

Hi everyone,

Like in Israel, also here the students get a chance to evaluate their instructors (but, unlike Israel, the results of the surveys are not published in the LA-weekly). Several weeks ago I got my evaluations from the numerical analysis course that I taught last quarter. And - it turns out that I have a darker side! The following evaluation of one of the students summarizes wonderfully what most of the students wrote: "Excellent lecturer, clear and to the point. I think he would make a neat terrorist". *Moi???* A terrorist!? It turns out that I was, at least to some, intimidating and too demanding. I think that I was a tender angel and I'm ready to redesign the face of any student who would dare to disagree with me on that.

My current class is much better: it's a graduate class (namely, master and PhD students), the same course that I taught last year. Naturally, it's more demanding for me: I have to answer some smart questions ("and what happens when the function is not differentiable?") instead of some more basic ones ("can you please explain again how did you get that 2 and 2 are 4?"). The course didn't start very smoothly: since less than 20 students enrolled, I was told that I wouldn't have a TA=Teaching Assistant (metargel). That was a big problem since I was planning to teach the course the same way I did last year when I had a TA. I thought to myself "well, at least I will have a reader" (bodek targilim). But then, after classes have begun, I was told that even a reader is a wild fantasy and that I'll have to grade my students' homework myself! In that rate, I wouldn't be surprised if the department told me later that I also had to stay and clean the classroom! Now I'm joking since this story had a happy end but then it really troubled me. I went to the vice-chair who told me that I may have a TA and/or a reader if (a) I find a graduate student who's capable of doing the job; (b) is willing to do it; and (c) isn't being fully paid for this quarter. And even if I find such a "legendary creature" (as he put it), chances are slim that the chairman will allow it and that there will be money for paying that student. I was going to give up but I decided to go on that quest. And it worked. I found Igor who was my student last year and is capable, willing and payable.

Again and again I am overwhelmed by the intensity of my feelings towards my current home town - LA. Sometimes, when I'm driving along Wilshire or Sunset boulevards (two of LA's central routes) - and that happens almost every day - it seems to me that I have always lived here. In the last week there were two times in which these patriotic feelings were exceptionally notable:

A week ago I watched, together with my colleague Gadi, the movie "Grand Canyon". I already saw it in Israel 3 years ago and enjoyed it; but now I saw it as a Los-Angeleno. And the difference was striking. I knew the places, I recognized the views, I was familiar with the situations described there, I could relate to the problems that this great film considers. I could identify with the characters in many scenes - the earthquake, the traffic jams, the encounters with homeless people, the loneliness moments. Although I am quite successful in bringing to minimum my earthquake-traffic-homeless-loneliness experiences, they are inevitable in this city. And only now I can understand and appreciate the so-very-deep meaning of what Kevin Kline tells his son during a driving lesson after a scary left-turn: "Son, making a left-turn in LA is one of the hardest things in life. "

This weekend I had a guest from New York, Eddie. So far, I met Eddie several times, but always in the jungle where he lives. It was great and interesting to have him here and show him LA which is so different from NY. It filled my heart with joy to hear him admire the weather (the lucky bastard wouldn't be so admiring if he came a week earlier...), the beaches and what's on them, the mansions of Beverly Hills and the coffee served in my favorite cafe near my home. We also went to a trip in the Griffith Park on the Hollywood hills: this is the park that has the famous HOLLYWOOD sign. The views from there are breathtaking: the entire LA basin, from the sea to the snow-capped San

Bernardino mountains (about 100 kms), covered with a light layer of smog (the lightest ever, thanks to the recent heavy rains), was below our feet! In what other city can you see, in one turn of the head, the sea, a huge metropolitan, the edges of a desert and snowy mountains? In what other town can you see, in just one glance, the high rises of downtown and a wild deer jumping right next to you on the hills? So - "bechol zot yesh ba mashehu. "

Tamir