

Arnold And Melania Leinweber In Israel



This is a photo taken in Haifa, Israel, in 1981. There is me, Arnold and my wife Melania Leinweber in the photo. In 1948 [when the State of Israel was created], there was joy, there was enthusiasm, there was momentum. I was surprised - Sada had come to Jerusalem, to the Knesset, to make peace. I was in hospital at the time; I avoided having a stomach operation. This is how I felt when I first went to Israel [Mr. Leinweber reads one of his own poems]: 'I once descended from a plane / And a porter sitting by the stairs greeted me: Shalom. / This made me feel human, / A special human being, wrapped in the warmth of this word. / Shalom, this welcome word tickled my heart and my feet. / (Why was I so moved?) I stepped upon your holy land full of history / A land that was longed / By a Diaspora that has always wanted / To have its own country, in days good and bad. /

You welcomed many and held them up in your arms / Together you erected what many others failed to erect. / Your creation, a paradise on Earth, and the one on Mount Sinai / Bear the flag of Zion / Which will for ever wave. / Shalom.' ['De pe scara unui avion candva am coborat / Si un hamal ce langa el statea mi-a spus Salom! / Eu am simtit ca sunt un om, / Eram un om mai deosebit, caldura ta m-a invaluit. / Salom!/ Acest cuvânt de intampinare eu l-am simtit in suflet si picioare./ (De ce am fost emotionat?) Paseam pe al tau pamant plin de istorie si sfant, / Un pamant ce a fost dorit / De o Diaspora ce a voit / Mereu sa aiba tara ei la bine si la greu. / Pe multi tu i-ai imbratisat si cu caldura i-ai ridicat. / Impreuna ati cladit ce multi alti n-au izbutit. / Creatia ta, gura de rai si cea de pe Sinai / Poarta stindardul cu Zion / Si flutura în veci / Salom.'] My feet got soft. I couldn't walk and I felt a sort of drowsiness; I couldn't control myself. I felt the same in front of the Western Wall. Only thinking of it makes me feel excited. It's as if something were falling upon you, pressing and squeezing you, then lifting you up into the air. It's hard to explain. And we wonder why people cry there - a surface in a mere square. Most of my relatives left for Israel. Our relatives from abroad wrote to my mother. All those who left, both those from my father's side of the family and her own, had first passed through her place. So she had all their addresses. When I went to Israel, in 1974, I took all those addresses, plus those of the people from the old neighborhood. Some put me in contact with others, so I managed to visit around 50 families of relatives, acquaintances and friends. I got to 75 [families] in 1977. I would go on my own and was a surprise to them. When I went to Israel with my wife, in 1981, I couldn't do the same thing - I had to take her with me in my visits, so I didn't manage to tackle as many families as before. The last time I went there was in 1996. I knew many had died in the meantime. I came back a sad man. Melania Leinweber [nee Reischer], was born in Roman, in 1926. She went to high school and became an accountant. It was with difficulty that managed to have a child - she miscarried several times. She spent three months and a half in bed when she gave birth. She worked as an accountant for the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party until she had the baby, and then she moved to a food store. When I was in high school [evening classes], she used to translate book fragments from Latin or French into Romanian. She had a good reputation, so the Ministry of Light Industry appointed her head of a millinery department. Then she moved to the knitwear and ready-made clothes department, where she was in charge with all the centers countrywide. Knitwear contracting was her responsibility - she had become an expert. She retired in 1981. Melania died in 1990.