



The Jellabiya

Owing to my urological issues, my family's integration into the regional culture is finally complete

In the mid-20th century as WWII raged and Europe burned, my parents fled for their lives and arrived at the Semitic shores of Palestine. A foreign and alienated land, hostile local population, different climate, unfamiliar cuisine, foreign culture and exotic apparel. In place of the familiar European cold and greyness they were greeted by a scorching sun, heat and dryness. However, they were not discouraged by these harsh conditions. If this land was different from what they were accustomed to, they would change it into something more palatable. They would transform Israel into 'little Europe'.

First, they took on construction. Architects from Germany, graduates of the Bauhaus movement, believed that the sea was bad and brought nothing but wind and disease. Therefore, one must not allow a breeze to enter the city, G-d forbid. As a result, Tel-Aviv in the early days was built with its back to the Mediterranean and with most of the main streets running parallel to the sea. The planning of Ben Yehuda, Allenby and Ibn Gabirol streets defies any local ecological rationale. In addition, shade was considered evil but the blistering sun good because it was the heat that was sought after in the chill of Central Europe. Hence the city centers were designed without shade and without trees.

In the beginning, the city was full of restaurants offering heavy Central European cuisine. But gradually, we stopped and made a U-turn. We exchanged the cooked red cabbage dishes for finely chopped fresh salads, the rich liver pâté for light tahini and the slow-cooking stews for quick chicken skewers. We left the old-world



Built-in breeze. Jellabiyas.

culinary traditions for nostalgic evenings only. Gefilte fish for Passover, Hungarian goulash and latkes for Chanukah. The classic European cultural symbols like Puccini's operas and Mozart's music, which require air-conditioned acoustic auditoriums, were replaced by drums and trills in the open air.

Despite these transformations in building practices, cuisine, and culture, one aspect hardly changed at all – clothing. The long pants that were brought in from cold Europe but were unsuitable for the local warm climate remained a staple clothing item. But then, at least in my case, a recent change did occur. I reached the age where some men develop urological issues that require medical procedures.

The initial treatment sessions were held at the hospital where I was connected to a torture device intended for men only, known as a catheter. You walk around the corridors of a medical institution with a cumbersome device that has a tube inserted in your lower abdomen area on one side and on the other side a drainage bag. You are connected to it like a confirmed COVID-19 patient in quarantine to an ankle monitor (required in Israel to ensure you stay put). You walk with it, sit with it, sleep with it, and shower with it. And apologies for the

following analogy, but like prisoners in detention centers – men with their cumbersome devices pace the hallways back and forth, waiting for time to pass and heal.

On one of his visits the doctor informed me, "You are being released, but you have to keep using the device for a few more days at home. Come back in a week and we will remove it." I was overcome by embarrassment – but on a practical level. How will I function for a week at home with this device? I reviewed my options. Walking around half naked with only a t-shirt – unpleasant. Wearing pajama or other pants, long or short – uncomfortable.

In despair I leafed through the daily fashion section of the newspaper and there I saw it. The perfect garment for my distress: The Jellabiya. The only garment traditionally worn by locals and by our Jewish ancestors who lived here thousands of years ago. A long robe without buttons, zippers or hindrances that covers the body from shoulders to knees. The most suitable apparel for the scorching local climate. The warm breeze blows underneath, between your knees, and makes its way up your body. Along the way it dries the sweat and cools the body and finally exits through the collar. The outfit that will solve all my current technical issues as well as conceal them.

I called a store that specializes in fashionable Jellabiyas (if you're gonna do it, do it right) and the Jellabiya has been shipped. Thus, with the help of urology and the Jellabiya, I completed the transition my parents had started. I successfully assimilated into the regional culture.