

INNYAN

HAMODIA WEEKLY MAGAZINE

PHOTOGRAPHY

IN THE

EXTREME

NATURE
IN EXOTIC
LOCATIONS

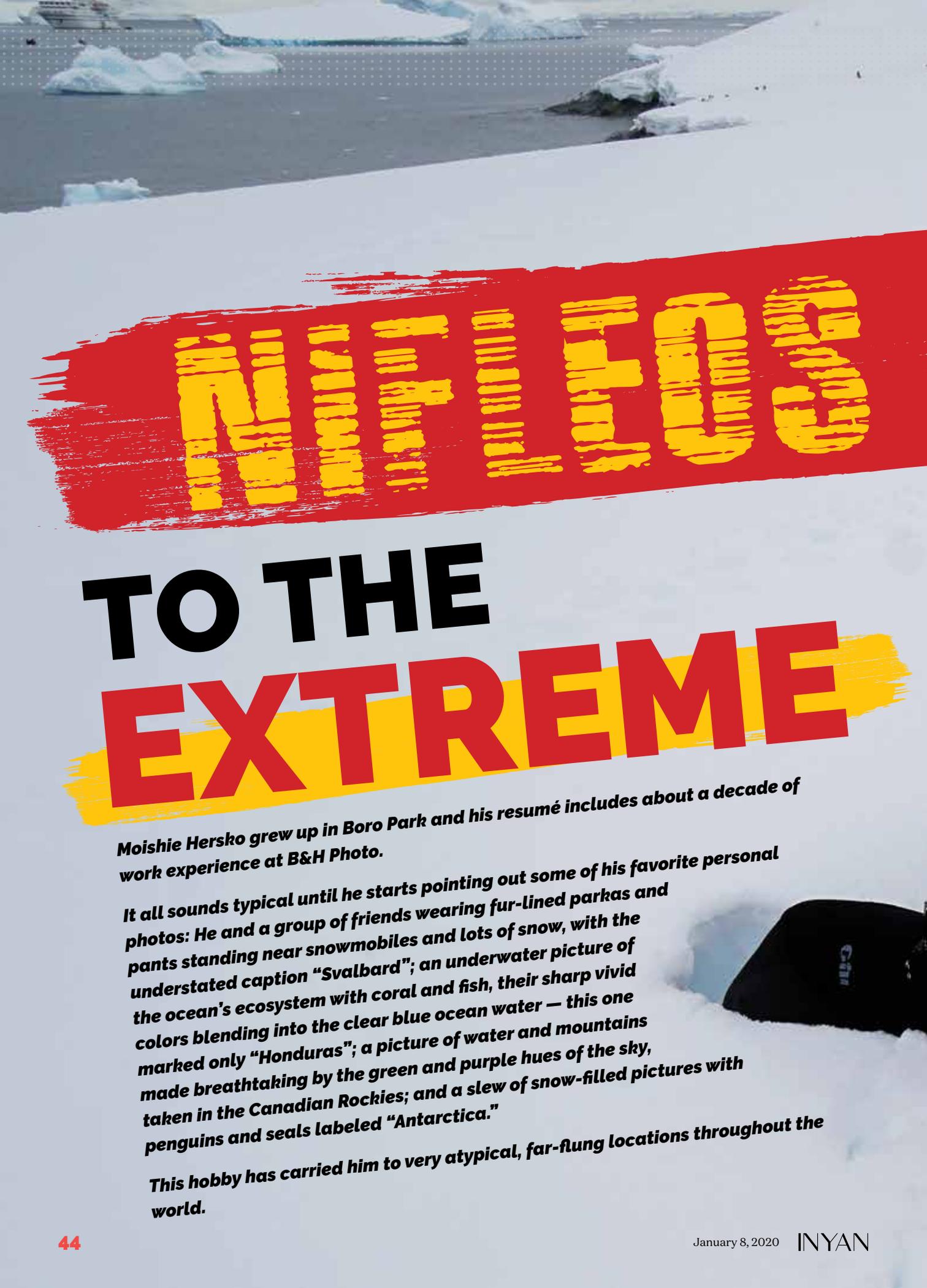


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Life Cycles**

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"In the sight of these fanatics, Jews today can do nothing right. If they give generously – they are doing it for some selfish purpose of their own. If they don't give, then what would you expect of a Jew?"



INTERVIEWS

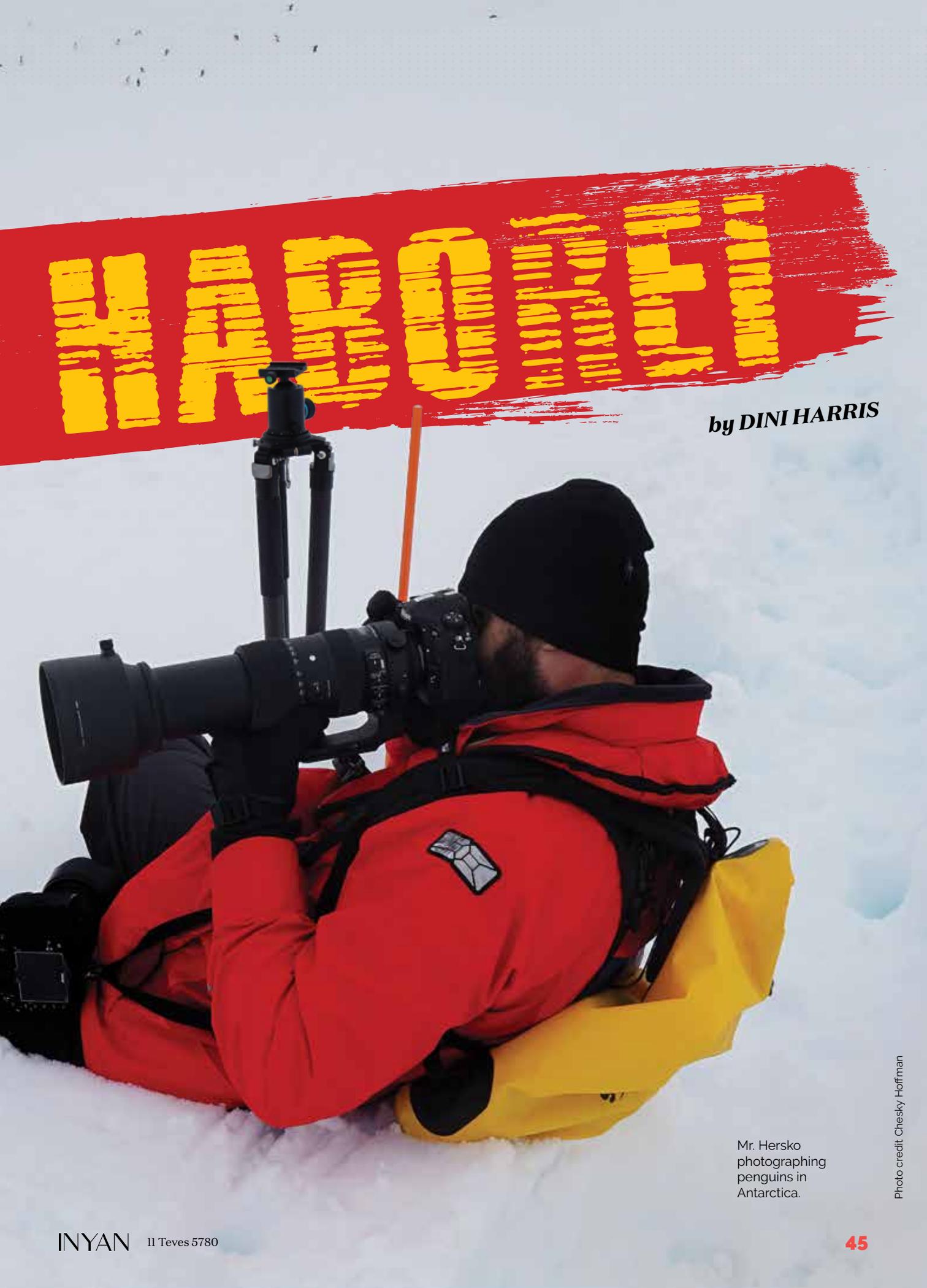
TO THE

EXTREME

Moishie Hersko grew up in Boro Park and his resumé includes about a decade of work experience at B&H Photo.

It all sounds typical until he starts pointing out some of his favorite personal photos: He and a group of friends wearing fur-lined parkas and pants standing near snowmobiles and lots of snow, with the understated caption “Svalbard”; an underwater picture of the ocean’s ecosystem with coral and fish, their sharp vivid colors blending into the clear blue ocean water — this one marked only “Honduras”; a picture of water and mountains made breathtaking by the green and purple hues of the sky, taken in the Canadian Rockies; and a slew of snow-filled pictures with penguins and seals labeled “Antarctica.”

This hobby has carried him to very atypical, far-flung locations throughout the world.



by DINI HARRIS

Mr. Hersko
photographing
penguins in
Antarctica.

Photo credit Chesky Hoffman

Hashem's in charge and you get what you get!

You can spend thousands of dollars and travel thousands of miles and find that nothing works. The weather is difficult and the animals don't show.

You can come back with five pictures instead of five thousand — but one picture can be perfect.

I was in a stunning location in Iceland, but the picture wasn't working out because it was pouring rain. All of a sudden, the clouds parted a bit and some rays came through for about 15 seconds. The day was photographically unproductive otherwise, but that picture is one of my favorites from the trip.



Iceland: Sunset from behind the veil of the Seljalandsfoss waterfall



Iceland: Iceberg in Fjallsárlón Lagoon



Iceland: Storm light over the Vatnajökull Glacier. Or, as some have said, Birchas Kohanim at the Kosel.

photography equipment!”

Travel • Photography = Travel Photography

Along with Mr. Hersko's interest in photography, he was also interested in travel. His interests first meshed when he and a B&H colleague took a trip to Maine for the express purpose of taking pictures.

“On that first trip,” he says, “I learned that on a photography trip all you do is take photos. You can spend six hours in front of a rock waiting for the perfect light. So you can't mix a photography trip and a vacation with your wife. Each one needs its own time.”

That Maine trip was the kickoff for a long list of future photography trips and eventually led to his founding of Kosher Horizons, which

arranges kosher tours to the “world’s wild places.” Some of the first photography trips that Mr. Hersko took were to Wyoming, Iceland, Cuba, and Arctic Norway. He has also taken some relatively local nature photography trips.

“I’ve been down to Florida to do bird photography,” he says. “I was in Ohio during extreme cold weather, the effects of a polar vortex, and my friends and I stood there... taking pictures of frozen waterfalls.”

Extreme Photography

One of Moishie’s most extreme trips, done more than once, was to Svalbard, Norway — as close as you can get to the North Pole. Apparently, travel devotees have a particular interest in Svalbard because it boasts the world’s northernmost airport.

“Anyone who likes to travel wants to go to Svalbard,” he explains. “It’s the only place on Earth where you can see polar bears in their own habitat. Polar bears are so common that it is illegal to leave the settlement without a gun — and a big gun, too. In town, people leave their doors unlocked so that in case there’s a polar bear on the street, people will be able to duck into the nearest house for safety.

“Polar bears are the only animal on earth that actively hunt humans for food — even tracking them for days. There is a thrill in going out and looking for them, toeing the line between being safe and getting close up to see them.

“The polar bears tend to hang out on the east coast. There are no roads out there, the only way to get around is by snowmobile. The first time I was there, we saw four polar bears. The next time, there were none. This is nature, not a zoo. If they come, they come; if not, not. But once we were out on the east coast, we had plenty of time to go out on the sea ice and look for the seals that the polar bears hunt when they come up for air.

“You cannot do this yourself; you must have experienced

Kosher Horizons

Mr. Hersko’s first photography trips were arranged together with friends and colleagues who shared his hobby. When others expressed interest in joining these trips, he started arranging official group photography tours that included photography workshops.

Over the years, this has morphed into his Kosher Horizons business, which arranges kosher tours to remote locations. Though these tours are for everyone and not designated as photography tours, Mr. Hersko is always on hand to give photography advice and help participants return home with dramatic pictures documenting their experiences.

One of his tours is for people interested in seeing the aurora borealis, the northern lights. Because conditions for aurora sightings are unpredictable, Moishie schedules this trip only a day or two in advance, when the solar and weather reports align. He notifies interested parties and those who can make it on such short notice joins him on the trip to Iceland.

“We have Jews of all types on our trips,” Mr. Hersko proudly relates. “Chassidim, Litvaks, modern Orthodox — everyone gets along so well together. It’s a pleasure to see. It’s a bit crazy to go to the North Pole in the winter, so lifelong friendships are formed, no matter the participants’ backgrounds. We keep in touch and go to each other’s *simchos*.”

Svalbard: Mr. Hersko and the sign warning about polar bears.



Svalbard: Camping on a glacier under the aurora, in -40 degrees.



Svalbard: Polar bears on an iceberg

Left: The northernmost minyan for Minchah on Earth, and likely ever in Svalbard.



Precautions for Those Who Decide to Take Up Extreme Photography

Be safe! Don't be stupid. Dress appropriately for the weather. Never turn your back on the ocean; all it takes is one big wave... People get swept away on coastlines all the time. Carry a first aid kit and always have enough food and water. Research the area you're going to and make sure someone knows where you're going and when you're expected back. Don't rely on cellphones; some places have no service and, of course, batteries tend to die when you need them most. If there's a thunderstorm, go inside; at the very least, get in the car.

Safety should be your absolute first priority. No picture is worth putting your life at risk!

guides. You have to be careful when looking for a good place to camp, because the glacier is covered by a thin layer of snow that covers crevasses — deep cracks. If someone steps into one... that's the end! The guides have the know-how, experience and equipment to stay on safe snow.

“During breaks, you also stay with the snowmobile, because if a bear shows up you want to be able to move fast! At night, when we camp, there are shifts of two people on watch at all times, walking around the camp and making sure no polar bears show up.

“It's an amazing experience, camping on a glacier in -40°, with the aurora dancing overhead.”

Talking Photography Shop

On his photography trips, Mr. Hersko's main goal is, not surprisingly, taking beautiful pictures. In addition to the *siyatta diShmaya* involved, to get a really good picture a photographer needs to know a lot about weather and nature and how different elements of nature interact with each other. The photographer also needs a lot of patience.



Photography Tips

From an Expert

LIGHTING IS EVERYTHING. You can have the most beautiful scene, but if it's 2:00 p.m. and the sun is beating down, it just won't look good. The best light is right after sunrise and right before sunset, or around storms.

You can't always be up early or take pictures during dinner, but if you're on vacation, schedule yourself to be somewhere pretty at sunset.

Don't be scared off by bad weather. Right before a storm is a good time to take a dramatic picture. I took one of my best pictures in pouring rain. Huge birds were taking off and the rain was very soft, so the picture is very relaxing — even though I was getting soaked.

WHEN THERE'S A PRETTY SUNSET, look the other way. That will often be even prettier. We've seen a million pictures of sunsets. But if you turn around, you'll get a picture of something new bathed in a beautiful light.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO GO EXOTIC. I've gotten some of my best photos in my backyard.



Two bald eagles fighting over a kill.

“My longest wait for a photograph was eight hours,” relates Mr. Hersko. “That was back in Maine. I was waiting for the perfect light, because [ultimately], it's the lighting that determines the quality of a picture.

“There was a rock of perfect shape and color on the coast. The waves were crashing against it and there was the perfect tree in the background. Everything was perfect — except the lighting. I waited those eight hours, but I didn't get the picture I wanted. That's nature.

“One way to get a good picture is to first visualize it in your head and then try to position yourself so that it will all come together. I have pictures in my head that I've been trying to get for years. Some I've gotten, others not. I've been trying for ages to get a picture of a great white

egret in breeding plumage while it fishes. I have pictures of egrets, I have pictures of other birds fishing — but I don't have this exact picture yet.

“One picture I did get was of two eagles fighting over a kill. I took it in New Mexico, near the Rio Grande. It took about two hours for the whole story to play out: A female eagle killed a goose. A crow tried to get a peck, but the eagle chased it away. A juvenile eagle tried his luck, and the bigger bird allowed him a few bites. But when an adult male eagle got involved, it led to a fight for supremacy. That's when I took the picture I wanted.”

CUBA



Antarctica: Elephant seal posing in front of the group.

In 2015, as soon as the U.S. somewhat normalized its relations with Cuba and some travel restrictions were lifted, Moishie decided to visit the socialist country.

"I wanted to go immediately," he says, "before tourists started to flood the country and changes were made.

"We went through Panama, as flights from the U.S. were still illegal at that point, and slept on the floor of a room in Cuba for \$12 a night. Now everything's different; there are cruise ships and tourist hotels. But we were there just three days after the American embassy opened in the country.

"Cuba is beautiful; it has gorgeous nature. The trip wasn't exciting in the sense of mountains and glaciers, but it was intense. It was a chance to travel back 50 years in time, because under the U.S. embargo, Cuba had been closed to change.

"In Havana, we saw people playing dominoes in the street and started shmoozing with some of them. One guy told us that he was a structural engineer. So I asked him why such an educated man was playing dominoes at 2:00 in the afternoon.

"He asked me, 'Why should I work? I get the same exact rights, food and pension if I work or if I don't!'

"That statement summed up socialism for me. And that also explains why, on average, one building collapses in Cuba every day."



New York: Self-portrait from a helicopter.



Cuba: Cuban taxi

It's difficult for Mr. Hersko to choose his favorite picture because there are many that he likes, and because his opinion is subject to change. "When I come back from a trip, I remember not just the picture, but everything I experienced while taking the picture. But later on, the picture has to be able to stand on its own merit. So my opinion about particular pictures changes as time passes. Sometimes I realize that pictures of a very enjoyable trip aren't particularly good after all; and at other times, I realize that pictures taken on a less enjoyable experience actually have great photographic merit."

What propels Mr. Hersko to travel to take these pictures — which he uses to show only to family, friends and *Inyan* readers? "What it really boils down to," he says, "is that we live in a beautiful world and most people don't ever have a chance to see or experience it. That's what drives me. I want to see and experience *nifleos haBorei*. At times I take pictures, but at times I put the camera down so I can just live the experience." ■