As the land of milk and honey marks its sixtieth birthday, an alumnus and photographer celebrates ten years of channeling his adopted land’s seductive beauty.

Sometimes I do get to places just when God’s ready to have somebody click the shutter.”

Ansel Adams said it first, but photographer Yehoshua Shalom Halevi—formerly Ken White ‘83—quotes Adams’s statement on the home page of his Web site. “I really believe a lot of the photographs I take are inspired by a spiritual source that I’m sort of channeling.” Halevi confides. Certainly the luminous photographs in his weekly blog, Israel the Beautiful, many of which feature details of nature radiantly sculpted by light, invite the viewer into a quiet gladness.

In 1998 Halevi and his wife, Gail Glickman ‘85, moved with their children to Israel, or “made aliyah.” At that point they took the surname Halevi and the Hebrew names they’d been given at birth, Yehoshua and Sara. A particular benefit of not being called “Ken” in Israel, Halevi says, is avoiding frequent confusion (and, one might suspect, neck strain); in Hebrew, “ken” means “yes,” so it’s heard all the time in public places.

Before moving to Israel, Halevi worked for a dozen years as a professional journalist, but he says, “I never really found my ‘voice’ as a writer or an artist or anything else until I came to Israel.” It was a question of becoming internally centered, he observes—perhaps partly a matter of maturing, but also the result of enduring the dangers and challenges, and sharing the community commitment, of living in Israel. “It’s a beautiful thing to establish that as the foundation of your lives,” he says.

Halevi’s reach extends far beyond Israel. He has worked in many countries on four continents—for publishing houses, including National Geographic; for institutions and organizations, including Yeshiva University and Hadassah; and for many private businesses and individual clients. His photographs taken on a climb of Mt. Kilimanjaro once illustrated an article in the Brandeis Review, predecessor to Brandeis University Magazine. Exhibited in California, Massachusetts, and Israel, his work has won numerous awards for both art and photojournalism.

Each week Halevi presents in Israel the Beautiful a stunning new picture followed by a nontechnical explanation of how it was created and what, in his judgment, makes it special. His pleasure in freely sharing this information reflects the fact that, being largely self-taught, he himself has benefited greatly from studying the work of others.

Israel the Beautiful is a marketing tool for Halevi, but, in his adopted country’s sixtieth year, he says, “What’s more important to me is that people see Israel in a different light—that they see the beauty that makes up this country and don’t just take in the news and the political controversies.”

Neither this lofty mission nor his photography for hire is a burden to Halevi, who says, “I’m very happy when I’m on my way to work. I love my work. I’ve managed to find the passion in my life and do it professionally. That’s the ultimate combination.”

Additional Halevi photographs can be seen at www.goldenlightimages.com.

—Sue Rardin

MEDITERRANEAN COAST AT ROSH HANIKRA

Rosh Hanikra is a chalky cliff along the Mediterranean coast on the border between Israel and Lebanon. It is known for labyrinthine grottoes carved over the years by the pounding surf. Recalls Halevi, “I was on route to an assignment not far from the coast and thought I’d steal an hour admiring the aquamarine water that flows through this natural wonder. Following the dark and misty maze of tunnels, I was surprised to emerge suddenly into a very short opening with a southwestern view of blue ocean expanse. The fresh air and sunshine compelled me to stop, gaze, and, of course, preserve the moment in pixels.”
SUNRISE AT THE DEAD SEA

To capture this image of dawn, Halevi writes, “required little more than setting my camera on a tripod and waiting for the curtain to rise. I did make a conscious decision to compose the shot in two equal halves, but beyond that, it’s all God’s show.” The remarkable color, he adds, is the result of accidentally using a camera setting that allowed more of the blue light to be recorded and filtered out the warmer red and yellow light of the rising sun. “The camera,” he notes, “did what it was told to do, and my eyes, although surprised by the dramatic results, were nevertheless quite pleased.”
THE JUDEAN DESERT

The desert has its own unique beauty, but for a photographer, it also has a host of challenges to overcome—among them dust, heat, inaccessibility, and high-contrast light from dawn until late afternoon. Against such obstacles, a picture can go flat. This photo was taken just before sunrise from Upper Nachal Og. Writes Halevi, “A variety of textures gives feeling to this image, while a gentle, curving line provides depth. Using a strong foreground element, such as these colorful rocks, draws the viewer into the photo and gives the landscape both dimension and impact.”
GLORIOUS GOLAN

Viewing this field of wild mustard, just below the Peace Lookout in the lower Golan Heights, challenged Halevi to convey in one picture a range of sensual stimuli: the warmth of the sunshine, the cool breeze, chirping birds, and the intoxicating floral aroma. “As I waded through the field, hip high in flowers, I felt as if I were in an ocean of wildflowers,” he writes. “To convey that feeling, I used a wide-angle lens and searched for a viewpoint that stretches the yellow across the frame and far into the depth of the photo. The olive trees appear to be islands, floating in this sea. If you look carefully, you can spot one of Israel’s real ‘seas,’ the Kinneret, in a few places just behind these trees.”

AN EXPLOSION OF FALL COLORS

Taken about a two-minute stroll from his home in the Judean Mountains, this shot illustrates something Halevi often tries to convey to his students: To be a good photographer, you have to be aware of your surroundings. “Often,” he says, “we take for granted what’s right outside our front door, thinking we have to travel to the exotic Himalayas or a tropical island to see the grandeur of nature.” This view, captured about an hour before sunset, appealed to the artist, he says, because of the variety of color in the vines amid a swath of green, where a farmer had planted a small vegetable patch.