

Same old story



Any avid reader will tell you the habit can get pricey. They'll also likely tell you that it can start to impede on personal space, taking over shelves and bookcases. This is exactly the problem Dolev Gotlib, founder of the "Same Old Story" project, aims to remedy. The project supplies hundreds of cafes (and even gyms and hair salons) throughout Israel with

used books priced for just NIS 20. With over 70 locations in Tel Aviv alone and books running the gamut from Fitzgerald to Stephen King to Harry Potter, there is most certainly something for everyone, and at this price, there is just no excuse to not get your read on.

Inspired by the environmentally sound international backpacker custom of passing on completed (and now cumbersome and space consuming) books to other backpackers through guesthouses, Same Old Story also contributes to society's greater good by employing mostly disabled workers through the Israeli organization "Shekulo-Tov."

In the true spirit of a collective, profits from book sales are split evenly between all participating locations and Same Old Story, and distributors choose how many books they will sell.

Find café locations and even sort through titles (including English listings) online at rebooks.org.il.

5,683 miles away



A new photography book tries to portray a normal day in the life of an Israeli citizen from the 'outsider looking in' viewpoint of an expat


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"I think that distance – both geographical and mental – enables you to look at things differently," Yael Ben-Zion observes. She quotes a line from the classic Yehudit Ravitz song: Things that you see from there, you don't see from here.

"5,683 Miles Away," recently published by Kehrer Books, is a photographic monograph exploring that most complex and beguiling of subjects: the meaning of "normal" life in Israel. The title refers to the distance between New York and Tel Aviv; Ben-Zion, an Israeli national who has lived for the past decade in the United States, uses her position – an insider on the outside, looking in – to create a series of photographs that captures an oft-misplaced intimacy to everyday life in Israel, but without succumbing to misplaced romanticism.

Perhaps the most distinguishing feature of "5,683 Miles Away" is the precision with which the photographs capture the ordinary quality of everyday life in Israel. "It took a while for me to realize that what is considered 'normal' in Israel is not really normal anywhere else," Ben-Zion says. "People live their lives under a constant state of emergency" [referring to the State of

Emergency, declared in 1948 and never formally revoked], and this omnipresent yet elusive tension affects every aspect of life, for better or worse."

This sense of disconnect recurs through the monograph, with imagery that hints subtly at more than what is immediately apparent. The photography – as is the case with the concept of normalcy – is open to multiple interpretations.

"Being familiar with Israel may certainly add another layer to the understanding of the work," Ben-Zion acknowledges, but adds, "I do think that the work speaks to a wider audience, as it engages with rather universal issues of identity and belonging."

The positive response to "5,683 Miles Away" (it was selected a Best Book of 2010 by photo-eye Magazine, and was nominated for the German Photo Book Award 2011) testifies as much. "Interestingly, I found that the reaction to the work has more to do with the sensibilities of the viewer than with his or her familiarity with Israel." As it should be, of course.

The book is now available at Tola'at Sfarim bookshop, 9 Rabin Sq, Tel Aviv. Akin Ajayi