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## In a here-and-now Israel, the future remains elusive

BY DANIEL WOLF SAVIN

Living in Israel, I'm not certain that the country has a future. At the ulpan, after two months, we're still stuck in the present tense. Life in Israel seems to be only in the here and now. Maybe the past is too painful and the future too uncertain. But living here does have a very Buddhist air to it. The only problem is that I can't tell whether people are living in the moment or for the moment.

The drivers here are clearly living for the moment with no thought for the future. These people drive like maniacs. Last year when I was trying to decide whether I should move to Israel during the ongoing intifada, my Israeli friends all downplayed my fears of the terrorists. They told me that I was more likely to get killed by an Israeli driver than by a suicide bomber. As if getting killed by a fellow Jew makes it all OK.

Somehow this logic evades me. What this whole bit of statistical sorcery is hiding over is the fact that my cumulative odds of getting killed here have just gone up.

All of this has gotten me to thinking. Every so often I read about how the Israel Defense Force stops tens of would-be suicide bombers every week. I am glad for their efforts and have to say honestly that I am able to live my life here almost oblivious to the uprising going on in the territories.

So since the IDF has been so successful, what I would like to suggest is that they also begin to crack down on the drivers here. Then I would really feel relaxed about living in this country.

I think that I most feel as if I am fully living in the moment when I am at the ulpan, from 5:45 to 9 p.m. every Sunday through Thursday. Our teacher is an amazing woman who pantomimes like a silent movie star from the 1920s as she attempts to teach us Hebrew grammar and vocabulary. Imagine Marcel Marceau trying to teach a Hebrew as a Second Language class and you'll have an idea of what I mean.

And my fellow students are inspirational. The class is made up of new

immigrants to Israel. They have come from Argentina, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. Most of them are married with children. They work in the daytime and attend the ulpan in the evening.

I am amazed at what they are going through to move here. They have given up their careers back in their homeland, moved to a country where they cannot speak the language and taken jobs below their skill level while they learn the language. And they have moved here despite all the political instabilities in this region. It makes me wonder how bad life must be where they came from for them to consider that moving to Israel offers the prospect of a better life.

I am also reminded of my mother's parents, who in their 20s came separately to the United States to seek a better life. One was a refugee from World War I, another an illegal alien who fled political persecution in Poland. They arrived in the United States and began working right away. Neither had time to attend school to learn English. And yet when I knew them, they spoke English. With an accent and not flawlessly. But they had arrived. It is only now, when I myself have moved to a foreign country, that I have begun to realize the full magnitude of their accomplishments in moving to a new land and establishing successful new lives for themselves.

Which brings me back to Israel not having a future. Maybe any country that attracts immigrants like my fellow ulpan classmates at a time like this can survive without a future. Perhaps the present holds all the promise that one could hope for.

*The writer is an atomic physicist on a yearlong research fellowship in Israel.*

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