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Wild and wacky Israeli tales from '09

By [Daniella Ashkenazy](#) · December 20, 2009

JERUSALEM (JTA) -- Israel is not just the place of stories about settlement freezes and army operations.

This unique country of 7 million people has its fair share of zany tales; here are a few from 2009.

The prize for weirdest move taken by Israeli politicians in 2009 probably goes to Netanyahu's city elders, who in August decided to dress up the city center with a fresh coat of bright purple paint on the main thoroughfare. By October the pricy paint job had faded in the Middle Eastern sun, reverting to black asphalt. A close runner-up in the category goes to the Hadera municipality, where a \$5 million facelift for the city's congested central traffic circle added not just entry and exit lanes, but planned to have traffic lights playing Hebrew songs.



Daniella Ashkenazy collected offbeat snippets
of daily life in Israel in 2009. (Avi Katz)

The award for the strangest Supreme Court case goes to an Israeli named Shlomo Avni, who petitioned the high court for the right to be eaten by wild animals after his death, saying he was only repaying a debt to nature as a lifetime consumer in the food chain. In their 772-word decision, three Supreme Court judges wished the 80-year-old plaintiff a long life and unanimously rejected Avni's petition. The justices quoted Jeremiah 9:21 and the prophet's warning of dreadful times when "carcasses of men fall as dung upon the open field." Avni said he'd take his case to the international court at The Hague.

The best item related to Israel's water crisis goes to the residents of a north Tel Aviv apartment building who found themselves paying huge water bills that were 10 to 100 times those of similar dwellings.

After investigation, it was discovered that an underground connection from the apartment house was watering an adjacent municipal park.

While 2009 demonstrated no shortage of silly two-bit crooks and goofy cops -- including one nearsighted specimen who ticketed a driver because her Saint Bernard wasn't wearing a seatbelt -- the strangest theft occurred at Tel Aviv's Ichilov Hospital. The hospital staff was puzzled when a huge oil painting by a well-known Israeli artist vanished from the walls of a well-trafficked corridor. Before they could canvas the hospital for the missing canvas, another large painting by another well-known Israeli artist disappeared, and then another canvas 24 hours later. Security cameras revealed that the same middle-aged woman had nonchalantly been taking down the canvases and coolly walking out the front door, no questions asked. She hung the works in her nearby apartment.

One candidate in the Softhearted Sabra category stands out among many. A court re-possessor who knocked on the door of a poor family in the western Galilee took one look around at the impoverished household and made a snap decision: Rather than taking whatever he could find of value, he scribbled "Nothing to repossess" on his form, opened his wallet and handed the head of the household \$25.

The Loose Cannon award is a toss-up among a group of overzealous religious residents in Ashkelon. Several months after the end of the Gaza war in January, they decided to let everyone in their neighborhood know of Shabbat's arrival by sounding private sirens from their balconies minutes before sundown on Fridays -- causing widespread panic by residents who mistook it for an air-raid siren.

One story that really takes the cake involved the trend of turning birthdays into full-scale productions. A Netanya resident decided this would be a lucrative sideline and offered his business premises as a venue for kids' parties. The problem: the venue in question was a pistol range. Fliers promised target shooting with live ammunition -- up to 51 .22 caliber bullets per child -- at \$20 a shot.

The prize for nutty motorists is given to the fellow pulled over for zigzagging down the highway to Petach Tikvah at 5:30 a.m. Not only was the driver three times above the amount of alcohol permitted while operating a motor vehicle, he also was engaged in an activity with his passenger that is usually reserved for the back seat. The driver argued -- to no avail -- that he was zigzagging only because his lady friend had blocked his field of vision.

From the religious world, a prize goes to the competition between the two sons of the former Sephardi chief rabbi, Ovadia Yosef, who argued over what blessing should be recited over the popular kids' peanut snack Bamba.

In the category of Israeli ingenuity, one Israeli created a DNA test for steer that could track a stolen animal even if it already had been reduced to hamburger.

The most incredible dilemma of 2009 came during the Gaza war last January: How do you feed two frightened and famished lions solely with battle rations? As an army unit hunkered down near an abandoned Palestinian zoo amid the fighting, its brigade commander frantically sought to move the lions out of the war zone or find a way to feed them.

The Israel Defense Forces has some weird posts -- including two stand-up comedians and a full-time magician -- but who thought the army would need a lion keeper? One idea was to mobilize personnel from the Ramat Gan Safari into the IDF, then embed them with the infantry unit on special assignment.

Nobody knows exactly how the IDF did it, but by the time the army pulled out of Gaza the lions were in their cages and doing fine.

(This column was adapted from a submission by [Chelm-on-the-Med](#), which culls the incredible snippets of daily life reported in the Israeli press.)

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