

May 2013

Dear Chavera,



Next week we celebrate Shavuot, which commemorates the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai. On this festival it is customary to read from The Book of Ruth, which describes the special bond shared by Ruth and Naomi and focuses on the values of loyalty and loving kindness. Just like Ruth and Naomi, WIZO members worldwide are united in the bonds of sisterhood and in their mission to help those less fortunate in Israeli society.

Food plays an important role in all Jewish holidays. Cheesecake has become as synonymous with Shavuot as donuts have with Hanukkah. Did you know that it was invented by the ancient Greeks? *In The evolution of the cheesecake* take a trip through history and discover how this humble food has evolved into a gourmet dessert. There is nothing like a home baked cheesecake to dazzle your guests and we have included two delicious recipes. *Israeli cheese goes artisanal* focuses on an Israeli cottage industry that has flourished in recent years. Unique artisanal cheeses are now being produced by skilled cheese makers in small boutique dairies across the country and they are gaining a worldwide reputation.

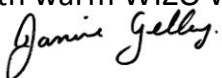
Like her namesake, newly elected Knesset member, Dr. Ruth Calderon is a remarkable woman. She is a Talmudic scholar whose life's quest has been to make Jewish religious texts accessible to all. At ALMA, a secular Beit Midrash institution, which she helped found in the heart of Tel Aviv's avant-garde Shenkin Street area, she initiated the custom of an all night study session (based on the Tikkun Leil Shavuot learning sessions that are a staple in religious circles).

In Brand Israel hits the skies advocating on behalf of Israel takes on a new look with EIAl crew volunteering as grassroots ambassadors. Another passionate advocate for Israel is our guest writer, media specialist Rolene Marks. The eternal optimist, she views life in Israel through rose-colored glasses as is evident in her essay *65 Reasons why Israel is so Fabulous*.

I hope that the contents of this issue of the Lapid newsletter will inform and inspire you.

Wishing you and your families a Chag Sameach.

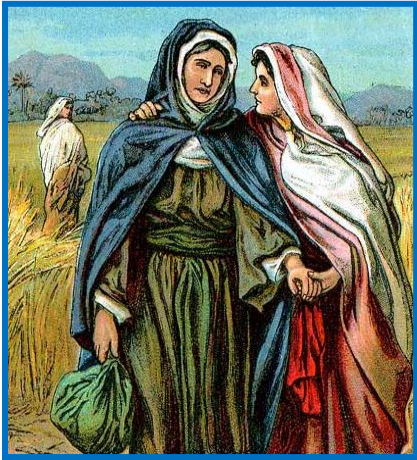
With warm WIZO wishes,



Chairperson, Organization and Tourism Division
World WIZO

HOLIDAYS - SHAVUOT

Megillat Ruth - Women's empowerment and Sisterhood exemplified



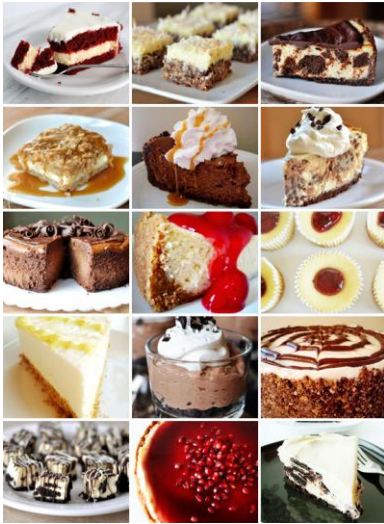
The Book of Ruth is uniquely a feminist tale, the story of two brave and independent women struggling for survival in a patriarchal world. Unlike most Hebrew Scriptures, this narrative speaks with a "woman's" voice and the female protagonists, Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi occupy center stage. The Book of Ruth can be viewed as a model of women's empowerment. Despite having experience death, hardship, danger and insecurity Ruth and Naomi are role models of independent women, who have taken charge of their own destiny, and risked bold decisions to work out their own survival in the midst of that which is foreign, hostile and unknown. This is also a tale about friendship and the unbreakable bond of sisterhood between the young and compassionate Ruth, and the old and wise Naomi.

Written in the late fifth century B.C.E the Book of Ruth still has much to teach us in the 21st Century about love, loyalty, and extraordinary acts of kindness or "hesed". "Hesed" is reflected by the compassion, loving kindness, charitable and selfless acts of Ruth that transform Naomi's life from one of empty despair to a fulfilled existence full of blessings. Ruth, in her modesty of nature, her dignity, and her grand deeds, demonstrates for us what a true friend, a true daughter; a true woman is made of. Now and forever, Ruth will represent and personify nobility, humility, and loving kindness. The Book of Ruth is about the commanding voice of love and selflessness and teaches us that all life's hardships and obstacles can be overcome through love and through kindness.

The act of stepping outside of one's own experience and comfort zone and being willing and able to take on the suffering of the other is at the core of Judaism. It is what differentiates Judaism from Moab, where people do not give bread to hungry strangers passing through the desert. Judaism teaches us to look at the other person's journey, not just our own, and see where a person needs lifting, needs companionship, needs help, and to take action on the other's behalf.

Just like Ruth and Naomi, WIZO women are strong and capable; united in the bonds of sisterhood, and dedicated to helping the "other", those most vulnerable in Israeli society. Nobody put it more aptly than Former British Prime Minister, the late Margaret Thatcher when she said *"In politics, if you want anything said, ask a man. If you want anything done, ask a woman."* As WIZO wonder women you have the ability to bring about positive change and make a difference in the lives of thousands of children, youth and women in Israel, and by doing so you are placing yourselves at the top of the world's real rich list.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE CHEESECAKE



Shavuot, like most Jewish holidays, has a food component. On Shavuot it is customary to eat dairy products and what better opportunity than this to indulge in a favorite dessert – CHEESECAKE!

Over the centuries the cheesecake has evolved from an energy food to a gourmet dessert.

Many believe that cheesecake originated as a New York City delicacy somewhere around the 20th century. History shows that the first recorded mention of cheesecake was by the Greeks in 776 B.C.E. on the island of Samos in the Aegean Sea. They created cheesecakes by combining, wheat flour, honey and cheese that had been pounded to a paste-like and smooth consistency. The mixture was then formed into cakes, baked, cooled and fed to the athletes in the first Olympic Games in 776 BCE, to provide them with the energy they needed for rigorous competitions.

In no time the Greek cheesecake became a popular delicacy that was the precursor to the wedding cake. It was customary for the Greek bride to prepare and serve mini cheesecakes to the groom's friends – this came to be known as the wedding cake. In time the Romans defeated the Greeks and over the centuries continued their conquest of Europe and the British Isles spreading their culture which included the cheesecake.

According to the revered cookbook writer, Claudia Roden, in her encyclopedic *The Book of Jewish Food* Jews started making cheesecake in Central and Eastern Europe where it was popular in both Jewish and non-Jewish cuisines around the 18th-19th centuries.

It was not until Jews migrated to America, bringing their recipes and affinity for cheesecake with them, that the dish took on a specifically Jewish identity. And it was not until the 20th century that New York-style cheesecake emerged. In 1872, William Lawrence, a dairy man in upstate New York combined cream with milk to create an ultra rich cheese. By the late 19th century the product was being produced and distributed under the name Philadelphia Brand cream cheese, and was primed to take homemade curd cheese's place in American Jewish kitchens.

The flour traditionally used for the crust was substituted with cookie crumbs and graham cracker crumbs. Unlike its European ancestors, this new cheesecake was sweet, slightly dense and smooth, rather than textured. The New York-style cheesecake was popularized in famous non-kosher New York delis such as Reuben's, Lindy's. Non-Jews ate cheesecake as avidly as Jews, vicariously taking part in the New York-Jewish experience.

Jewish communities throughout the West have adapted the recipe to suit local ingredients and tastes. Some communities even borrowed from Christian traditions, such as Italian Easter cheesecake, which is made with citrus rind and fragrant orange blossom water and is now served in Italy for Shavuot. Israelis eat a light and creamy mousse like cheesecake made with *gvina livana*, or white soft cheese. Cheesecakes in France are most often made with fresh farmer's cheese or savory goat cheese, while Greek cheesecake recipes call for feta or for Greek yogurt.

The cake exists in a number of forms, including sweet, savory, custard, mousse and even pancake like, and is made from a myriad of soft cheeses, including ricotta, mascarpone, farmer's cheese and cream cheese, to name only a few. Even though the ingredients and the process of baking have evolved, we still owe this divine treat to the Greeks. Cheesecake has lived for years and yet it still continues to prosper – it is an ancient delight that will never go out of style no matter how old it is; and remains a classic Jewish dessert on the Shavuot table.

QUICK AND EASY 4-LAYERED CHEESECAKE

Recipe courtesy of Riki Kaldes, Chairperson, Division of Organization and WIZO Centers, WIZO Israel

Base:

Crush 20 Petit Beurre (Marie biscuits) + 50gr butter + 1/2 cup blanched almonds in food processor (In place of almonds you can add 2 tablespoons cocoa + 2 tablespoons coconut). Spread on base of greased 26cm springform tin.

Filling: (Mix all ingredients together, **do not** beat the eggs separately)

2nd layer:

500gr 9% white cheese

3/4 cup sugar

3 eggs

2 packets vanilla sugar (10gr each)

Pour over base and bake at 180 C until the edges are golden. Leave to cool.

3rd layer:

600ml sour cream

1/4 cup sugar

2 packets vanilla sugar

Mix together and spread over the cooled cake. Chill in fridge for minimum of 2 hours until completely set.

4th layer:

250ml sweet whipping cream

One packet instant vanilla pudding.

Whip together and spread over the sour cream topping.



AVIVA'S LEMON CHEESECAKE

Recipe courtesy of Aviva, conditor and cook at the WIZO Shaviv Day Care Center in Herzliya, sponsored by WIZO Finland.

Base:

3 Eggs separated

3/4 cup sugar

3/4 cup flour

Tablespoon lemon juice

Tablespoon oil

Pinch salt

Grated lemon rind

Tablespoon brandy

Beat the egg whites and sugar until stiff. In a separate bowl mix the egg yolks, oil, lemon juice, brandy, lemon rind and salt until well blended. Fold in the stiffened egg whites and gradually add the flour. Pour into a greased 28cm springform tin and bake at 170 -180C for 15-20 minutes. Allow to cool.

Cheese filling:

6 eggs separated

1 1/2 cups sugar

1 1/2 cups flour

750gr white cheese (or cream cheese)

3 tablespoons cornstarch

3 tablespoons vanilla pudding

Lemon rind

Beat the egg whites and one cup of sugar until stiff. In a separate bowl mix the cheese, egg yolks, cornstarch, vanilla pudding, lemon rind and remaining 1/2 cup sugar until well blended. Fold in the stiffened egg whites and spread the mixture over the base. Bake at 180C for 40-50 minutes until crust is golden and firm to the touch. Allow to cool.

Topping:

Beat together 250ml sweet whipping cream and 2 tablespoons sugar. Spread over the cooled cake. Garnish with strawberries or grated chocolate.

DISCOVER ISRAEL

Israeli cheese goes artisanal

The last thing one would expect is to find the Milky Way in the furthest western reaches of Israel's Negev Desert. But here, small family homesteads are flourishing and with them an artisanal cheese-making industry.

David Ben Gurion, Israel's first prime minister believed that "It is in the Negev that the creativity and pioneer vigor of Israel shall be tested." Today this is proving to be truer than ever as the ancient Nabatean spice route is being revitalized with wine and cheese makers, and farmers producing amazing hand-crafted goods, despite the harsh desert climate. In the mid 1990's the Israeli government launched the "Wine Route" project in order to halt Bedouin illegal squatting on State land and secure a Jewish continuum of familial agritourism farms. These farmsteads serve as the economic backbone of the Negev, strengthening the area and fueling financial and social growth. The phenomenon of lone family farms or ranches, *havot bodedim* in Hebrew, is not entirely new to the Negev landscape. Already in the 1950's the government allocated land for the establishment of one-family establishments, the most well-known being Ariel Sharon's Sycamore Ranch.



The Negev is one of the few places where the pioneering spirit thrives in modern Israel. But the translation of pioneering is different today; it's more about self-fulfillment. People feel they really are doing something meaningful — making the desert bloom, building their houses on the border of Egypt, struggling with nature, distance and economic hardship.

Dror and Sarah Friede are an embodiment of this pioneering spirit. They have lived in the tiny community of Ezuz, in the furthest western reaches of Israel's Negev Desert on the Egyptian border for more than 30 years. Dror tends to about 100 goats, while Sarah makes yogurt and cheese. They sell these freshly made dairy products in their shop, located in a converted Ottoman-era railroad car. Sarah, a native of Kenya, says that their desert farm in Ezuz, with its palm- and acacia -covered veranda overlooking the Sinai, reminds her of Africa. Just 80 kilometers from their farm stands Mt. Sinai, where Moses delivered the Ten Commandments.

The Friedes' good friends Daniel and Anat Kornmehl live about 50 kilometers away, just south of Sde Boker— home of David Ben-Gurion, who dreamed of making the desert bloom. Daniel and Anat herd goats on land leased from the

government, and their Kornmehl Farm, located next to the ruins of an ancient farm from the Middle Bronze period, is a rustic hilltop retreat with a 360-degree view across the desert. The Kornmehls produce a variety of French gourmet kosher cheeses in their factory which is housed in a mobile cooling container. They also operate a charming outdoor dairy restaurant.

They are considered by many chefs to be the finest makers of goat's cheese in Israel. Their products include everything from a Camembert-type goat cheese wrapped in grape leaves to a delicious hard Alpine-like cheese called Adi, named after one of their goats. The Kornmehls were inspired to become cheese makers after being introduced to the legendary Jerusalem cheese maker, Shay Seltzer, many years ago. When Seltzer offered to teach Daniel



cheese-making, he accepted, staying for several months. After opening a dairy near Latrun in 1995 the Kornmehls moved to the south. They looked at various sites until they came to the Negev, with some assistance from the government. Since industrial farming is not their style they decided to keep the business small and to stick to artisanal

cheese-making. They were amongst the first people to answer the call to create cottage industries in the Negev and chose the location because it was clear that the area once sustained a farm and that it was a thriving locale. The Kornmehls are currently on a yearlong sabbatical with their four kids in Australia, where they're educating Aussies on the wonders of hard goat's cheeses.

http://www.kornmehl.co.il/?page_id=20

Naot Goat Farm is a solitary farm nestled between Road 40 and the wide expanse of the Negev Desert. Looking to escape the congestion and hectic lifestyle of central Israel the Nachimov family moved there in 2003. They have a herd of 150-plus goats and produce yogurts and cheeses. These are mild yet flavorful; refined and expertly made, from their hard Nitzan cheese to the soft Tzfatit (mildly salted white cheese) scented with black cumin, sundried tomato and garlic, sumac, or sesame. In addition to the active farm they also provide luxurious guest accommodation with breathtaking views of the Negev desert.

<http://www.naotfarm.co.il/tour-israel.htm>

The extra-dry Negev isn't an ideal place to start a dairy farm but driven by a pioneering spirit these boutique cheese makers have converted the Zionist vision of "making the desert bloom" into a reality.

THE SUCCESSFUL JEWISH WOMAN

MK Dr. Ruth Calderon

She brought Israelis to the Talmud; can she bring its wisdom to the Knesset?



Earlier this year incoming Knesset member Dr. Ruth Calderon delivered a moving inaugural speech in the Knesset plenum, which captivated her fellow parliamentarians and left a lasting impression. The new MK, from the Yesh Atid faction, who also holds a doctorate in Talmud, stood on the podium holding a volume of the Talmud and described just how much the study of Gemara (Aramaic name for the Talmud) had changed her life. She did not go into unnecessary detail nor did she speak in the short, fragmented style usually associated with Knesset members. Hers was a different type of speech: welcoming, reflecting, wondering and intriguing. She simply opened the Talmud and studied a midrash aggadah, a little story from the Talmud, together with her fellow MKs in the Knesset.

It is not everyday that the Talmud is brought to the Knesset and certainly not by a woman. Dr. Calderon is not just a Talmudic scholar, she is also an experienced professional and when she described the dramatic moment of the Midrash, the Knesset seemed to hold its collective breath. It was no coincidence that within two days, her maiden speech which included a heartfelt and gracious plea for the widespread study of Jewish and Hebrew texts as the basis for a new Hebrew culture, became an Internet sensation, with 150,000 viewings on YouTube.

Dr. Ruth Calderon was born in Tel Aviv in 1961 to a Sephardic father who immigrated to Israel from Bulgaria and an Ashkenazi mother originally from Germany. She earned a BA at Oranim Academic College and the University of Haifa, and went on to earn her MA and Ph.D. degrees in Talmud from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Calderon is a ground-breaking leader in the secular study of sacred texts in Israel. She co-founded the egalitarian, pluralistic Beit Midrash Elul in Jerusalem in 1989, and in 1996 founded Alma, which seeks to acquaint secular Israelis with Hebrew culture. She was awarded the Avi Chai Prize for her efforts to promote the Jewish bookshelf and strengthen Israeli-Jewish identity. She also hosted a TV show on Channel 2 that invited guests to discuss classic and modern Jewish texts.

In 2012 Calderon joined the new Yesh Atid party, and was placed thirteenth on the party's list for the 2013 elections. She subsequently became a Knesset member after the party won 19 seats.

Calderon has a great love of Torah and Talmud that she hopes to share with all Jews, including those, like herself, who are not observant, and those who live in the Diaspora. In an interview the press she affirmed: "For me, Jews who live outside of Israel are necessary partners in building the Jewish state. It's the Jewish state, not the Israeli Jewish state. I want to hear their voice, take them seriously, and make this a place they're proud of".

When asked about why she decided to enter politics, she answered: "I was very frustrated by the situation of the Jewish Renewal Movement in Israel, which was growing spiritually, but suffers from a lack of budget and resources. I thought that, until we have a voice in the political world, there would be no solution. I see myself as a representative of secular Jews. I'm not part of [the Conservative or Reform movements] and I don't think it's a good system. I want to represent anybody – even Orthodox people – that believes Judaism should be open and serious.

This 19th Knesset has a record high number of women and religious people. When asked how she thinks this will affect the way it functions and the kinds of changes it brings Calderon responded "This is just a stop on the way to full equality in representation for women. We have a long way to go. I think that we will see greater sensitivity to women's issues, and that we have a chance to see more creative, softer ways of thinking. There will be more compromise and less arguing because of the new women and new MKs in general".

And when a Talmud lesson from the heart becomes an internet phenomenon, it seems that rather interesting possibilities lie ahead for the Jewish state. With her proven ability to engage people both in Israel and in the Diaspora, Dr. Ruth Calderon may just be laying the groundwork for a textual revolution—one with the potential to transform not just the Israeli political status quo, but also the way that Jews around the world relate to sacred texts, and to each other.

Here is the **YouTube** link <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S8nNpTf7tNok> to Ruth Calderon's inaugural Knesset speech with English subtitles.

ISRAEL TOUCH

Brand Israel hits the skies

A new initiative places EL AL pilots and flight attendants at the forefront of Israeli diplomacy.



Imagine a different kind of Israel program. This one features a wide range of Israeli citizens who share their own stories about Israel and all of them work for the country's national airline. The Blue and White EL AL Ambassadors program, the brainchild of El Al CEO Eliezer Shkedy, a former IDF Air Force Commander, was launched in November 2011. The program was created by El Al Airlines, in partnership with the Jewish Agency for Israel, the Foreign Ministry and StandWithUs, an Israel advocacy group. This initiative is the first time in Israeli history that the management of a private sector corporation has decided to take on an active roll in Israeli Advocacy.

The program aims to put to use El Al personnel, some of Israel's most universally respected and trusted citizens, to take part in speaking engagements and host meetings about Israel at Jewish Community Centers, Federations and university campuses. In the initial stage the program was launched in the airline's three North American gateways, New York, Toronto and Los Angeles. Following on the success of North American teams have also taken on Public Diplomacy assignments in London and Hong Kong. All of the participants give up their free time on layovers, and their assistance is on a voluntary basis. They undergo a three-month course training them in public speaking and current affairs in order to prepare them for their role as spokespeople who will advocate on behalf of Israel. On their public diplomacy missions the El Al ambassadors hope to dispel popular, conflict-driven media narratives of Israel with a picture of the Jewish state as it really is—a diverse, open and globally-connected society with a vibrant democracy and an economy that is producing innovations critical to the future of technology and medicine.

Bringing a human face to Israel beyond-the-headlines

The idea behind this project is to counteract the negative images of Israel in the news with the personal stories and faces of El Al pilots and flight attendants. Elizer Shkedy believes that his staff can impact public opinion simply by talking about their "normal lives in Israel", without mentioning the Arab-Israeli conflict.



Alon Futterman, the Jewish Agency's shlichut (emissary) development director and director of the El Al Ambassadors program said, "This project is so unique because of the people-to-people aspect. We believe we need to use our most engaging, interesting and worldly people to share the incredible story of modern Israel and, once again, connect with Jews around the world. We need to empower Diaspora Jews as our advocates at the grassroots level, and who better to inspire them than Israel's top pilots and El Al?"

There are enough people, especially diplomats and Israeli activists, who come and explain other sides of the conflict, but there's not enough discussion about the sides of Israel that not everyone knows about," according to Futterman.

The Blue and White Ambassadors come from all parts of the El Al workforce, and represent and reflect the diversity of Israeli society, including Druze, gay people, university students, new immigrants and others. Daniel Saadon, Vice President of El Al's North and Central America operations described the participants as "the civilian wings of Israel" and for all their superficial differences, these passionate volunteers all share the common desire to speak out for Israel.

When interviewed by the JTA (Jewish Telegraphic Agency) one of the participants, a newly married Druze flight attendant said that the program was an opportunity to share a unique perspective. "You talk to people from around the world and you get to see how they see Israel, how local press covers Israel. They have a narrow perspective, and we have an opportunity to show something personal, private and human. You get a larger perspective from the air."

The program has been received positively. At an event at UCLA, an audience comprised of students and community members appreciated the opportunity to meet these Israeli world-travelers. "It was interesting to hear the perspectives of people whose job is to represent Israel and hear about their daily lives and

travels around the world," said Tal Lerner, a senior who is active in Bruins for Israel, the premier pro-Israel group at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Futterman, the Jewish agency emissary said "People who walk into the event are kind of curious. When they start hearing the stories and meeting the people, there's something about this connection and the framework that we've created that draws people in. Then that curiosity turns into pleasure, and we're sure that it's going to continue that way."

Saadon and the entire El Al crew are happy to be achieving the goal of bringing the real Israel to people across the globe. "We're all making a contribution bringing Israel closer to the heart of people around the world"

The El Al advocacy program is offered to the public free of charge. Organizers who want to schedule an event can contact the Consulate General of Israel in New York or contact Alon Futterman at the Jewish Agency by emailing him at alonfu@jafi.org. We encourage you all to take advantage of this wonderful initiative which can contribute greatly to your advocacy efforts.

El Al ambassadors meet WIZO

El Al ambassadors will be addressing a WIZO members' forum in London in June. Hopefully a similar event will also take place in Leeds in June/July (the date has yet to be confirmed).

65 Reasons why Israel is so fabulous....

by Rolene Marks

Happy 65th Birthday Israel and may we just say that you have never looked so fabulous! You are becoming more attractive as you age and this year as we celebrate a milestone year; let us look at some of the things that make you as special as you are.



65. **Israeli "chutzpah"** - there is nothing quite like it in the world. Plucky for your size, Ms Israel, you never take no for an answer.

64. **Fantastic Israeli summer** - yes it is hot but it brings Israelis out of their winter hibernation and the beaches are dotted with sun worshippers. And dogs.

63. **Israel is pet friendly** - Tel Aviv has parks, a beach and even restaurants have a "Dogs Allowed" policy. Where else can Fluffy chill and drink water while his or her owners' network and catch up on the latest news.

62. **Coffee Shop Networking** - some of Israel's best business deals are done in her coffee shops. Israeli's are very particular about their coffee and with Java like this; it is easy to see why some of Israel's greatest deals are clinched over a cuppa coffee.

61. **Bakeries to die for** - forget the threats posed by Hamas and Hizbullah - the greatest threat to Israeli society are the calories provided by our fantastic and diverse bakeries.

60. **Incredible diversity** - over 82 different kinds of ethnic communities call Israel home. On any given day you can bump into several of them. It adds colour and life to our wonderful mosaic of people.

59. **Cities with very distinct personalities** - Israel's cities each have very distinct personalities. Jerusalem appeals to our spiritual side and one can be forgiven for displaying signs of "Jerusalem syndrome" while Tel Aviv throbs with energy and excitement and other cities like Haifa or Safed are more laid back or speak of the esoteric...

58. **Where ancient meets modern** - Where else can you walk in the same footprints as King David, Jesus or the prophets and at the same time marvel at modern architectural buildings like the Azrieli Towers with their three distinct shapes in Tel Aviv?

57. **The ingathering of exiles** - Over the last 65 years, Israel has gathered in Jews living in exile from all over the world, doing her best to offer a sanctuary and safe haven. Her remarkable achievements in many fields have made Israel a sought after destination for Jews in addition to Zionist ideology.

56. **Size does count** - Israel is a tiny country, in fact one can barely see her on a map but the energy that is contained in this tiny space is not relative to her size, Israel has achieved disproportionately. The statistics are impressive! More academic papers published than any other country, more patents registered than any country, and many more.

55. **A start up nation** - Israel has definitely learnt that necessity is the mother of all invention. When you are under permanent threat, the best thing you can be is innovative. As a result of our army service we have learnt to be super inventive, we have absorbed so many cultures that have brought their own intellectual and creative strength and we are a people who thirst for knowledge. Don't take my word for it - read the book!

54. **A country filled with children** - children are Israel's national treasure. They are our greatest hope for our future and as a result are nurtured, adored and invested in. But is not just our children that matter – Israeli NGO Save a Child's Heart has been bringing children from Africa, Iraq, the Palestinian Territories and other Arab countries, some who are hostile to Israel, to the country for life saving heart surgery.

53. **Education Nation** - Did you know that Israel is the second most educated nation in the world? I guess we really are the people of the book.

52. **People of the Book** - This is the land of the Bible and this holy book is studied, remembered and pored over. Since ancient times until today, the bible is revealing more and more of its hidden secrets.

51. **Army of volunteers** - There are so many incredible organisations for people to join up as volunteers. My choice is WIZO! So just do.....something!

50. **A healthy respect for animals** - There is another community that is a huge part of Israeli society. Feral cats. These felines enjoy a purrrrrfectly relaxed life, patrolling the streets and keeping a careful eye out for vermin. They are the epitome of catitude!

49. **Where everybody knows your name** - and they are always glad you came - Israelis are a curious bunch. We love to know more about you and where you come from. Of course we will also poke into your personal business and offer unsolicited advice. Hey we are Mishpacha! Maybe you know someone we know in your area and then Jewish geography takes over. This really impedes gossip but we are always glad you came.

48. **Unsolicited advice** - Need legal or tax advice? How about medical or parenting advice? No? Doesn't matter, we will give it to you anyway. Unsolicited advice is our way of showing we care. And demonstrating our fantastic ability to access useful information at any time.

47. **Hidden gems** – you can turn a street corner and disappear into an Aladdin's cave, hidden restaurant or stumble upon an ancient archaeological relic.

46. **An army for the people** - The brave men and women who make up Israel's Defence Forces. On land, sea and in the air, this army made up of all her citizens keeps a watchful eye over our country. They are the defenders of our freedom and our safety. We are always grateful for their presence. Despite fierce criticism from Israel's detractors they live up to their impeccable Code of Ethics that many western armies are modelled on.

45. **Seasonal eating** - You can tell the seasons apart just by observing supermarket shelves. If it is summer, an abundance of exotic fruits abound, if it is spring, Oznei Haman (Hamentaschen or Haman's Ears) signal that it is Purim and time for the weather to warm up. Fall/Autumn is heralded by Crembo, delicious mounds of chocolate covered goo and winter is the season for donuts or sufganiyot. As we count the nights of Chanukah, so we also count the mounting calories from these delicious oil enriched delicacies.

44. **Eating as an art form** - Food is central to Israeli culture. No matter what the situation is or the mood, everything can be solved over some Hummus. Or gefilte fish. Or anything from the kaleidoscope of cultures that form the Israeli palate. We do love our food. We like it fresh, simple and in abundance. B'teavon!

43. **The National Sport** - Forget footballs or basketball - arguing is the national sport and all Israelis could qualify as Olympic champions. It is a simple question of mathematics: Two Israelis = 4 opinions. No subject is off limits and one can have as many players as possible. Everybody, no matter what your skill level is can join in.

42. **A free press** - The purpose of the press in a democracy is to shine a light on all those dark corners and expose any inefficiency committed by the government. The Israeli press are great at doing this so much that they are often criticised for being anti-Israel. Freedom House, an NGO that monitors democracy and freedom indices across the world rated the Israeli press as free, democratic and open stating in their report that the media is "vibrant and independent and freely criticize government policy."

41. **The Rainbow Nation** - Israel proudly recognises the rights of her Gay citizens. Gay rights in Israel are considered to be the most progressive in the Middle East and Asia and the Gay Rights Parade in Tel Aviv is one of the most anticipated dates in the annual event calendar and enjoys an enormous amount of support.

40. **Everyone is family** - This means that everybody has a right to meddle in your business. But they also have a right to worry about you, fuss over you, and make sure you are eating/drinking enough. And make sure that you are wearing a sweater just in case THEY feel cold!

39. **Don't sweat the small stuff** - Really is it worth worrying over insignificant issues when there are far greater things to worry about like our neighbours in the North and South, Iran and just how much weight we will gain over the Chagim? It is all small "Stuff". I know we are Jewish and worrying like over feeding is in our genes but sometimes you just have to prioritise and not sweat it. Besides, the summer weather makes you work up enough of a shvitz.

38. **In times of strife** - We are all family right? This is so evident in times of strife. When we are under threat or in a state of security escalation or war, there is no more cohesive, tight knit and united nation than Israel.

37. **And in time of remembrance** - There are sacred days when we are united in grief and remembrance. Sirens wail their mournful cry as we remember our 6 million heroes and martyrs who perished in the Holocaust. And we remember those who paid the ultimate price in defence of our country in Israel's wars and military campaign as well as victims of terror attacks.

36. **A reason to celebrate!** - Happy 65th Birthday Israel! We have a lot to celebrate! Achievements beyond our wildest dreams in so many areas and the triumph of our plucky little state against all those who hope for her failure. L'Chaim Israel - to life!

35. **Punching above our weight** - For a teeny country, Israel punches above her weight. Nearly always the first to respond to any kind of trauma or natural disaster around the world, Israel doesn't let size impede her in any way. Israel has even offered help to countries she has no diplomatic ties or hostile relations with. Now that packs a punch!

34. **Green is the hot new colour** - It is no secret that Israel is a leader in cutting edge technology. This also includes environmental or "green" technology. A leader is sewage recycling, water purification and concentrated efforts to encourage people to recycle and lessen their carbon footprints, makes environmental issues an important priority.

33. **Hebrew speaks Hebrew** - Hebrew is an ancient language that has been revived with the birth of the new state. With the influx of Olim, some interesting hybrids that include hebrench, hebranich, heblish, hebrussion and hebritalian amongst others.

32. **Democracy at its best** - Elections in Israel bring with them much excitement. And a steady raise in blood pressure. But it is democracy at its best. All facets of Israeli society are represented, despite what some may say and results are almost always surprising. The 2013 elections put new party, Yesh Atid firmly on the map - surprising even them! Viva la democracy!

31. **The "cottage" revolution** - The humble tub of "cottage" is the little dairy product that could. An essential part of the Israeli diet, the rising cost of "cottage" inspired a revolution for social justice in the summer of 2011 and one could hardly pass a park without the ubiquitous protest tents. Viva la revolution!

30. **A very Nobel people** - We have already discussed that Israel punches above its weight but did you know that she has a disproportionate amount of Nobel laureates in fields that include literature, science, medicine and peace? Now that is worth raising a glass to!

29. **When in doubt sing** - Israelis love to sing. In the car, in the shower, in the post office and in the middle of the mall. Hey why not?

28. **Watch us on TV** - Some of your favourite TV shows are based on shows created in Israel The award winning "Homeland" and "In Treatment" are just two of Israel's stellar small screen offerings.

27. **No censorship (within reason)** - Most radio stations around the world steer clear of dropping F bombs. In Israel you can enjoy your morning radio with a liberal smattering of profanity. The F word has little or no impact here. Just don't swear in Hebrew - now THAT is disrespectful!

26. **Museums** - You can lose yourself in a myriad of different kinds of museums. From the historical to art, to our Zionist history and honouring our precious lost, Israel offers something that appeals to everyone no matter what your interest is.

25. **Protecting the endangered** - Israel is home to no less than 25 special programmes aimed at protecting endangered wildlife. Here, rhinoceros who are hunted all over the world thrive in breeding programmes, endangered birds and other threatened species are cared for and under stress free conditions, happily multiply.

24. **A nation filled with Jewish mothers** - Everyone's a Jewish mother. Don't be surprised if a total stranger offers you something to drink in the blistering heat or something small (okay so we all suffer from Jewish woman's gene to overfeed) to nibble on.

23. **Living by the Jewish calendar** - You can always tell which Chag, national holiday is coming up by what is on sale at the supermarket. If the shelves are lined with boxes of matzah, it must be Pesach, if pomegranates abound, Rosh Hashanah approaches. Is it just coincidental that most of it is food related?

22. **Do you read me?** - Israel has more books published per capita than any other country. And while we may be the people of the book, we are also the people of the book week.

21. **Home to the three monotheistic religions** - Judaism, Christianity and Islam were all born in this region. Where else in the world but Jerusalem can you pray (and slip a note) into the Wailing Wall while hearing the Imam call the Muslim faithful to prayer and the church bells peal all at the same time?

20. **Freedom of religion** - The freedom of ALL religions is protected in Israel While we may be the Jewish State and home to the three Abrahamic religions, we also protect the rights of Baha'i, Hindu, Buddhists and any other sacred religion that our citizens choose to observe.

19. **A world in one country** - Israel offers a world in one country. If you are hankering for the Alps, you can ski in the north, swim with the dolphins in the south and feel like you have toured several different countries thanks to the mix of cultures and personalities of our towns and cities.

18. **An investment darling** - Israel is attracting a fortune (literally!) of investment from major international brands such as Apple, Google, Microsoft and others. Not to forget earning the praises and investment from Warren Buffett and Stephen Hawking.

17. **All the world loves an Oscar** - Israel has had a presence in the Best Foreign Film Category at the Academy Awards ceremony nearly every year. And the Oscar goes to....

16. **Women's rights** - Women in Israel enjoy a much higher status than their counterparts in many other countries around the world. One of the first countries to have a female Prime Minister and with a strong representation of women in our new Knesset, Israel is demanding that the status of women continuously improves.

15. **Cultural hub** - Opera? Theatre? Live music? Mime? Art exhibition? Book reading? Whatever cultural activity you feel like indulging, you can bet that you can find something that tickles your fancy...

14. **Defying the odds** - With no clearly defined borders, constant threat of war and hostile neighbours, how is it that this tiny Oasis continues to defy the odds? Perhaps we are a miraculous country....

13. **Amazing national institutions** - Before we had a formal government we had incredible organisations like the Jewish National Fund (KKL), Keren Hayesod, WIZO, the World Zionist Organisation and the Jewish Agency who prepared and nurtured the country in anticipation of the ingathering of her exiles.

12. **Literary gifts to the world** - Award winning authors Amos Oz and David Grossman are just some of our writers who enjoy international support.

11. **Protecting our civilians** - in times of strife, every citizen knows that the processes are in place to make sure we are protected. Whether it is bomb shelters or rocket proof centres, our safety is paramount.

10. **One of the world's natural wonders (Dead Sea)** - Have a float or enjoy some pampering at one of the earth's most spectacular wonders, the Dead Sea. It is enough to soothe away your stress.

9. **Israeli NGO's** - From fighting Israel's media war to helping animals and children., Israel is home to many NGO's who are working hard to protect and defend our nation. Our very special WIZO works for an improved Israeli society. Now that is something to be proud of!

8. **Support systems for Olim** - What other countries makes sure that its new immigrants are well taken care of and have a soft landing? While we don't promise you a rose garden, we can pad your arrival a bit just to help you. The processes are in place to advise you and help point you in the right direction. The rest is up to you.

7. **The right to criticise** - Israel faces a lot of criticism from the international media but the irony of it all is that nobody is more critical of the country than its citizens. The right to voice our approval or disapproval is one of the greatest benchmarks of a democracy and our democratic right to complain and criticise is fiercely defended.

6. **Working with our neighbours** - one of Israel's best kept secrets it projects with our neighbours. While stories of mutual cooperation in this volatile region may not sell newspapers, they do in fact happen. We sow the Seeds of Peace and improve water supplies used by both people. Peace will be built through these initiatives.

5. **Superb medical innovation** - From teeny cameras that you can ingest to an external carapace that will enable paraplegics to walk, Israel is not only saving lives, we are helping people start new ones.

4. **Exporting our know-how** - So we weren't blessed with a fortune of natural resources. Until recently with the founding of natural gas reserves, so what is our key export? Technical know how! In a sphere of different industries and arena, Israeli products are changing and shaping the world.

3. **Diaspora community** - Our wonderful communities around the world support us and while we know that a strong Diaspora = a strong Israel, we welcome you here with open arms.

2. **Don't worry** - be Israeli - Really, don't worry, everything will be okay. Kol yihye b'seder. That is the Israeli motto and over the years I have learned to not worry or question how things get done, they just do.

1. **An absolute reverence for life** -There is nothing more sacred and worth celebrating than life. Israelis were voted one of the happiest nations in the world and it is easy to see why. Let's all raise a glass and toast to 65 spectacular years and many many more. L'Chaim!

Rolene Marks is a member of the Media Team Israel, a voluntary body under the auspices of the South African Zionist Federation that counters bias against Israel in the media. Rolene Marks has written numerous published opinion-editorials, addressed groups and has been featured on radio and television countering bias against Israel. Follow Rolemarks on Twitter or read her blog: www.rorosrantings.wordpress.com