

The Elevator

“Have you ever been stuck in an elevator?”

I have lived to a good old age before such an event overtook me, and it was definitely an unpleasant experience.

It happened just last week, on Monday, 21 November 2011, at 2.30 in the afternoon. Rain had been forecast for the whole country, but in Jerusalem it was quite a pleasant morning, overcast, but with intervals of sunshine. I went for an acupuncture treatment, came home for a quick lunch and prepared to go out to my family doctor to pick up some prescriptions. I had no time for my post-treatment rest.

I left the house a few minutes before two, and immediately a tremendous downpour began. My daughter phoned to ask if I had managed to get home in time, and I answered that I was just setting out. When I arrived at the clinic, I was happy to see no other patients waiting and the doctor took me almost immediately. I felt it was my lucky day because sometimes one waits quite a long time.

I returned home just before 2:30, noting that none of the neighbors' cars was there. I entered the house, and summoned the lift. I entered and pressed the second floor button. The lift began to move, then suddenly stopped. The lights went out, a small emergency light lit up, and the emergency button glowed red. I was flabbergasted.

Just yesterday, I had met my upstairs neighbor on the stairs, panting on her way up to the third floor. “Isn't it time you gave up your prejudice about the lift?” I asked.

“Oh no,” she replied. “Since that time I was stuck inside it, I never use the elevator. I don't want that experience again.”

Now I could appreciate her feelings. I began to press the emergency button for a few minutes, even though I knew that none of the neighbors was at home. In spite of the weak emergency light, I could make out some of the directions on the panel. There was a phone number to call the technician, but to my horror I found that I had forgotten to take my mobile when I left the house. I comforted myself by thinking that it would probably not work in the confines of the lift anyway.

This gave rise to the thought that my daughter might phone again to ask if I had come home safely. She would get no answer from home phone or the mobile, and would start worrying. She would phone the doctor and they would tell her that I had left the office half an hour ago. She didn't know the numbers of any of the neighbors – what would she do?

I mentally shook myself, and vowed to stop imagining. I began to press the red button again, and was amazed how tiring this simple act was. I had to rest a few minutes, but soon continued again. It then occurred to me that I didn't have to hold my heavy handbag, and placed it on the floor. That made me feel better, but I was also feeling a bit damp because I had been caught without an umbrella, but I decided not to take off my jacket. All the time I was trying the bell, and even banged on the door, hoping to attract someone's attention, but all in vain. As I listened to the alarm, I was reminded of the noise made by a train.... The rhythm and the volume kept changing, and at times I thought I could hear syllables or words emanating from the clackety-clack of the wheels on the tracks.

I was getting tired and my back was beginning to ache. I was tempted to sit on the floor, but was afraid I wouldn't be able to get up again, and so wouldn't be able to reach the red button. I read the instruction panel again. It told me that there was room for five people – in a space of about a square meter. That conjured up a picture of sardines in a tin, and what if there was a child

among such a group of passengers? I was happy that I was alone, and didn't suffer from claustrophobia.

I looked at my watch and saw that more than half an hour had passed. I continued intermittently to press the red button, and then realized that people in the neighborhood probably thought it was a car alarm, going on and off as programmed. Who pays attention to car alarms, other than one's own?

I tried to cheer myself up by thinking that *someone* must soon come home, but I was beginning to feel worn out. I began to wonder about the supply of oxygen. Was any fresh air coming into my little space? How long could one survive on the amount that there was? In a moment I was imagining that the neighbors had perhaps gone out for the day, or even overnight? They would open the door next morning, and find me collapsed on the floor, unconscious, or worse. How would they notify my children, not having their numbers?

I gave myself a mental kick to stop such thoughts. Fifteen more minutes passed, and suddenly I heard voices, but couldn't hear what they were saying. I called to them, and then heard a woman's voice asking if I was all right. She added that they had sent for the technician. I wondered how long it would take him to come. The voice asked again if I was all right, and I answered "Yes."

A few minutes later the main light went on. The lift began to move, and stopped. Darkness again. After a few more anxious moments, the lights went on and this time the lift moved up to the second floor. The door opened, I stepped out and breathed a great sigh of relief. I had been confined a whole hour! My downstairs neighbor was waiting, and asked again if I was OK. I admitted to being very tired, and asked if she knew what had happened.

“We were called by our security company, who told us something was wrong with our alarm, and we came immediately. At the same time, there had been an electric outage in the whole area, because of the storm, and that’s why the elevator stopped. There wasn’t any technical problem there. Once the electricity came on all was well.”

“Well, thanks for your support, but please excuse me, I must lie down.” I was exhausted. I went into my apartment, quickly made a wonderful cup of tea, then went thankfully to bed. The next day I was even more tired and could scarcely stand on my feet, so I stayed in bed the whole day, dozing and digesting this new experience. It is said today that timing is everything. If only I had come home two minutes later, the lift would not have been working; I would simply have walked up the stairs, and missed this hopefully not-to-be repeated episode.