

25.19x31.03	1/2	10	מחוד	the jerusalem postlite	22/11/2017	61121167-5
בנימין זאב הרצל - בהקשר לציונו - 80790						

In Herzl's Footsteps

A talk with Nissim Levy, the new chairman of the Herzl Museum.

It was 1941. A young Bulgarian immigrant holding a cake went with a group of friends to the Atlit prison to try and put a smile on the faces of the illegal immigrants locked up by the British. It was there that she met her future husband, a fellow Bulgarian who had made his way by boat to Palestine after being forced by the Nazis to stop his chemistry studies at the Sorbonne in Paris.

The couple got married, and began their life together in Haifa's Wadi Nisnas neighborhood. A few years later, their son, Nissim, was born. To hear the story of London businessman and philanthropist Nissim Levy's modest past from the balcony of his Herzliya penthouse with its peaceful view of the Mediterranean is to understand the amazing route his life has taken.

Having finished his studies at Hugim High School in Haifa in 1965, Levy went on to study chemistry at the Hebrew University, and got a doctorate at the Technion. After doing a post-doctorate in organic chemistry at the University of Kansas in 1976, Levy went to work for NASA at the SETI Institute (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence — חיפוש אחר חבונה חוצנית).

He later worked for four years in Clal Industries, and then moved to London to follow business interests.

The 70-year-old Levy and his wife, Rina, are returning Israelis, dividing their time between their home in Marbella, Spain — where Levy opened the Marbella International University Center — and Herzliya.

The move has helped Levy put more time and energy in projects here that he has supported for years, including יד לילד, a boarding school and community center for disadvantaged children run by Chabad's Rabbi Herzl Elimelech in Kiryat Malachi, fund-raising for Sheba Medical Center in Tel Hashomer, a seat on the Board of Tel Aviv University, where he and his wife have the Rina and Nissim Levy Periphery Fund, which gives full scholarships to disadvantaged students, and Hillel, a nonprofit organization that helps former haredim who have chosen to move into the secular world.

Now, having been chosen to fill the newly created position of chairman of the board of the Herzl Museum in Jerusalem by Avraham Duvdevani, chairman of the World Zionist Organization, Levy is excited.

"It's an amazing museum," he says excitedly, "because Herzl was unbelievable, a genius. Even though his life was very difficult and he died young, he did more in nine years than most people do in 90 years. If I had had the chance to meet him, I believe we would have become friends."

The museum, at the entrance to Mount Herzl, was founded by the World Zionist Organization in 2004, on the 100th anniversary of Herzl's death.

Levy speaks of his deep admiration for Herzl's vision of a homeland for the Jewish people — a place that is not only safe for all Jews, but is also clearly secular, open-minded and progressive.

"For me," Levy says, "Zionism is secular. I follow Herzl's vision because he didn't believe in God. In spite of what the present government tries to say, religious belief has nothing to do with the success of Israel. The Zionism that built the state is not connected to whether or not you drive on Shabbat or keep kosher."

Levy has been secular in outlook for his whole life.

"As a child, I was the only boy who didn't want to have a bar mitzvah. I didn't want to go to the rabbi. My parents tried to convince me, but they were unsuccessful.

"In my opinion, the idea that anyone can claim to be God's representative on earth is ridiculous. The way religion treats women is like in the Dark Ages."

In spite of his own feelings toward religion, Levy is pluralistic. "When my own son wanted to have a bar mitzvah, I agreed."

"Many religious people believe that the more they study Torah, the



(PHOTOS: WIKIPADIA)



24.12x28.8	2/2	11	עמוד	the jerusalem postlite	22/11/2017	61121171-0
בנימין זאב הרצל - בהקשר לציונות - 80790						

By JANICE WEIZMAN

stronger Israel will be, but I say that the more religious you are, the weaker you become. The government today is in the hands of religious extremists who deny their children and others an education. The fact that the law lets them deny their children the chance to study mathematics, English, physics and chemistry is a tragedy.

"I talk about this with Rabbi Elimlech, and he tells me, 'The messiah will come, and everything will be all right.' When I ask where there will be room for all the dead Jews who will supposedly come back from the dead, he says, 'The messiah will take care of it!' To me, that just sounds like a crazy joke!"

The answer to Israel's continuing success, Levy believes, is education. As a child born to immigrants, he credits his achievements to his parents' insistence that he work hard at school.

Levy hopes that the museum will serve as a place for swapping ideas, focusing on how to extend Herzl's vision of a secular Jewish state into the 21st century.

"This is the only country for Jews," he says, "but it has to be a normal country."

Dictionary

Immigrant	אמיגרנט	מהגרת
Chemistry	כימיה	כימיה
Neighborhood	ג'בורהוד	שכונה
Modest	מודסט	צנוע
Balcony	בלקוני	מרפסת
Route	רוט	מסלול
Institute	אינסטיטוט	מכון
Industries	אינדסטריז	תעשיות
Dividing	דיבידינג	מחלקים
Supported	ספורטד	תמך
Including	אינקלודינג	כולל
Boarding school	בורדינג סקול	פנימיה
Community	קומיניטי	קהילה
Disadvantaged	דיסאדבנטג'ד	מוחלשים
Fund raising	פנד ריזינג	גיוס כספים
Scholarships	סקולרשיפס	מלגות
Nonprofit	נונפרופיט	ללא מטרות רווח
Organization	אורגניזשן	ארגון
Former	פורמר	לשעבר
Secular	סקילר	חילוני
Chairman	צ'רמן	יושב ראש
Genius	ג'ניוס	גאון
Founded	פאונדד	נוסד
Anniversary	אניברסרי	יום השנה
Admiration	אדמירישן	הערצה
Vision	ויז'ן	חזון
Progressive	פרוגרסיב	מתקדמת
In spite	אין ספיט	למרות
Religious	ריליג'ס	דתית
Convince	קונבינס	לשכנע
Claim	קליים	לטעון
Representative	רפרזנטטיב	נציג
Ridiculous	רידיקיוולס	מגוחך
Deny	דיני	מונעים
Education	אדיוקישן	חינוך
Supposedly	ספוודלי	לכאורה
Achievements	אצ'יבמנטס	הישגים
Insistence	אינסיסטנס	התעקשות
Extend	אקסטנד	להרחיב
Century	סנצ'ורי	מאה

