

Behind the Green Line to Samaria and Samaritans

While in Israel we are yet to go anywhere beyond the Green Line . Not for any ideological but security reasons. And not because it is insecure to travel beyond the Green line, it's not. After all there are better than 300,000 who live there and commute to behind the green line to Israeli centers daily for work shopping etc. It's because my pathetic sense of direction that practically guarantees that I am going to end up in the middle of the town square of a Palestinian town like Nablus or Jenin.



The other reason why we never travelled beyond the green line is because we don't know anyone who lives there and would appreciate our company. So when the Kathedra (one of many tour Israel companies) offered a trip to the Shomron (Samaria) on the Passover day of sacrifice of the Samaritans (a sect claiming Jewish ancestry) , we jumped on the opportunity. For us it was a perfect Trifecta:

See some of the Jewish settlements of Samaria behind the line;





watch the Samaritans celebrate Passover with their famous Sacrifice ceremony on top of Mount Gerizim



and soak the awe inspiring scenery of Samaria from the top of Mount Kabir. And so it was... Fantastic!

The highlight of the trip was our walk up to Mount Grezim to watch the Passover Sacrifice of the Samaritans.



Who are the Samaritans? (Wikipedia): **Samaritanism**, an [Abrahamic religion](#) closely related to [Judaism](#). Based on the [Samaritan Torah](#), Samaritans claim their worship is the true religion of the ancient [Israelites](#) prior to the [Babylonian Exile](#), preserved by those who remained in the [Land of Israel](#), as opposed to Judaism, which they assert is a related but altered and amended religion brought back by those returning from exile.



Ancestrally, Samaritans claim descent from a group of [Israelite](#) inhabitants from the tribes of [Ephraim](#) and [Manasseh](#) (the two sons of [Joseph](#)) as well as some descendants from the priestly tribe of [Levi](#), who have connections to ancient [Samaria](#) from the period of their entry into the land of Canaan, while some suggest that it was from the beginning of the Babylonian Exile up to the Samaritan Kingdom of [Baba Rabba](#). The Samaritans, however, derive their name not from this geographical designation, but rather from the Hebrew term [שמרִים](#), “Keepers [of the Law]”.

According to Samaritans, it was on Mount Gerizim that Abraham was commanded by God to offer Isaac, his son, as a sacrifice Genesis 22:2. In both narratives, God then causes the sacrifice to be interrupted, explaining that this was the ultimate test of Abraham’s obedience, as a result of which all the world would receive blessing.



What makes the Samaritan's Pesach ceremony so interesting is that they continue the Passover tradition of sacrificing a lamb and roasting it. When the family sits down to eat it afterward, they also hold a "seder" of sorts, although not using the formal text used by Jews. One of the Samaritans preparing the lambs for roasting told us that during the meal, they actively encourage their children to ask questions about why the sacrifice is performed, and why various aspects of it are done in the specific ways that they're done. They encourage these questions, he said, in order to enable the fulfillment of the commandment in the Torah to tell one's children about the exodus from Egypt: "And you shall tell your son on that day"







Most of the photos were taken from the roof of a house overlooking the Sacrifice arena (top left corner above). While I was busy clicking my camera away I couldn't help but noticing what someone wrote about they experience and I can't improve on it: "I couldn't help but notice the wide variety of visitors present, both among the VIP's milling around inside the plaza, and among the crowd watching from the sidelines: There were all kinds of Jews, both secular and religious – including a noticeable number of haredim (among the VIP's as well). There were Israeli soldiers, including some high-ranking officers.



There were paramedics – both from Magen David Adom and from the Palestinian Red Crescent. There were non-Jews of all different sorts, including representatives of the Palestinian Authority. The U.S. Ambassador was there, too. I saw someone who, by his tunic and collar, appeared to be a Roman Catholic priest. It was a remarkable mix of so many different kinds of people, all present as visitors to the Samaritan Pesach sacrifice.







And it was all the more remarkable because many of those people have contempt and hatred for one another, and one would not expect to see them together in such close quarters. And yet there they all were, with no noticeable anxiety or animosity in the air. The atmosphere among them seemed to be a relaxed mix of respect, festivity, and curiosity.”



Before the Sacrifice ceremony itself we went to the Samaritan museum where we listened to Yefet (his first name) a senior Samaritan priest:



http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZSMNUrE_gEE&list=UUFmWNqi5QHk6u_rXpbRiGIQ&index=6&feature=plcp

The Samaritans are a community of only 750 people (in ancient time they numbered more than a million and a half but they have a history of persecution not unlike the Jews) Half of them live on Har Grezim. The study and work in Nablus, speak among themselves in Arabic or an ancient Hebrew (unrecognizable to us) and their scriptures are written in ancient Hebrew alphabet.



The Samaritan's on Har Grezim have triple citizenship (The Palestinian authority, Israel and Jordan). The other half of the community lives in the center of Israel in Holon (10 minutes drive from Tel-Aviv) The Holon community speaks only Hebrew, hold only an Israeli passport and (except for holidays) and dress like everyday Israelis.



At the end of the ceremony which normally takes place at mid-night (but because it fell on a Friday in mid - day) we traveled through some of the Jewish settlements in Samaria (the entire trip was behind the Green Line)





Most people who have not been to some of the settlement (including ourselves) may think of them as a bunch of caravans on top of a hill with primitive amenities and pioneering lifestyle - Not so. Many of them are little towns (300 + families) with beautiful villas, gardens, parks and playgrounds. You have to be there to understand that evacuating the settlements if it ever came to it is a challenge few if any Israeli leader can undertake. Personally and politically we are not advocates of the settlements, but being there helps immensely to understand the situation so much better.

This was another one of the “Explore Israel” series of interesting places, people and events that ultimately will be the highlights of our memories of this beautiful, colorful, and other “fulls” - country of Israel.



