

A Chance Encounter in Los Angeles **by Arie A. Galles**

Sara and I were shopping at the "Eilat Market" on Pico Blvd. in Los Angeles, a few blocks from where our son, Jeremy, lives. It was Friday afternoon, and although all the signs are in Persian or Arabic, the store is Jewish owned, and it appeared that most of the shoppers were Jews from Persia and other lands in the Middle East. Persian music was playing over the sound system, and a cacophony of languages, including Hebrew, filled the space. People were shopping for Shabbat. Hands reached out over yours to grab a tomato you were handling, or to shuffle around a few Kiwi fruit that you were about to pick up. Carts and people pushed one another, other carts ran over your foot without an "excuse me" or anything from their erstwhile propellers. In other words, it was just like home.

We stocked up on sunflower seeds from Israel, Skhug, Hummus, fruits and Lavash bread. Sara was doing her thing, and I wandered off to see the meat department. There I made eye contact with a short, portly Rabbi, something of a Jewish elf, with laughing eyes and a quicksilver movement to all his actions. He was shopping with a friend, a man who may have been from Algiers or Morocco. We exchanged a few words in Hebrew, and before you knew it we were talking like old friends about the store, the products and the crowds. He invited Sara and me for Shabbat dinner, an invitation I had to unfortunately decline. The Rabbi wished me Shabbat Shalom, and in doing so warmly patted me on the back as one would do with an old friend. His companion looked incredulously at that gesture, and pointing at me asked his friend the Rabbi, "Mi eifo ata makir oto?" ("From where do you know him?"). The Rabbi looked at him and said, "Hu amad muli al Har Sinai." ("He stood next to me on Mt. Sinai.") "That's right," I answered, "Aviha amad ktzat smola mimha, ve avi amad ktzat l'fanai." ("Your father stood somewhat to the left of you, and my father was a little bit in front of me.").

I was overwhelmed to tears by this. Sara felt the same kinship after I told her what just has happened. For the past 10 years I contemplated how Jewish souls were linked in pain, and this brought forth to me, as forcefully as anything in my life, the fact that Jewish souls are linked in Joy and Celebration also.

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