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Wise, Strong and Modest WOMEN IN THE BIBLE



WOMEN IN THE BIBLE

"Taking photos allows me to observe life in a photo frame, and each time I discover a new world within it," says Israeli photographer **Dikla Laor**. "It is always a moment in a particular time period. This is what I try to immortalize in the photo."

The hills on the Golan Heights are bathed in a deep green that is only found in this unique region. This is where *Israel Today's* **Anat Schneider** met up with Dikla, an intelligent, sincere and modest woman who lives on a *moshav* (rural community) called Givat Yoav. Her pastoral garden is chirping with birds.

These green hills serve as the backdrop for her spectacular new photos of female characters from the Bible. Dikla spoke about the Bible, women and Israel, and for the first time, she displayed her works outside the borders of Israel in our magazine.

Anat: Why did you decide to focus on women?

Dikla: When I began to take photos I simply felt more comfortable in the company of women. All the women that I have taken pictures of are close friends or nieces, women with whom I have a close relationship. For me a woman represents an amazing creature; she can bring children into the world, has the sensitivity to interact with others, and is endowed with creativity. She leads a fulfilled life. And of course there is also the feminine beauty of every woman.

Tell me something about the style of your photos.

People expect to see women in desert landscapes in biblical, Middle Eastern or Arab dress. I place them in a different geographical location, right behind my house. I dress them in long, brightly colored clothes. My inspiration comes from the Renaissance and Baroque periods, from the clothing, facial expressions and hand movements. I have felt connected to this era since my childhood.

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Hannah, Samuel's mother



Hagar and Ishmael



The concubine of Gibeah



Michal, the daughter of King Saul



Miriam, Moses' sister and prophetess



Job's wife



Bathsheba



Tamar, King David's daughter



The Egyptian midwives Shifra and Puah



Israel Is a Happy Country!

THE BRIGHTER SIDE
A UN report finds that Israel is a happier nation than the US and Britain

Despite the ever-present threat of terrorism and war, Israel remarkably ranks as the 11th happiest country in the world in 2017, according to the annual World Happiness Report by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network. Israel has held this spot for four years which makes it the happiest country in the Middle East.

Surprisingly, Israel's ranking even tops that of the US which came in at 14

and Britain at 18. The top 10 countries this year are Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Switzerland, Finland, Holland, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and Sweden.

The World Happiness Report ranks 155 countries based on a variety of factors including per capita GDP, life expectancy, social services, generosity, freedom of choice and a perceived low level of corruption. These countries ranked at the bottom of the list: Yemen, South

Sudan, Liberia, Guinea, Togo, Rwanda, Syria and Tanzania, with hapless Burundi and the Central African Republic coming in last.

"Happy countries are the ones that have a healthy balance of prosperity, as conventionally measured, and social capital," said survey director Jeffrey Sachs. This means "a high degree of trust in a society, low inequality and confidence in government." ■

Women in the Bible

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Many of the photos depict women who are not part of the mainstream.

I would actually like to document all the women mentioned in the Bible. I do research on each character and this is how I form their image in my mind's eye. Then the fire for the actual photo begins to burn inside of me. Sometimes I have to wait several months until the hills here have the right color tones for the picture, and the light is right, just as I saw it in a moment of enlightenment in my spirit. Research and preparation take a long time, but the actual photo shoot only takes about half an hour.

There are women that I would most definitely like to photograph, such as Queen Esther, but the right inspiration for her has not yet come to me. We also have a hard woman like Jezebel, but she is powerful and the text of her story is frequently misunderstood. Perhaps these characters leave a negative impression because they are feared by men? Yet I am sure there is another side to them.

Is there a woman with whom you feel a special connection?

Yes, I have already photographed her as a personal portrait. I am talking about Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel. Through her I realized what I wanted to pass on to my children. Samuel is always depicted wearing a coat, the one that his mother sewed for him.

Women such as Ruth and Tamar were not Jewish. Has the religious environment changed with regard to converts?

After the destruction of the Second Temple, the religious establishment feared assimilation among the people. This is why certain rules, laws and guidelines were drawn up which were intended to make it difficult for Gentile women to become part of the Jewish nation. Today the situation has changed. It is high time that these rules were revised. Today each person chooses how he or she wants to live.

What is your favorite photo?

The one of the concubine of Gibeah [Judges 19]. It is a very sad story. I did not need to do a lot of research for this photo; surprisingly, this idea came to me very quickly. The photo of the midwives in Egypt is also one I like very much. ■