

I returned to Ashkelon on Wednesday evening, Jan 9, after attending the Hadassah 2019 Annual Conference at the comfortable and accommodating Yehudah Hotel. The two-day conference for me was full of powerful speakers, beautiful surroundings and lots of companionship.

The first afternoon I sat in on the inspiring speech given by Miriam Perez, a winner of the Israel Prize for Life Achievement. She started her speech, "Land of Israel, the Dream, the Pain, the Hope", relating to the Hadassah members assembled. She said Israel would not be the country it is today without its volunteers.

She then continued with her family's story. They were very poor, from the Atlas Mountains of Morocco. Her parents couldn't read, but every night her father told the same story of the land far away with trees dripping with milk and honey. She related how they miraculously did arrive in the legendary country and fulfilled her father's dream. Her father kissed the ground on arrival.

She continued with stories of her married life and how the mothers spoiled their children because of the anxiety of the time the children would eventually spend in the army. How her son, in the first day of first grade, loaded down with a huge backpack containing a large sidur, had to tell his mom, "I *can* climb the steps alone." She told of the son taking a trip to Europe to see the concentration camps. She gave him a camera to share some sights. When she saw his pictures, they, were pictures of flowers! In the evening she confronted him with why there were no remembrances. He said, "No, Imma, each flower has a name, this is Yossi and that is Rafael and there is Yaakov-- each named for a victim. The soil the flowers grow in is the ashes of the Holocaust."

Another time she and her husband were called in to the army base for this son. He often took jobs of soldiers who had asked for a break or filled in for soldiers that needed to return home for some reason. He even was known to clean toilets for another soldier. (The officer was afraid he was a "freier".) When she asked her son if he did these things for other soldiers, he said, "No, I did it for my brothers." Miriam tragically lost that son in Gaza and her other son died in Lebanon. He was father of five children, the youngest born just after he was killed.

Miriam, to aid in her own recovery, consoled and comforted other survivors and established support groups. She gave us her philosophy for dealing with the pain, ending with the sentiment that she (and we) are still walking and breathing. Hashem does not give us permission to not go on. The way she deals with her pain - and advised us to do the same - is to help others, live a life accenting the positive and each day thank Hashem for our daily miracles. This is the hope of the speech.