

A Simple Driving Test

By Rabbi Emanuel Feldman

The notice in the papers was innocuous enough. Under new regulations, all those who had been driving in Israel under foreign driver's licenses are now required to obtain an Israeli license, after taking a simple test.

Where bureaucracy is king, nothing is simple. I called the Motor Vehicles Bureau to find out details. After 14 attempts over a span of two days — getting nothing but busy signals or endless ringing — a very courteous man, who had finally finished his tea, picked up the phone. The procedure would be simple, he assured me. Just show your foreign driver's license and, after a simple test to establish your driving ability, an Israeli license will be issued.

"How do I go about taking the simple test?" That too, I was told, is simple.

You just go to the Motor Vehicles Bureau and take the test.

Can I go any time? Are the lines long?

No, it's very simple. You just schedule the test at a certain time. There's no waiting.

How do I schedule the test?

You go to a licensed driving school and pick up the necessary forms there.

And bring the forms with me to the test?

Yes. But first you have to take the forms to a licensed eye doctor for an eye test, and he has to stamp the form. They charge about 20 shekel.

And then I bring that form to the driving test?

Yes, but first you go to a licensed medical doctor to have a physical examination. He won't charge more than a 100 shekel.

And then I bring the forms to the driving test?

No, first you go to a licensed driving school to take driving lessons.

But I've been driving for 30 years! Why do I suddenly need lessons?

To learn Middle Eastern techniques. You may need only a few lessons, but those are the regulations. You have to go to driving school.

How much are the lessons?

80 shekel each.

And the test — does it cost anything?

Not much. 80 shekel.

After my lessons, when do I take the test?"

The driving school schedules your lesson. But first you pay 40 shekel to the Motor Vehicles Bureau for administering the test.

And if I fail the test?

Who said you would fail the test? Who told you that? Should that somehow happen, you just have to take additional lessons at 80 shekel per lesson, plus another 80 shekel for retaking the test, plus another 40 shekel for administration, of course.

Sir, with all due apologies, is it not in your interest, and the driving school's, that I fail the test?

Our only interest is in making driving safer. And if I pass the test?

It's very simple. You come back the next day to pick up your temporary license.

And when do I get my permanent license?

You come back four weeks later to pick it up.

Must I stand in line each time?

Well, the lines are not very long. Bring a book. Maybe two.

Thanks, you've been very helpful.

Like I said, it's very simple.

I am proud to report that I'm now licensed to drive like an Israeli. That means I can weave in and out of traffic, blow my horn at red lights, be churlish and rude, make illegal U-turns, speed in reverse, never give right of way, and in general, throw civilized behavior out the window as soon as I turn the key in the ignition. All this cost me only 15 hours and 900 shekalim. Yet when I consider that surge of freedom that comes with getting behind the wheel just like a *sabra*, it was, simply speaking, a bargain.

