

# The Incredible Journeys Of Amir Dromi

**Moshe Miller**

If **Zman** has never quite had a story like this it's because we have never interviewed anyone quite like Amir Dromi.

We thought we were “merely” getting the firsthand account from the man Rabbonim have commissioned to search for the Aseres HaShevatim, the 10 Lost Tribes, in the dangerous mountains of western China. Many believe that among the mysterious tribes inhabiting the region is the Bnei Moshe, authentic descendants of the 10 Tribes, living a Torah life beyond the legendary Sambatyon River. Though this by itself would be a major journalistic coup, we had no idea that this is only one of many astonishing adventures Amir Dromi has to share.

From brushes with death in the melting glaciers of the Himalayas, to unwittingly pitching his tent in the path of a ferocious lion attacking a wildebeest, his life story is one heart-pounding experience after another.

Dromi's outer search for meaning mirrors his inner search and discovery of his religious roots. Here is his truly one-of-a-kind story – or at least as much as we can fit in anything less than a full-fledged book spanning hundreds of pages.

The afternoon sun gleamed overhead, its rays causing the vast expanse of snow that lay before them to sparkle, almost blindingly.

That fateful summer day in 1979 found Amir Dromi and his wife, Yael, struggling up a 16,800-foot-high peak in the Himalaya Mountains. They had started out that morning from their encampment just beneath the snow line. Temperatures are always freezing above the snow line, and to camp at that altitude overnight, when the temperatures drop even more, would have put them in mortal danger.

As the day wore on, they had edged up seemingly endless cliffs rimming a huge valley. The impossibly steep walls seemed to lead toward the mountain's peak. Once they reached the top of the cliffs, they expected to find a way to the peak and then down the mountain and past the treacherous snow line. Instead, as they finally pulled themselves up above the wall of the valley, they were met with the apparition of an immense basin spanning the distance between them and the peak. Filling the newfound, expansive valley was a massive glacier, gleaming white. To reach the peak, they would have to cross over the ice-filled basin. Only then would they be able to begin their descent.

Amir looked at his wife. He thought he could make out a faint sound of ice shifting amid the howling of the wind, due to the warmth generated by the summer sun. Yael, however, looked blue from the cold and from malnourishment, and as he looked at her he realized that he, too, must be turning blue.

"Give me your pack, and then walk behind me. Stay close, and we're going to walk across," he instructed her, trying to infuse a measure of confidence in his voice. In reality, however, the young couple was facing a life and death situation. If the sun went down before they could descend below the snow line, they would certainly freeze to death due to the lower night temperature and their inability to move in the darkness.

They began to walk across the icy expanse, fighting for breath in the high-altitude, low-oxygen environment. At that

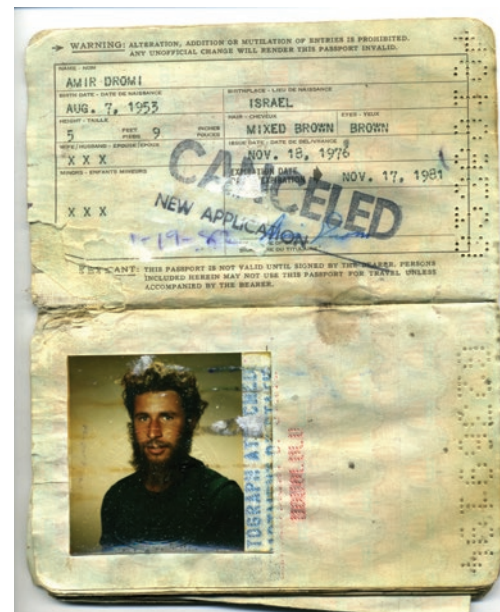
height, one needs to take two breaths to get the same amount of oxygen we take in with one breath at sea level. Yael was feeling weak and disoriented. All of a sudden, she thought she heard *something*, but she didn't know what it could be. Startled, she lifted her head and looked around—Amir was gone!

Fear infused a renewed energy in her weak and numb muscles, and she hurried in the direction that her husband had been heading. Abruptly, Yael found herself at the mouth of a vertical pit in the snow descending 25 feet—with Amir lying at the bottom... unconscious. The snow had collapsed under him, sending him plummeting down onto an ice shelf below. Just beside him the ice shelf ended, and beneath it could be heard the ferocious gushing of a river formed by the melting ice at the bottom of the glacier-filled valley.

## An Adventurer Is Born

Chizkiya Amir Dromi was born on a kibbutz in 1953 to Moshe and Myra. His father had come to *Eretz Yisrael* from Bulgaria. An influential member of the Bulgarian parliament, Dimitar Peshev, was on good terms with the Jews and together with other key political and clerical leaders moved King Boris to actively oppose the Nazi demand to deport Bulgaria's Jews to the death camps in 1943. (Tragically, Bulgaria had already deported over 11,000 Jews to Treblinka by then.) He succeeded in saving most of the Jews under Bulgarian rule. Right after the war, at age 16, Amir's father boarded a train for Syria. He traveled alone, on through Lebanon and into the land of Israel.

Myra Dromi's family had left Ukraine in 1914 due to the terrible pogroms and horrific circumstances in which they lived. Her mother had been so affected by malnutrition that her skin had a green tinge, so much so that she was nicknamed *a grine zhabe*, "a green frog." She never grew to her full height. The family reached the United States. After 1948, Myra decided to immigrate to *Eretz Yisrael* and she went to live on a kibbutz. There she met and married Moshe.



Amir's American passport photo – age 23. By then he had already seen 20 countries on four continents.

Moshe Dromi was a hard worker and aspired to become a successful businessman. In 1958, he decided to take his family to America. There he studied business management for four years at New York University. The family stayed with Amir's grandfather, who lived in Westchester County.

Amir spent his formative childhood years in the United States. There he became fluent in English and acquired US citizenship. Both would help him in his later journeys.

By 1964, having finished school and after having worked for two years, Moshe Dromi was ready to take his American training and business acumen back to *Eretz Yisrael*. Indeed, he became prosperous and Amir grew up in comfort.

Nevertheless, Amir did not find his existence especially fulfilling. He longed for something greater, for a deeper meaning in life.

Amir studied at an agricultural high school and at age 18 he was drafted into the army like everyone else. There he was placed in an intelligence unit for most of his time in the service. Toward the end of his stint in the army, Amir was transferred to a Nahal/kibbutz unit on the Lebanese border. He was

there when the Yom Kippur War began.

It was a bitter conflict, and although the fighting lasted less than a month, it seemed interminable. Every able-bodied man was enlisted to repel the two-pronged attack, one each from Egypt and Syria.

At first Amir was sent to fight against Syrian forces in the Golan Heights. However, the kibbutzim started to experience difficulty, since there was almost no one to perform the hard labor necessary to maintain the farms. Additionally, the absence of residents (due to the draft) in the kibbutz where Amir had been serving enabled the infiltration of Lebanese terrorists across the border – upon which the fence of the kibbutz lay. Thus, he was sent back to patrol the fence and stem the influx of terrorists.

His community was bombarded, but Amir was never engaged in active battle throughout the war. Nevertheless, many of his friends fought on the front lines and did not survive.

The horrors of war shook young Amir to his core. Over 2,500 soldiers were killed and three times as many wounded. The Syrians had tortured and killed their Israeli prisoners of war. After his traumatic experience,



Amir working an olive press in the early days of the farm.