**Mishy Harman (narration):** Hey, it’s Mishy. Our next new episode is just a few days away, but in the meantime, we wanted to share a little bonus. In our last episode, **Soul Food**, we told the story of Tali Aronsky, who laid out the tale of her marriage and divorce, through a series of dishes.

Now, when we decide to pursue a story, we typically identify *all* the relevant characters, reach out to them and go interview them. Not everyone will make it into the final version, of course, but often many do. We’re also hyper aware of the fact that different people recall the same events in different ways, or have different perspectives on what happened. And we spend a lot of time fact-checking, cross-referencing and trying to reconcile those differences in a way that allows us to tell one coherent story.

Tali Aronsky’s story was no different. As we mentioned at the end of the episode, Tal - Tali’s ex-husband - didn’t want to be interviewed on the matter, but other than him, we spoke to a whole bunch of people who played a role in Tali’s tale. For all kinds of editorial and artistic reasons, we ultimately decided to focus the piece on Tali’s journey, *her* version of events, and indeed she was the only voice you heard. Here’s a little reminder.

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**Tali Aronsky:** I remember the lamb biryani that made me feel human again. I went to meet a friend on *Emek Refaim* Street in Jerusalem. And there’s a really good wine shop there. While I was there, I met this Indian guy named Erwin Prabhu. And he could just sense that there was something wrong that something tumultuous had happened in my life. And I remember him saying then and there, “I want to cook for you.” And I was like “what?” And he was like, “yes, let me cook for you.” At the beginning, I was like, ‘och, he's a guy. And does want sex? Does he want some kind of *quid pro quo*? And what, you know, who… who is this character?’ But I was in such a desperate state, that - like - I was almost like a machine like I didn't even have enough energy to fully explore it. Meaning I was moving like a zillion miles a minute, trying to like… New job, and I need a place to live, and I need to get a *gett*, and there was like so much craziness going on, that when he first made the offer, “OK, maybe.” You know, when he says “I'll see you here tomorrow in the shop” - I think it was like a Tuesday - “I'll see you here Wednesday at 8pm.” I'm like,“*ich veiss*, fine.” You know, I don't know. I remember actually showing up. But not knowing if he would show up. And there he was. And I remember being very moved by not only did he have all this food for me, but he left right after. He didn't linger. It wasn't, “now I'll walk you home,” or “because I gave you food. I can now ask you personal questions.” There was no weirdness. He gave me the food, said goodnight, said “I'll see you in two days,” and left. And I remember coming home, the apartment was very sparsely furnished. No one had lived there in a while, so there were broken panes of glass and I'm like, in this apartment shivering and the food was so good. Different spices than I'm used to. It's curry leaves. It was just so yummy. So biryani is like rice and vegetables and lamb. And then there was also like a pickled sour-sweet mango thing and then there would be the tamarind winter soup. Like the soup that his grandmother made in the winter. There was something about it that almost like... almost thawed me back into like humanity. Like my senses weren't just fear, panic, safety, survival. I suddenly had mango and tart and spicy and new. Like somehow through my taste buds, I became in touch with myself again. And that became our ritual. I would see him every two days and I would return the empty containers and he would give me new ones. This food drops like from the stork into my apartment. It really felt like mana. Like it really just felt so heaven-sent that it didn't feel weird to take it. And no matter how crazy my days were, my clothing is still in garbage bags. I'm moving from house to house, but in the evening I always knew that one meal a day I would have a home-cooked meal and it was so nourishing.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Once Tali mentioned Erwin Prabhu, the Indian man who cooked that lamb biryani for her, we obviously tracked him down.

**Erwin Prabhu:** Shalom Israel and people of the Holy Land. My name is Erwin Prabhu. I’m from India. I’m an engineer. I worked in the airport for about fifteen years. I came to Israel to work as a *metapel*.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** He lives in Bangalore now, having left his job as a *metapel -* a caregiver in Israel - exactly three years ago. Back in August, Zev Levi - who produced the piece about Tali - had a long chat with Erwin, and (unsurprisingly) heard a completely different perspective. Now, this is nothing new, of course. But in this case, we thought that the *particular* differences reflected something interesting about the ways stories are told from different vantage points. So we’re excited to share a shortened and edited version of the interview with Erwin. Here it is.

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**Zev Levi:** Good morning Erwin, how are you doing?

**Erwin Prabhu:** Fine, Zev. Good morning.

**Zev Levi:** Can you tell us about the first time you remember hearing or learning about Jerusalem, or Israel?

**Erwin Prabhu:** When I was about eleven years old, during the Eucharistic sacrifice - that's the mass, the Catholic mass - a priest by name of Father John Solomon. In the sermon, he said, like, “I was in Bethlehem, and... you know where Jesus was born, in the manger square.” So he said, like, “when I touched the Star of David, I could feel the energy.” And from that time, I somehow wanted to come to Jerusalem.

**Zev Levi:** And did you… when you were a kid, did you turn to the Bible? Did...

**Erwin Prabhu:** I don’t read the Bible. I don’t read the Bible. No. ‘You do good, God stays with you. That’s how it goes.’ From a very small age, like, I believe in what you do comes back to you. Even today, I feel that. Yes.

**Zev Levi:** When you were working in the airport back home, what made you think, ‘I’m gonna go and completely change my occupation just to go to Israel?’

**Erwin Prabhu:** My dream was to come to Jerusalem. Even I had the option to go to US. I had an option to go to Poland. I had an option to go to Italy. I refused. I just quit my job, and was like, ‘I’m going to Israel now.’ It’s a proud moment for me. No matter what I studied in India or whatever it is. It was a great experience for five years in Israel, with one of the most exciting and beautiful people I ever met. Tali. It was an accident that I met Tali on the 24th of December 2014, Christmas Eve. And I just went out to buy some whiskey *[laughs]*. Singleton!

**Zev Levi:** Was the whiskey in celebration of Christmas? Was it…

**Erwin Prabhu:** Yeah, of course. Yeah, yeah, yeah. So you know, they were shocked, because it was like two hundred and forty shekels. They looked at me, “what? You want this?” “Yeah, give me, why not?” Because people don’t spend that much money for a bottle of whiskey there. I know it. And she was shocked. Like, ‘who is this guy from India buying two hundred and forty shekels of whiskey bottle?” *[Laughs]*.

**Zev Levi:** How did that conversation start up?

**Erwin Prabhu:** When she introduced herself, she said, “Tali.” And I said, “you know Tali, what does ‘tali’ mean in Tamil?” It's a symbol of marriage, like a wedding ring. Ladies in India wear something around the neck which is called ‘tali.’ So this is the conversation which started, with the name.

**Zev Levi:** Do you remember Tali’s face? Do you remember her reaction?

**Erwin Prabhu:** You know, she’s got a smile with a dimple… not in the cheeks but above the cheeks, you know? She had a smile. She started talking about India. So I just asked her “do you like Indian food?” She said, “yeah, wow, I like this food called ‘biryani.’”

**Zev Levi (narration):** It just so happened that Erwin had made some lamb biryani for Christmas that very day.

**Erwin Prabhu:** I said, “I still have it. Can I bring you some?”

**Zev Levi:** I mean, this is some stranger that you just met. What made you think, ‘I should give this person food. I should cook for this person?’

**Erwin Prabhu:** Why not? You know, if I… I had this free time to do something which benefits others. This is just as a goodwill gesture, you know? For somebody who will cherish that moment of time. You know food is something you will never forget. And I took her a pack of food. She ate the food and said like, “this is something out of my imagination, you know? I didn't eat this food for a very very long time.” Then we started knowing each other. She told me like she was married just one month, and she was split. She didn't have a house. She was in a very bad phase. And I said, “yeah, OK, Tali, you can come and have food. Just give me a call.

**Zev Levi (narration):** And Tali took him up on that offer. She called.

**Erwin Prabhu:** So I used to bring her food. The chapati and the fish fries, you know like scrambled eggs with bread, and, typical Indian food, you know? For almost two months.

**Zev Levi:** And what was that like for you? Like, here’s this new person that you’ve just met who’s in a really bad place. Was it depressing? Did you find it was kind of like homework? You had to take care of this person because they needed help?

**Erwin Prabhu:** I came to Israel to help people, right? I... even in the interview, the question they asked me was, “do you know anybody in Israel?” I said, “I have a family in Israel.” “What? How can you tell this?” I said, “I’m gonna be with somebody. So they’re my family now.” And I used to look at her enjoy, you know? The happiness she has in the food - this is a blessing for me. Nothing more than that. And I wish I would do this to everybody. Why not bring in a smile? I gave it without any expectation. But the conversations took the second step of friendship. I asked her, “would you like to marry me?” You know, why not?

**Zev Levi**: Wait did you really ask her to marry you?

**Erwin Prabhu:** I asked her, “why don’t you get married to me? You’re still single, even I’m single.” But she was on the other side of religious side, you know? She was also religious. There’s too many factors involved, you know? All for good.

**Zev Levi:** Were you in love with Tali?

**Erwin Prabhu:** I was a good friend of her. A friendship can also become a relationship. Love comes when you're like, you're sixteen-seventeen, in your teens. Not when you're in your thirties. So thirties you understand things, you're mature, and you know love was after marriage.

**Zev Levi:** When you asked her to marry you, and she said, “no,” did you feel like, ‘oh OK, well, I tried,’ were you upset?

**Erwin Prabhu:** It was hard because, tell the truth, I didn’t have a girlfriend, ever. And this person was like, wow. I met somebody. In Jerusalem. On the Christmas Day. You know, why not her be my future? No I was not upset. If I force somebody to do something, that relationship will not last long. And even after that I used to go cook. So when I went there, I cooked chilli chicken with biryani for her. That was the first good meal she had after like two months. After that, was like every Shabbat for us, you know? Like I used to go on Fridays at twelve o’clock, cook for her for two-three hours. People used to come. All her friends. This is how life went. Tali, she likes Indian food. So when you like something, God doesn’t come down and give it to you. But it happens through another source. So maybe, I was there to feed her for the time I was there. I don’t know what I felt but I gave it without any expectation. You know, I was happy to see a smile in somebody’s face. Four years she had beautiful, good food. Good food. You know, I think you have to try it once. Share some food with somebody and see the happiness you get it yourself.

**Zev Levi:** Now that you’re back in Bangalore, are you still looking for a wife? Or..

**Erwin Prabhu:** No. Zev, whatever happens to me happens for good. I would wish things to come to me, I never go hunting. If it happens, it happens for good. Or else why break your head for nothing?

**Zev Levi:** Erwin, thank you so so much for taking the time.

**Erwin Prabhu:** Thank you so much Zev. Have a good day. And anyway shabbat shalom. Not today but for tomorrow, OK?

**Zev Levi:** Shabbat Shalom Erwin.

**Erwin Prabhu:** Thank you.

**Zev Levi:** All the best.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Zev Levi speaking with Erwin Prabhu. Sela Waisblum created the mix. This bonus was an example of the kind of extra content we release on our Israel Story subscription feed. So if you liked it, if you want to hear more stories, ad-free listening, and behind-the-scenes extras, sign up through Apple Podcasts. We’ll be back next week with a brand new episode. Till then, *shalom shalom* and *yalla bye.*

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