

A Different Dimension

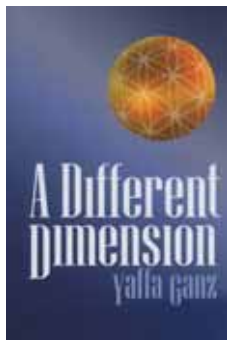
By Yaffa Ganz

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304 pages

Reviewed by Varda Brantman



I didn't expect to like this book. *A Different Dimension* is a collection of columns written by Yaffa Ganz for *Hamodia* newspaper, and I am generally not a column reader. Maybe the reason that I stay away from columns is that I am a veteran journal writer; since age sixteen, I have been recording the events of my life, my feelings, observations, dreams and reflections. A column is similar to a personal journal entry in that it expresses something that caught the interest of the writer on that particular day. I would rather take the time to write in my journal, letting my mind meander, than sit down and accompany someone else on her internal journey.

Despite my reservations, I was surprised by how much I enjoyed seeing the world through this author's eyes. Ganz has lived in Israel since 1964 and weathered the Six-Day War as well as all the subsequent upheavals. She is a writer with an impressive number of publications in the Jewish publishing world. Her wise assessments of the political scene and the personal vicissitudes of life are interesting and, at times, inspiring.

In a former lifetime, Varda Brantman was a copywriter for educational television and director of Maine's Poetry-in-the-Schools Program. For the past twenty-two years, she has lived in Jerusalem, where she writes about her experience of inter-planetary travel—how she went from the secular world to a life of Torah observance. Her books are I Remembered in the Night Your Name (Jerusalem, 2003) and The Hidden World (Jerusalem, 1999), which she co-authored with her husband.

Written during the present intifada, this book portrays the peculiar necessities of Israeli life. In "Jewish Schizophrenia," she explains the need to go on with life and attend a wedding, even while trying to absorb news of the latest terrorist attack.

Evil can only be obliterated by constant vigilance and battle and by a profusion of good. Let there be weddings. Tomorrow we will hear funeral announcements on the radio all day long, and we will see pictures in the newspapers. Pictures of lovely, smiling, productive people who are no longer here. And we will cry and mourn—and endure, and grow, and multiply, and suffer, and build and give thanks that we are here.

Ganz is firmly grounded in the material dimension in her role as wife, mother and grandmother to a large and growing brood. As she documents throughout her book, the lion's share of her time is spent in such "mundane" activities as making Shabbat, picking up the pieces after her guests depart for home, making birthday parties for each child and grandchild, baking, cooking and cleaning the house. Despite all this emphasis on the physical, she stays constantly on the lookout for the deeper spiritual dimension.

In "Sukkos Paradise," Ganz frankly admits that despite all the enticements of holiday trips, jeep rides, plays and concerts there is nothing she would rather do on Sukkot than sit in her sukkah.

I suppose I could write a detailed theological analysis, but personally, I don't feel the need. When I hold the esrog and lulav together and say the bracha, I am filled with a feeling of love for Hashem and my people, concern for all G-d's creatures, rootedness in the land, and overwhelming thanksgiving for the privilege of being who I am, where I am, when I am.

Chapters are about three pages long, and organized loosely according to

subject matter. The topics are diverse and range across the spectrum of everyday life, from coping with the flu in "Tissues and Tea" to devising a strategy for dieting in "To Eat or Not to Eat." Ganz proves what writing teachers have been telling us all along—that a writer can focus his eye on just about anything and find a valuable message or insight to share.

From one chapter to the next, Ganz moves from the ridiculous to the sublime, from moaning about all her wanderings to spend Shabbat with her children scattered across Israel to yearning for the *Geulah* and how to bring it closer.

Ganz covers a lot of territory in *A Different Dimension*, and I can't say that I was interested in every subject she presents. It's a matter of personal taste, and since each chapter stands on its own, it's easy for the reader to jump around.

A habit I picked up during my days as a young mother (when time for reading was an absolute luxury) is reading books from the middle or even from the very end and making my way backward toward the beginning. That way I was sure to know the climax, even if I didn't find the time to read through the storyline. This book lends itself very well to taking gulps of humor and inspiration in five- or ten-minute doses. The downside of the book's format is the sense, now and then, that the chapters are clipped too short with a facile ending taped on.

By the time I finished reading *A Different Dimension*, I felt as if I were one of Ganz's good friends, someone who had spent time in her sukkah, watched her master the art of playing the recorder, accompanied her on a walk to Har Herzl, helped her find the pencil caught under her piano key and cheered her on in losing weight so she could fit into that beautiful *simchah* dress. Every time I opened a chapter, I felt like I was being invited into her inner sanctum. She presented me with many gifts of insight and inspiration, and I feel richer for the experience. **JA**