

January 21, 1972

Sharon Travel Agency  
18 East 48th Street  
New York, N.Y.

Gentlemen:

I just returned from a two week trip to Israel arranged by your firm. Both flights, coming and going, were aboard El Al. This is ~~astit~~ should be, because I always prefer to fly El Al.

However, there is something I think I ought to call to your attention. It is not directly your responsibility, but I believe that as a major travel company you might be in a better position to discuss the problem with the El Al authorities.

On my flight to Israel (#200 on January 5, 1972), we discovered from almost the very beginning of the flight that the stewards and stewardesses were antagonistic to the passengers. The situation would be comical if it were not so painful to experience. This was not only my own opinion, but the consensus of almost all the passengers, the majority of whom felt enraged at the shabby treatment we received.

The personnel, especially the stewardesses, acted more like top-seargents ordering about the lowly privates, namesly, us passengers. One example: an elderly lady seated next to me asked for a pillow because of a chronic pain in her neck. I heard her repeat this request three times, once each to two different stewardesses and once to a steward. The first two times she was told to wait, and the third time she was dismissed with a bark that there were none left. I do not know if there were any left or not; in either case, El Al is surely responsible for either tolerating incredibly discourteous personnel, or failing to provide ~~elementary~~ elementary comfort for its passengers.

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When the time came for prayers, one felt that the aircraft personnel suddenly placed themselves in an immediately hostile position to those that had the audacity to participate in the services. I recognize full well that blocking the aisles interferes with the serving of breakfast. But after close to 25 years of experience, El Al surely should have found it possible to solve this scheduling problem. Certainly, the snide remarks and contemptuous looks of stewards and stewardesses do not enhance the ethnic quality which is El Al's primary attraction for American Jews.

Additionally, very early in the flight tow of four lavatories proved inoperative. Requests by certain elderly passengers to make use of First Class facilities were turned down, as I understand they must be by law. But I believe that if El Al cannot provide for these basic and elementary needs of passengers, it must understand, and make its employees understand, that the laws of nature take precedence over the laws of the Warsaw Convention or any other airlines agreements.

It would be foolish to generalize about all El Al flights. As a matter of fact, my return flight on El Al was quite pleasant (Flight #247, January 19, 1972). However, this discourtesy and inefficiency that I experienced going to Israel was certainly not the first unpleasantness I encountered on El Al. Other airline employees are generally far more pleasant and cooperative.

It would seem to me that over and beyond courtesy and respectfulness for its own sake, El Al ought to make a greater attempt to develop these qualities against the day that it may be in the position where it needs customers.

It hurt me, as an American Jew who loves Israel and always travels El Al, to hear many like-minded people mutter under their breaths that this was the last time they would fly on El Al. I know they did not mean it, but it is a sentiment that, if repeated often enough, leads to an ugly reality.



Please, therefore, do attempt to bring these matters to the attention of the El Al authorities. It is more than just the reputation of one company that is at stake. A competing airline advertises that its aircraft is an "introduction" to the country it represents. It would be sad for the State of Israel to be characterized, in the mind of El Al customers, as the source of the bellicose attitudes displayed on some El Al flights.

Cordially,

RABBI NORMAN LAMM

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