

A Bisela Menschlichkeit

Anyone who has flown El Al to Israel has stories to tell. In the old days, we said that El Al stood for “always late.” In the course of its existence, El Al has become a flashpoint for religious debates over whether men and women who were strangers, should sit next to one another. I have seen flights delayed because there was not agreement among the passengers as to who should sit where. Over the years, flight attendants have received specialized training as to how to deal with unruly passengers who do not like where they are seated, the food, the kashrut, the condition of bathrooms and well, you name it. Somehow, in spite of its problems, economic and otherwise, El Al has managed to survive an even and even thrive.

Today, El Al is an upgraded airline, with its new Dreamliners and cabin attendants who are better trained than ever. Flying El Al, especially in upgraded economy, has actually become a pleasure, with food served from a menu with choice, linen napkins and silverware. Who knows, the silverware is undoubtedly some inexpensive metal, but it looks and feels like silver which, after all, is what counts.

It was my mother’s Yurzeit. She had the audacity to pass away in 2018, the second Adar, the second day. The leap month occurrence has led to all kinds of questions, philosophical and religious, as to when her Yurzeit should be observed. Is it during the first Adar, this year, or the second Adar? One Rabbi told me that Yurzeit should be said both times.

It just so happened that *Maariv* of the Yurzeit was the night we were to leave for Israel on El Al. *Scharet* would be while we were on the plane and *Mincha* would be just after we arrived. How inconvenient.

Finding a Minyan at the gate was no problem. A group of *Chusidim*, were dovening *Maariv* anyway. I merely intruded and was essentially ignored, but not disrespectfully.

When being seated, I noticed that the man behind me was a young Chusid. I told him that I would like to have a *Scharet* Minyan in the next morning, but he informed me that El Al was not permitting people to congregate for prayers. How right he was. Just as the flight was about to begin, the pilot announced that no prayers in the aisles or in any other portion of the plane would be permitted as a group enterprise because of Covid-19. “You will have to pray in your seat.” How many other airlines could imagine having such an announcement prior to take off?

When *Scharet* time came, a man who appeared to be an observant Jew, but certainly not Chusid, came up to me and asked if he could help me with the Minyan. He was perhaps 5 or 6 rows behind us. I was surprised and I asked him how he knew. He said that his wife heard me talking to the young Chusid the night before. He had a great plan. He said let me pick out 10 people who will say amen, while seated, and you can doven in the front section for all to hear. Just be loud when you get to the *Kaddush*. So, I figured “why not, they aren’t going to throw me off the plane at 35,000 feet and 620 mph.” Rather, the cabin attendants were extremely nice and showed me a place that I

could stand near the food service quarter. I dovened as loudly as I could, but not so loud to be obnoxious to those who were still sleeping. Sure enough, when I got to the *Kaddush* I could clearly hear the 10 saying “amen.” I was greatly pleased by this opportunity and by the gentleman who thought it up.

I also enjoyed the coincidence of the fact that the young man sitting behind me, whose overheard conversation led to this act of *menschlichkeit*, told me he was from Williamsburg, Brooklyn. My mother was born on 3rd Avenue in Williamsburg, prior to moving “to the country,” Sullivan County, New York.

As we were collecting our baggage, the same man who had organized the Minyan on the plane, came up to me and said why don’t we do *Mincha* right here; the luggage can wait. Sure enough, he corralled 10 men and we dovened *Mincha*. I was curious about the fellow who showed me this decency. He seemed to be in charge. Clearly, he was giving instructions and suggestions to the Rabbi-Chusid who was leading *Mincha*.

I went up to the man who had shown me such decency and I said to him: “You must be a Rosh Yeshiva” somewhere. He laughed and said to me: “No; I am an investment banker.” We had a bit of conversation, I thanked him repeatedly and we each went on our way.

I thought about this fellow in the last few days and the extraordinary thoughtfulness that he demonstrated. Was it for religious reasons? Is he just a tummeler type of guy who likes to organize people? Or, just maybe, he is a simple Mensch, and he likes to do what he can to be of assistance when he sees someone in need, emotional or otherwise. It meant a lot to me to be able to say *Kaddush* for my mother, and fortunately I ran into the right man, at the right time, and in the right place.

It is nice to know that there is still some *Menschlichkeit* in the world and people who care enough about other people and just doing the right thing, to get out of their comfort zone a little bit and to organize an act of redemption.

While it may sound like an ad for El Al, and I am certainly not getting paid to say or do this, try the airline on your next trip to Israel, if you have not flown El Al recently. It is clearly where Israel, and maybe a little bit of Judaism, begins.

Clifford A. Rieders, Esquire
Rieders, Travis, Dohrmann, Mowrey
Humphrey & Waters
161 West Third Street
Williamsport, PA 17701
(570) 323-8711 (telephone)
(570) 323-4192 (facsimile)

Cliff Rieders is a Board-Certified Trial Advocate in Williamsport, is Past President of the Pennsylvania Trial Lawyers Association and a past member of the Pennsylvania Patient Safety Authority. None of the opinions expressed necessarily represent the views of these organizations

CAR/srb

