

## A funny thing happened on the way to the electrical store, or shocking truths about Israel



March 22 2008 Posted by [Esther Shira](#)

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Ok, so being that I worked for years as an electronics technician, I should come as no surprise that my favorite food item in Israel the new drink, Shocko.

It's like putting my finger on my car battery to wake up in the morning, and tastes a million times better than coffee. It's also portable, in cute little bottles. Its Israel's answer to Starbuck's, and it costs probably about the same price if you factor in the average wage differential between here and the US. In reality, its just chocolate milk, but marketing is everything today.

I got my introduction to Israeli electrical standards my first Pesach in Sfat, while "camping out" in our house before our lift arrived. I had borrowed a new space heater, and had it on low for yom tov, as it was still pretty cold (or I was just still too spoiled by NY landlords who overheat their buildings). Overnight, everything was fine, but during the afternoon, as we were preparing to nap; my guest said that she noticed a funny smell in her room. I went to check and found the plug from my heater in an advance state of meltdown, and saw a black line UNDER the plaster and paint on the wall, heading toward the floor.

The smell was rapidly getting worse, and the cord and heater were overheated.

Stupidly, I tried touching the plug since I really had no idea where the main electrical cutoff switches were yet. Fortunately it I did not get a shock, so I grabbed an oven mitt and ran back to pull it out of the wall. That was the last heat I had until I rewired the place. When we did, we found that many wires were just plastered into the wall (no conduit) and sockets were more often than not wired with wires barely suitable for lighting, let alone for a socket. So my first lesson was, just because someone says they can do something is not a reason to let them to do it. After checking, it turns out that the person who did our original work was in fact someone with a very good reputation in Sfat among homeowners, but not necessarily with the electric company. I learned to check my choices of potential employees with both sources from then on.

Once the basic rewiring was done, we were wracking our brains trying to find an economical way to heat a place that has 14 foot ceilings. We considered building a loft, which would effectively give us two stories, but then we'd lose most of our natural light and still have to find a way to get heat to the lower level. We were going to bring baseboard heating from America in our lift, as I had found a very good product there that uses a new gel-like product to help retain the heat. They made it in both 110v and 220v models, the latter for hardwire installations, exactly what I was looking for: I thought I was "golden"

But wait, 220v is not the same anywhere.

To my rescue, came one Israel P who I "met" on the Tachlis email group on shamash.org, (NOT tachlis.org in the Galil). (To join click here:<http://listserv.shamash.org/cgi-bin/wa?SUBED1=tachlis&A=1>) He not only emailed me zillions of files on cost comparisons for gas vs. oil (called solar here) vs. electrical, but also on various appliances, lighting fixtures and

even bathroom venting issues. He actually took the time to meet me in the business district of Jerusalem and physically walked me into several stores that he personally dealt with, and gave me his recommendations about countless others that we could not get to, but I could check out later, and did.

He also spent hours showing me concrete examples of how he had tried various solutions and how each one had its plusses and minuses. His selflessness and enthusiasm for helping someone he had never met before gave me the zetz I needed to put myself back in gear using my talents and knowledge here to the fullest, as I had allowed a few small minded Israeli men to discourage me. I was doing all of the repairs on a really old house myself, a job I had volunteered for before learning that Home Center and Ace Hardware in Israel are NOTHING like their namesakes in America. I had run into several men at these places who were less than helpful, and were giving me a lot of “when your husband gets here” kind of runaround. If they only knew the truth!

Most importantly, he explained something that I had never encountered in US electrical systems: 2 different types of 220v systems. His information has since been added to the Nefesh B’Nefesh site, in their rights and information pages: <http://www.nbn.org.il/rights/airconditioning.htm>. In a nutshell, he explained that there are two ways to create 220v. You can either use 2-110v phases, each 180 degrees out of phase with each other (the US/Canada way) or you can use one phase of 220 volts (the Israeli way). If you plug in an appliance expecting 2 half phases of 110 to a “real” 220 line, you get fried appliances and very unhappy people who then have to buy new motors or new appliances.

So my bright idea of importing those great heaters along with our washer and dryer went up in smoke, (oops, did I say that? Sorry!). There is more, like the issue of 50 vs. 60 hertz, and the plugs with 3 pins vs. 4, but between you and

me, the rest is only worth reading if you already have such an item and you want to know if its worth bringing. The rest of us just by products made for here, and let the technician from the warranty company come and change the plugs and sell us the surge protectors, which in my opinion are worth every penny, as they are heck of a lot cheaper than service calls and repair bills. If you want more on surge protectors, read [http://www.nbn.org.il/rights/power\\_surges.htm](http://www.nbn.org.il/rights/power_surges.htm), but in the end, thanks to my general rule of “ask everyone I know, even if they have no idea what I am talking about”, I found out why we need them before I lost the circuit board in my washer, for instance.

Here’s a great example of what I am talking about. A friend who very readily admits to not knowing anything about electricity put me in touch with a mutual friend, also a recent oleh, who as of late has completed his training and internship as an Israeli electrician. He is also just happened to be working a part time as an installer of heaters not unlike what I had been trying to bring, as well as large ceiling fans, which I had brought. I had to wait until he made enough money to buy himself a work truck so he could turn the trip into a weekend trip to Sfat with his wife, but we were his first “out of town” job.

This was perfect example of using advice from a more experienced oleh (engineer), and joining it up with the expertise of a new one (the electrician/installer, to help a third one (me) get economical heating. It was nasty cold and pouring the day they were installed and as each heater came online, our house got cozier and cozier. We are very happy with the heaters themselves, but we are still waiting to see the electrical bill to see how economical they really are.