

December 13th, 2007 - Jennifer Lang

December 11, 2017 | Jennifer Lang



If my marriage is going to disintegrate, we're in the right place: limbo. Between Paris, where we spent a week with the kids for Hanukkah, and Israel, where we're midway through what I call the *Year of Living Differently* to immerse in another language and culture, to show our offspring there's more to life than Westchester, New York.

Today, my husband, Philippe, and I are en route from Charles de Gaulle to Ben Gurion airport--an easy four-and-a-half hour flight--but I don't want to fly further east. Despite months of couples therapy to help us navigate the decision to uproot our children and spend the year abroad, I'm anxious to go home. Even if New York isn't exactly that.

I want to return to the U.S. because the tension between Philippe and me sucks the energy required to make new friends, fill my empty days, and serve my kids breakfast, lunch and dinner. I yearn for my American oversized appliances, commercial-free WFUV radio station, writing group, yoga teaching schedule, shortcuts, queen-sized bed, English. I fear how often Philippe and I go to bed so angry that we sleep back-to-back.

A month after we settled into our rental house in Raanana in August, he said, "I know we agreed to a year, but can you consider longer?" A month later, "I know you like it here sometimes. Just admit it." Another month later, "I see you thinking about it."

In therapy, we weighed the pros and cons of one year versus two but failed to discuss if any family member liked the desert climate and Middle Eastern mindset so much he/she never wanted to leave. I should have known. Israel is, after all, where we met eighteen years earlier, where we married, where we had our first baby. We left over a dozen years ago for Philippe to pursue a MBA in France but stayed away because of me.

Israel's always been easier for him. He adores the natives' chutzpah, aggressive drivers, and the Jewish calendar controlling our lives. Every Friday afternoon, hours before Shabbat, cafes, post offices, supermarkets, banks, boutiques, buses and trains shut down until Saturday night or Sunday morning and an eerie, omniscient quiet blankets the city like a snowstorm.

Everything he loves, I loathe.

On the flight from Paris, I replay the week's highlights: our fun-filled search for Mona Lisa at the Louvre, our race to the top of Notre Dame, and our underground tour of the city's sewage system. Then I fret over how Philippe and I are going to dig ourselves out of our tunnel without flinging mean, unfair, unforgiving words at one another like darts.

Less than twenty-four hours after we land in Tel Aviv, my father calls to tell me nine words that alter the way I look at everything—my parents, their marriage, my husband and our union.

"I've been seeing S. for the past twenty-five years," my father says.

Philippe listens to me regurgitate the conversation, wipes my snotty tears, and cradles me while the kids chase each other downstairs. We might be in limbo land, unable to call anyplace we've lived home, but neither one of us is capable of such betrayal. We might act icily toward one another, but our foundation is built on love and trust and mutual respect. This year in Israel may have opened our personal Pandora's Box about place, but we're committed to each other and to our family.

At night, in bed, after my father calls, I face Philippe and Philippe faces me. We wish each other sweet dreams for the first time in a long while and, I hope, not the last.

A multi-cultural mutt—89 percent American, 10 percent French, kind of Israeli—I obsess over home: what, where, why. Much of my writing digs at my divided self, trying to make sense of how I arrived here, again, in 2011. Find me

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at israelwritersalon.com and follow me @JenLangWrites as I write my first memoir about marriage, where religion and country are constantly at stake. I live in a quiet city in the center of the only democracy in the Middle East. According to Google Maps, we're 313 km (194 miles) from Damascus, Syria. I'll never know because we can't drive or fly from here to there. We relocated from White Plains, New York in 2011 around the time the Civil War in Syria started.

In 2013, Israel began treating wounded Syrians, but, like many things in this region, it's complicated. Jennifer suggests donating to [Ziv Medical Center](#).

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