the decision to pack up a whole life and move halfway around the world was not an easy one. "My husband and I both needed confirmation from the Lord. It took us about three months of prayer before we were certain." In February 2008, the Hauers arrived in Jerusalem for what would be nearly a decade of loving and serving the people of Israel in the Promised Land.

FRUIT OF LOVE

According to Hauer, the volunteers at Bridges for Peace work toward one main purpose: building relationships. Some



Packing food for the needy. (Bridges for Peace)



Assisting Ethiopian immigrants. (CFI)

see the organization's service as purely humanitarian aid through its food bank that feeds 22,000 Israelis every month, home repair service for Holocaust survivors, Feed a Child program, which provides meals and support to needy Israeli students or initiatives to help Jews from war-torn or poverty stricken countries immigrate to Israel. Others view its work as educational or activism through its news service, prayer updates and global information sessions. "While we do all these things," she clarifies, "they are merely tools to express the love of Christians to the Jewish people in a tangible way."

This continued outpouring of love, Hauer points out, has resulted in a transformation. "The attitude of the average Israeli today is profoundly different from what it was a decade ago. Back then, if a Jewish person found out I was a Christian, the atmosphere would become strained. The reason is simple. As a Christian, they no longer saw me as someone they could trust. Of course I understand their reaction perfectly. It is our history of persecution that taught

them to react that way."

Today, Hauer holds, the opposite is true. "Now, when Israelis find out I'm Christian, they want to shake my hand. The phrase I hear over and over again from Jews in this land is something along the lines of, 'We are coming to understand that Christians who believe in the Bible are the best friends Israel has.'"

That shift, she shares, did not happen in a vacuum or of its own accord. "It is the fruit of a flow of volunteers from everywhere around the world who continue to come and go and sacrifice to be here, who love the Jewish people with no ulterior motive, who have prayed for them and supported them, ran to bomb shelters as they ran to bomb shelters and chose to stay put when things got really rough. That has made the difference. We are here because we love the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, because we recognize His eternal love and covenant with the Jewish people and because we are committed to love what He loves – and He loves these people. We have made

the hard choices to leave behind what is familiar and sacrifice the comfortable because we see that His heart is about the restoration of Israel and the Jewish people, because we notice His plan unfolding in this land and we have a desire to be part of that something that is so much bigger than ourselves."

REAPING THE REWARDS

While volunteers typically arrive in the Promised Land eager to give, many feel that they are actually the ones on the receiving end of the blessings, says Hauer. "There is no way we can ever give proportionately to what we get in return. If my Christianity was at a two when I got here, it is now at about a 12. I ascribe that to the reality, vitality and energy of God's intimate involvement in the unfolding of the story of mankind that is so tangible in the land. Here, the Bible comes to life as you see prophecy fulfilled in everyday life.

"I was always taught that God is setting a stage for the end of days and that Christians were going to be the stars of that show. Now I know that

the starring role belongs to the Jewish people. Yet as Christians, we do have a crucial role to play. What God is busy with in Israel is not only about Jews or about Christians. It is about the redemption of all mankind. That is profound beyond my comprehension. And it still overwhelms me that He would want me to be part of His grand plan.”

Hauer admits that Israel is not always an easy place to live. Yet the crucial element that empowers volunteers with joy and perseverance is calling. “You have to know that you are here because God has called you, that you have a purpose and that you are accomplishing something for His kingdom. You have to know that you are here to bridge the gap between Jews and Christians, which, in my opinion, is the most important thing that God is currently busy with in this earth. That is what inspired me to give nearly 30 years of my life to Israel support and Jewish-Christian relations.”

Hauer recalls one particular incident at the start of her journey that set the course for the decades to come. “I remember returning from one of my first trips to Israel and crying out to the Lord, saying, ‘Oh God, how I love your people.’” God answered me so clearly. ‘No, you don’t. You have a crush on My people. But if you’ll stick with Me long enough, I will teach you how to love My people.’ And He has done that. God continues to teach me how to love so that I could be an expression of His love to Israel and the Jewish people.”

GRAFTED IN

Kevin Howard’s passion for Israel and its people started early on. Born again at age 13, the young man was fascinated by the stories of the great men of Scripture, like Abraham, Moses and David. “Beyond my love for Jesus, these were the heroes of my faith. And even at that young age, I understood that they were the ancestors of the Nation of Israel.”

The understanding solidified into a conviction a few years later, when guest speakers visited a teenaged Howard’s

church to explain the truth of the church’s connection to Israel and the Hebraic roots of Christianity. “This opened my eyes to the fact that the God I serve is the God of Israel, the God Who made covenant with the patriarchs – and their offspring. I realized that the promises of God to Israel were promises for those He made that covenant with and their descendants and that I, as a Christian, was grafted into that covenant, kind of like an adopted son.”

Today, four odd decades later, the young man whose passion for Israel was awakened through the testimonies of the Bible’s heroes of faith and whose commitment to stand with the Jewish people was born from an understanding of the covenant and promises made by the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, serve full-time on the executive management team of Christian Friends of Israel at the organization’s Jerusalem headquarters, alongside his wife, Stacey. Howard, who has a background of 30 years in broadcast media working for national American broadcast networks like CBS, NBC and ABC, is now Christian Friends of Israel’s director of technology, overseeing the ministry’s connectivity to the nations, including a radio and television program and print and electronic media. Stacey is the international and executive director.

THE PATH TO JERUSALEM

One of the main motivators that launched the Howard family on a path to Jerusalem was the search for truth. Howard’s parents-in-law, Ray and Sharon Sanders, founded Christian Friends of Israel in 1985 as a ministry to comfort and support the people of the Promised Land and to educate Christians around the globe about God’s plans for and through Israel. Five years after opening the doors of the ministry’s headquarters in the Israeli capital, the First Gulf War started – and Ray and Sharon found themselves in the midst of the flood of Scud missiles that Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein rained down on Israel.



A second-hand clothes center for new immigrants. (CFI)

“I was working for CBS at the time,” Howard recalls. “Each night I would listen to secular media reporting on the war. Yet the reports of what was happening did not match what I heard first-hand from my mother-in-law, who was on the ground in Jerusalem. The stories did not line up. The narrative that the world received about Israel was simply not the same as the reality. That is when I realized that secular media was filled with spin and anti-Israel rhetoric. And that is when my desire was birthed to find out the truth for myself.”

Howard visited Israel for the first time in 2004, and was captivated by the land, its people and the visible evidence of ancient promises fulfilled. After decades of exposure to the world media’s narrative around the Promised Land, he expected to arrive in “a blustering desert, torn apart by constant fighting and terror, where people ride camels instead of cars.” Instead, he found “modernity, a land rejuvenated, a land alive again, a land responding to the people of God returning after more than 2,000 years, as promised in Ezekiel 36 and 37.”



During the trip, Howard experienced the Almighty's tangible fingerprints in the miracle of the establishment of the modern State of Israel in 1948, "according to the prophecy of a nation being born in a day (Isaiah 66:8). It allowed me to see Israel as a people – and a place – with which God has faithfully kept His covenant. Jerusalem is the spot He chose for His Name to be forever (2 Chronicles 6:6) and He calls the people of Israel the apple of His eye (Zechariah 2:8). The proof of God's hand in the history and present day of this land and its people drew my heart."

The trip made a lasting impact. After 20-plus years in television broadcasting, Howard quit his job and enrolled in a theological school. "I wanted to do something with my gifts and talents that would have a purpose for God." Yet throughout his training, Israel remained on his heart. "I began to feel a call to this nation, to stand with the people against the constant flood of anti-Israel, anti-Zionist and ultimately antisemitic rhetoric in the media. Coming out of the secular broadcast industry, I wanted to be a voice that would offer the narrative that the world did not get to hear, a voice that would speak out in

truth as I saw and experienced it first hand."

Three years after Howard set foot in the Promised Land for the first time as a tourist, the family returned – this time as full-time volunteers with Christian Friends of Israel. Two years later, they went back to the US to serve in Christian Friends of Israel's American office. They made their way to Jerusalem again in the fall of 2014, and when Ray and Sharon retired in 2015, the Howards transitioned into their official leadership roles.

A GLOBAL AWAKENING

Christian Friends of Israel, Howard explains, is a hands-on ministry that serves the people of Israel in practical, tangible ways. Moreover, it is a vehicle of reconciliation that seeks to address Christianity's historic track-record of hurt and persecution against the Jewish people – from the Spanish Inquisition, to the Crusades, the pogroms in Russia and the Holocaust. Howard ascribes the phenomenon of Christian volunteers in Israel, of which Christian Friends of Israel forms part, to a global move of God that seems to follow in the wake of centuries of Christian teaching centered on replacement theology and anti-Semitism.

"It is an awakening, if you will, to the realization that the blessings of God flow to Christians through being grafted into His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – and thus Israel (Romans 8:16-32)." Moreover, he holds, volunteers are drawn to the demonstration of God's miraculous ability and creative nature so clearly evident in Israel's modern history. "He resurrected a people from Diaspora. It is like throwing a hand full of flour into the air, seeing the tiny particles scatter everywhere and then having these scattered specs suddenly be brought back into your hand. That is what God is doing – right in front of our eyes – in Israel. So as a Christian, a Gentile and a foreigner in the land, my faith is strengthened by the understanding that I worship the same

God as the Jewish people, the same God Who made promises to His people and remained utterly faithful to fulfill them – and the same God Who I can then trust to remain faithful to fulfill the promises He made to me."

CALLED TO ISRAEL

Despite all the theories, arguments and reasonings, Howard holds that there is one deciding factor when it comes to the choice to spend a life volunteering in Israel. It does, after all, go against everything in human nature to say goodbye to a home, loved ones and the prospect of earning a sustainable income. "We do it for one reason," he says, "because God called, even if it is to one of the most spiritually intense and difficult places on earth. We do it in answer to God saying, 'I need you to be there. I have something I want you to do.' One day, I want to be able to say, 'I have done what God has asked me to do. I have fulfilled the call He had on my life.' And that call is to stand with Israel." ♦



Helping out Holocaust survivors.
(Bridges for Peace)

HOLIDAY

Down to earth

*Tu Bishvat is about redemption
and connecting to God*



**That person is like a tree
planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither
– whatever they do prospers.**

(Psalm 1:3)

Border Police officers plant
a tree on Tu Bishvat. (Photos:
Marc Israel Sellem/The Jerusalem Post)



BY BENJAMIN GLATT

Tu Bishvat seems to come at quite a peculiar time. The New Year for the Tree, which is known in English as the “Jewish Arbor Day,” falls during January or February, this year being observed on January 31. The temperatures in Israel may be more mild than in most of Europe or North America, but it is still winter. It’s the ringing in of a new year that supposedly celebrates the tree when the trees themselves, however, are anything but celebrating.

In a sign of unbelievable faith, in the heart of the season of “lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding,” in the season farthest away from being appropriate to plant trees, the Jewish people decided to go out to the countryside and get their hands dirty in the hallowed soil.

But Tu Bishvat, which literally means the 15th of the Hebrew month of Shvat, isn’t just about trees, or their roots, their trunks, the branches or even the fruits.

Established as the cut-off date to determine which types of tithes must be applied to the produce, the holiday only took on its arboreal element in the late 20th century with the aliya of Rabbi Ze’ev Yaavetz, a Polish-born historian who at the age of 40 immigrated to Eretz Israel in 1887. He began his life in the Holy Land as a worker in the vineyards of Yehud, and during his time as a teacher in the community of Zichron Ya’acov, south of Haifa, he began taking out his students on Tu Bishvat to plant trees in the field, thus establishing the holiday tradition of arbor day, which continues until this day.

To help continue the unconventional tradition of planting trees on this day, every year the tree nurseries look to find the strongest and most capable saplings that they hope will be able to survive the rest of the harsh winter months, especially in the mountainous areas of the Pleasant Land.

Rabbi Yaavetz wrote in the quarterly *Haaretz* in 1890 that the purpose of establishing this custom was to develop an affection for the trees of the land, “which God had planted for our ancestors for us to be satiated and to enjoy their beauty, and therefore the school has to make this day a holiday, the day that was designated from ancient times in Israel for the new year for the trees.”

While the prophecy has yet to return to the Land of

Israel, the people sitting in this holy land can at least claim that they are the children of the prophets. This day is not just about planting trees or about trees in general, but it is about bringing back the days of Israel's glory, renewing "our days as of old." It is about the complete redemption. After being forced out of the land twice prior – once by the Babylonians, and then again by the Romans almost 2,000 years ago – the People of Israel were returning home, and will be staying here for good, just as Moses the Prophet said in Deuteronomy 30:5: "He will bring you to the land that belonged to your ancestors, and you will take possession of it. He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your ancestors."



A dried fruits vendor at the Mahaneh Yehuda shuk in Jerusalem.

The sign of the beginning of that process isn't anything other than the trees of Israel, which represents the physical prosperity of the country, beginning as a seed or a young sapling, and eventually becoming a full-grown tree producing delicious fruits. Tractate Sanhedrin 88A describes this as being the sign of the end of times nearing.

"And Rabbi Abba says: You have no more explicit manifestation of the end of days than this following phenomenon, as it is stated: 'But you, mountains of Israel, you shall give your branches, and yield your fruit to My people of Israel, for they will soon be coming' (Ezekiel 36:8). When produce will grow in abundance in Eretz Yisrael, it is an indication that the Messiah will be coming soon."

In chapter 56 of Mark Twain's famous book *The Innocents Abroad*, he describes the land's infertility to make sure that this barrenness was on the record.

"Of all the lands there are for dismal scenery, I think Palestine must be the prince. The hills are barren, they are dull of color, they are unpicturesque in shape. The valleys are unsightly deserts fringed with a feeble vegetation that has an expression about it of being sorrowful and despondent. The Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee sleep in the midst of a vast stretch of hill and plain wherein the eye rests upon no pleasant tint, no striking object, no soft picture dreaming in a purple haze or mottled with the shadows of the clouds. Every outline is harsh, every feature

is distinct, there is no perspective—distance works no enchantment here. It is a hopeless, dreary, heart-broken land.

"Small shreds and patches of it must be very beautiful in the full flush of spring, however, and all the more beautiful by contrast with the far-reaching desolation that surrounds them on every side. I would like much to see the fringes of the Jordan in spring-time, and Shechem, Esdraelon, Ajalon and the borders of Galilee—but even then these spots would seem mere toy gardens set at wide intervals in the waste of a limitless desolation."

The 1869 book would be the final chapter in the elongated story of the Land of Israel not being in the hands of those who knew her best and those who had proven their moral superiority, thus giving them the right to settle the land once again. Rabbi Yaavetz was connecting the people back to the Land of Israel, something that had been lost in the 2,000 years of

exile that preceded the Zionist age.

Also, the eating of dried fruit is a Tu Bishvat custom developed in the exile that remains popular in Israel, maybe to say that just as God took the dry bones and gave them life with our return to the Land of Israel, so too have we taken the dry fruit – which we ate in the exile during Tu Bishvat because it was winter and there was no real fresh fruit then – and have turned that dry fruit into orchards and gardens of fruit that grow in the revived Land of Israel throughout all the seasons.

And, now, living in this unbelievable age of abundance, the world must say thanks for all that there is and not take it for granted and disconnect from God. The fact that the land is promised to be a land "flowing with milk and honey" –

meaning that all the produce here will be full of flavor – is a very dangerous promise. It's a clear opening for the world to grow fat and kick at God: "Filled with food, they became heavy and sleek. They abandoned the God who made them and rejected the Rock their savior" (Deuteronomy 32:15).

Rather, the fact that God is able to commit such a promise, means he trusts that we will be able to manage with all the abundance that we have, to have the best material lives possible and to not lose any of the morality and godliness that characterizes the Jewish People. Just as the three fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, were able to lead godly and moral lives even with the masses of riches that they had obtained over the course of their lives.

Getting one's hands dirty and planting trees is the way to connect to God, finding him in every realm. In 1924, a rural Jewish community was established just a few miles east of the what is today the coastal city of Herzliya. At the inauguration ceremony for Magdiel, which is now a neighborhood in Hod Hasharon, Chief Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hachohen Kook was invited to take part in a tree-planting ceremony.

"And how pleasant it is for me to tell at every opportunity what I once heard from the great Rabbi [Kook], who I accompanied to the village of Magdiel to plant a forest. When they handed the sapling over to the rabbi, I saw that his face was shining like a torch of fire, and his whole body was burning like holy fire, and with holy fear he dug the hole with his holy hands and put the sapling in it, as his lips were muttering thanks to God for granting him the right to plant a tree in the Holy Land," wrote Rabbi Zev Gold in his book *Gold of the Land*.

When the two were on the way back to Jerusalem, Rabbi Gold asked his teacher why he was so excited about planting a tree.

It says in Deuteronomy 13:4 "You shall walk after the Lord your God... and hold fast to him," the chief rabbi reminded his disciple. But how can man – made of flesh and blood – walk after God, and how is it that flesh and blood can ascend to the heavens and cling to a "consuming fire"? God is incorporeal, he has no body, he never had one and he never will, as the principles of faith declare that "he has no semblance of a body nor is he corporeal – nor has his holiness any comparison," he said.

"Rather from the beginning of the creation of the world, the first thing that God did was plant, as it says in Genesis 2:8: 'Now the Lord God had planted a garden. So, too when Israel came to the land, it was commanded to occupy itself with planting trees ['When you enter the land and plant any kind of fruit tree,' Leviticus 19:23]," Rabbi Gold retells the story. "Here, when I took the sapling in my hand, and went to plant the tree on the holy land, I could feel that at this moment that I was clinging to God, to the Shekhina [divine presence], which is consuming fire, and all my limbs were trembling." ♦

Trees in Israel giving an abundance of fruit is the sign that the Messiah is near, the Talmud says.

