

Chapter 19

RUN, RUN, RUN

It was towards the end of the year 2009 that I read the English translation of the book by Avigail Myzlik entitled “Escape from India.” I was particularly fascinated by the latter part of the book which gave a detailed account of Ronen Dvash’s escape from India to Israel, which took place in the autumn of 2005. Actually the book did not give Ronen’s surname but in the lectures Ronen gave, and also in other publications, his full name appeared.

I then decided that I would try and reconstruct and make a study of the route of his escape using just the details given in this book, The only outside information which I used was to identify the “Israeli Restaurant” in Mumbai and the “Ohel Avraham” in Varanasi. These were terms used in the book. However, in his lectures, one of which appears on YouTube, Ronen identified them as “Beit Chabad” and “Habayit Hayehudi” respectively. In addition, two Chabad publications wrote how the Mumbai Beit Chabad assisted Ronen in his escape. On 24 December 2011 Ronen delivered a lecture at Kiryat Arba on his incarceration in India and his subsequent escape. The hall was packed out and more chairs had to be brought into it. After this lecture I spoke to him and he confirmed that the place he spent Shabbat at in Varanasi was Habayit Hayehudi.

It was clear that to perform this research I would require detailed maps of the various areas through which Ronen travelled during his escape. He also utilised buses and trains and I would thus require details of their routes and timetables, most preferably at the period of his escape. I received all this material from a variety of sources.

My first source was a bookshop called “India Map Store” which is situated in New Delhi. I found this bookshop from the internet and its website gave a list of the maps that it sold. Towards the end of January 2010, I ordered online a 160 page book of maps entitled “Mumbai City Map” and also a “Tourist Guide Map of Varanasi,” and paid by Visa. During the following weeks I ordered further material from this same shop which comprised large street maps and small booklets of the various cities and Indian States through which Ronen passed. Another book I obtained from this shop was an India Railway Atlas which included a Railway Timetable for the period mid-2003 to mid-2004.

There is another atlas on the railways of India which was brought out by Samit Roychoudhury and entitled “The Great Indian Railway Atlas.” The India Map Store did not have a copy and stated “it will not be back in stock.” I therefore searched the catalogue of libraries in Israel and found that there was just one copy in Israel – in the library of Haifa University. In the summer of 2011, I was spending a few days in Haifa and I used the opportunity to go to that library. Before travelling there I telephoned to check that in fact it was on the shelves and received a positive answer. I then went to the library, found the appropriate room and bookcase and located the book. I then purchased a card which enabled one to make 100 photocopies and photocopied the

entire book. Before that, there was only one copy in Israel – now there are two (Haifa University's and mine)!

A further source of maps and timetables is “Google Maps” and it is to be found on the internet. I utilised it to provide me with further maps and to also find the distance between various locations and the directions on how to drive between them. I also utilised the internet to find bus and train routes, timetables and general transport information.

On the internet, there is an India Travel Forum known as “IndiaMike.” I found on IndiaMike the detailed station by station route and timetable for a train called the “Mewar Fast Passenger” which had stopped at almost every station between Ahmadabad and Udaipur during the same month that Ronen travelled on this train. (It is strange why its name includes the word “fast”!)

One of the factual mistakes in Myzlik's book is that Ronen had planned to take a particular train from Ahmadabad via Udaipur to Jaipur. However this is impossible since the rail gauge changes at Udaipur, and I briefly discussed the different rail gauges in India.

In addition to buses and trains, Ronen also travelled on taxis and rickshaws and I included background information from Wikipedia and other internet sources on this form of travel. The comments of travelers on these conveyances were also included, which showed that one could not always trust a taxi driver not to rip you off!

Extensive use was made of the internet to obtain information on the various streets and markets through which Ronen travelled. Such information included the names and descriptions of shops, restaurants, hotels, offices, tour and travel agents, etc. Since this is a book and not an advertising brochure, only the details and descriptions, but not the names of these places are given. Therefore, when their names appeared on the website, they were replaced by ***. I also found comments, some complimentary and others otherwise, by patrons, on the some of the hotels and restaurants mentioned.

As to be expected, Ronen's escape featured in both the Indian and Israeli newspapers. I found on the internet the online edition of two Indian newspapers with accounts of Ronen's escapes. When telephoning his wife, Ronen was informed by her that on Wednesday 28 September, an article had appeared on him in Yediot Acharonot. Archives of the Israeli papers of the period of Ronen's escape cannot be found on the internet. I therefore went to The Jewish National Library in Jerusalem to search the microfilms of Yediot Acharonot. There was no article on Ronen's escape in the 28 September newspaper, but there was an article which occupied about one third of a page in the following day's edition. I also searched the other Israeli newspapers and found a small item in Ma'ariv of 29 September, but nothing in the other Israeli newspapers.

Despite the advisability and recommendation to do so, Ronen did not remove his beard. He did however try in Ahmadabad to purchase Moslem clothing to act as a disguise but he found that the shops were closed. I submitted a question to IndiaMike asking: “Can someone please tell me

at what time in the morning do clothing shops open in Ahmedabad? Thank you.” I received an answer: “From personal experience - 10am is probably too early. Some shops do open then, but quite a few wait until 11 or even 11:30 am before the shutters roll-up.” The answerer then continued with some advice: “I’d strongly recommend (given the current 41° C in Ahmedabad!) that you’re better off shopping in the slightly cooler evening time.” The late opening time clearly explains why Ronen found the shops closed – he had searched in the early morning!

At Varanasi, Ronen spent Shabbat at Habayit Hayehudi. This organisation periodically takes over some hotel in Varanasi but I did not know which one it was in 2005. I found on the internet that Nehama David and her husband had conducted a Pesach Seder in Varanasi’s Habayit Hayehudi. I contacted her by e-mail and she gave me the telephone number of her husband, and he gave me general information about Habayit Hayehudi. A few days later I learned independently that an article about Alicia Dattner entitled “Varanasi, Where All Journeys Come to an End” mentioned Varanasi’s Habayit Hayehudi. I sent her an e-mail and she replied that an Indian non-Jew called Cannu of the Baba Silk Factory in Varanasi would be able to give me the information I required. I found his telephone number on the internet and in mid-February 2010 I had two telephone conversations with him (in Hebrew!) and he gave me the name of the hotel – “Ganga Guest House” – and other relevant information. I learned from the internet that the name of the owner of this hotel was Kailish Nishad. I sent him an e-mail with a number of questions but I never received a reply from him.

Following their army service, numerous Israelis, often termed “backpackers,” invariably those who are far from observing Jewish religious practices, travel to the Far East, and whilst there, a number of them visit places such as Habayit Hayehudi. A book on these “backpackers” is to be found at the Jewish National Library and I went there and photocopied many pages from, and they were useful for my book.

In his book, Ronen relates about a little village with luxurious houses, private swimming pools and fancy cars at which he stayed and which was situated in the middle of the desert just one and a half hours’ car ride from the border between the Indian states of Rajasthan and Utter Pradesh. I found it well-nigh impossible to locate such a village. I even submitted a question to Wikipedia Reference desk and also to IndiaMike but did not receive satisfactory answers. I finally came to a conclusion, rightly or wrongly, that it was a village in the Shekhawati region; however it was far more than one and a half hours drive from this border crossing, and it was situated only at the edge of the desert.

Another subject which appeared periodically throughout this book were discussions on matters of Jewish law which Ronen encountered during the course of his escape. One of them involved a mikvah at the Varanasi Habayit Hayehudi. It had the unusual location of being on a roof! I found on the internet a book written in 1930 by Rabbi David Miller entitled “The Secret of the Jew.” In this book, he gives instructions how one can build a mikvah in one’s own house, and it need not be on the ground floor, and the outlay is less than \$5. Today, with inflation, it would be

considerably higher! For a men's mikvah, drawn water (mayim sheuvin) can be used. This is not the case for a women's mikvah. However Rabbi Miller argued that the New York tap water was not classed as drawn water. This point came under a lot of criticism, but Rabbi Nissen Telushkin, an authority on mikvahs, was very critical of the criticsers and wrote that Rabbi Miller's opinion on this matter of the New York tap water had "more than a little validity."

The performance of many mitzvot depend on times, such as when it gets light in the morning and dark at night, and this was relevant in a number of instances during the course of Ronen's escape. There are a number of authorities who have made tables listing these times for different places in the world throughout the year. Today, these times have been put on computers. In ascertaining the relevant times during Ronen's escape, I obtained information from my brother who had written a computer program on this, and also from Rabbi Meir Posen's book "Ohr Meir".

In a place where the weather is very hot, one may ask a non-Jew to put on a fan on Shabbat, especially if it is for children. On the Shabbat when Ronen was in Varanasi, there was a power cut causing the fan to go out. There was an emergency generator but it needed turning on. The director of Habayit Hayehudi indirectly asked a non-Jew to turn on the generator (although he did not have to do so indirectly). One can find from the internet what the temperature was in a certain place even several years back. I did this and found that the temperature in Varanasi that Shabbat was indeed very hot.

An important crossing point between India and Nepal is at the village of Sanauli which straddles the border. In fact Sanauli is so small that I could not find it on Google maps. Shops and stores are on both sides of the border and merchandise spills over into the street. This can be seen in photographs which I downloaded from the internet. The streets are full with humanity and as people have written on the internet, they managed to cross unchallenged without any documentation, just as Ronen succeeded in doing.

Avigail Myzlik's book was written in Hebrew. It was later translated into English. It is inevitable that errors will occur in the course of translation. For example the Hebrew text states that from Sunauli to Bhairawa is 4 kilometres (which approximately it is), whereas the English translation writes 40 kilometres. Also, the names of some of the places in India are incorrectly spelled in both the Hebrew and English, for example Amdabar instead of Ahmadabad, and Sunami instead of Sunauli.

Another error concerns the name of one of the hospitals mentioned in the book. The English translation refers to a private Mumbai hospital called the "George Kennedy Britz." I searched the internet for the various lists of hospitals in Mumbai but could not find one with such a name. Therefore, at the end of January 2010, I submitted a question to the Wikipedia Reference Desk: "A book I was reading referred to a private hospital in Mumbai whose name is the George Kennedy Britz Hospital. It stated that this hospital is situated on a small street near to the ocean.

Despite extensive searches, I have not found reference to this hospital in any other source. Can any user please supply me with information on this hospital. Thank you.” I received the following answer, which was indeed the correct one: “Could it derive from a mis-hearing, at some point, of Breach Candy Hospital?” There is indeed such a hospital in Mumbai. On studying the original Hebrew text, one could see that the words “Breach Candy” had been mistransliterated into “Kennedy Britz.” However the word “George” even appeared in the original Hebrew edition, and possibly arose from the association of the words George and Kennedy, since George Kennedy was a famous person in show business!

On the basis of my research I wrote my book entitled “An In depth study of an Escape from India” and put it on to my website. The quotes from Avigail Myzlik’s book appeared as an inset in italics and my extensive commentary on these quotes appeared in ordinary print. The book has 105 pages, 540 footnotes/references, and there is also an extensive bibliography.

Towards the end of February 2012, I sent a copy of my book by e-mail to Avigail Myzlik together with a short letter: “I found your book ‘Escape from India’ very interesting and I understand that it is very popular with the public at large. On the basis of the text of this book, I have made an in depth study of the section of the book dealing with Ronen’s escape, from the time he was in the JJ Hospital until he reached Ben-Gurion Airport. I enclose it as an attachment to this e-mail and ask whether you would be interested in publishing it as a supplement to your book. I look forward to hearing from you.”

But I never received a reply to my e-mail!