For many of Zim’s shore workers, a ship is a “black box”: a line in an Excel table, a detail in a data base, an item on a bill of lading or a sailing schedule board.

Those whose work does not involve direct contact with ships and their crews know little about the challenges and the uniqueness of work at sea. The article before you is intended to acquaint you with some of the people that run the huge apparatus that forms the basis of Zim’s activities, providing you with a little taste of the lifestyle of the people of the sea who are still sometimes faced with the difficulties and challenges that have characterized the lives of sailors from the beginning of history - even today, in the 21st century.
Captain Gidon Soshan boards *Zim Haifa* following a voyage on *Zim China*. The two ships are anchored near the eastern pier of the port of Haifa, and the bridge cranes are loading and unloading them both at a fast pace.

Haifa is the home port of the “good ship *Zim Haifa*”, as it has been customary to call ships since the days of Francis Drake. There is a lot of activity on the upper deck, where the ship’s offices are located: suppliers, authority personnel and technicians go up and down the gangway, but as the time of departure to sea draws nearer, the ship becomes emptied of visitors and activity of another kind begins. Early in the morning, the crew takes up maneuvering positions and the ship casts off the ropes from the dock. The pilot on the bridge, along with two tug boats, leads *Zim Haifa* to the starting point of a long, ocean-crossing voyage.

Gidon Soshan grew up in Gaash, a kibbutz on the seashore. Two childhood loves - the sea, and long-distance travel - combined to inspire his long maritime career and his ascent to the pinnacle of maritime commands. After military service in the paratroopers reconnaissance unit, he explored South America as a backpacker. He continues to devote his free time to adventure travel. It was after that first trip and a series of courses at the Marine Training Institute in Acre that he set out on his first voyage, as a cadet on the ship *Zim New Orleans*.

The *Negba*, a general cargo ship that operated on the line to Africa, was his first ship as an officer. He was able to experience the era when bulk carriers and Tankers were operated by Zim, serving long periods on the tanker *Virgo*. 
as the time of the departure to sea draws nearer the ship becomes emptied out of visitors and an activity of another kind begins. Early in the morning, the crew takes up maneuvering positions.
the bulk carrier Beer Sheva, and the coal ship Hadera - which he does not miss, he says.

Container ships, Captain Gidon Soshan explained, are a different world - modern ships, convenient to operate, that enable good working and living conditions for the crew. On the other hand, the stays in port are short and many terminals are far from the center of town. There are also challenges of another kind, such as the pressure placed on officers to comply with the many regulatory inspections - Port State control - that has become part of the routine. Last year, Soshan commanded one of the new mega-ships, Zim Chicago. Excellent ships, he commented: “A very strong engine, they react very well at sea”. He hopes to return to sail on them.

The classic question - how does one combine family life with a maritime career? - is answered with a smile. He met his wife, who was born in Germany, when she was a volunteer on the kibbutz. She did not know quite what she was getting into, but she gradually got used to life with a sailor who was sometimes absent from home.
for months. No doubt it was not easy to raise three children while Gidon spent long months at sea, but like many of the sailors’ wives, she met the challenge admirably.

“I once visited the marine officers’ veterans club and heard their stories about storms, accidents and adventures in the early days of Zim. It seems to me that my generation and I will not have so many stories to tell”, he said. It is clear that much of the romance of the sea, that perhaps led him to this career, has already passed from the world. The voyages have become routine, safe and eventless - and yet today’s seamen still have a lot to tell.

Sail Away

The sea shift of four till eight, morning and evening, is manned by the Second Officer, Second Mate Mykhaylo Pavlov. Pavlov, born in the Ukraine, is married and has two children ages 9 and 12. And how does the family live with the seafaring way of life? Well, it appears that his wife is the daughter of a maritime captain and her two brothers are sailors. For her, there were no surprises!

Mykhaylo has been sailing on Zim Haifa for about 5 months and has worked at Zim for 5 years. He looks at the glistening, quiet Mediterranean sea on the way to Piraeus and remembers a voyage on Zim Qingdao during which they encountered a strong storm near Vancouver. One of the containers was broken up by the impact of the waves and the wind, and he suddenly saw particles in the air that looked like snowflakes, but they were actually bits of spaghetti flying from the container!

In the past, he sailed with a German company, and he says that the differences between the companies are actually small, because the international regulations dictate everything. But like many of his countrymen, he prefers Zim. One of the compensations for the demanding work and the long absence from home is visiting the ports. In spite of the short time, they manage to enjoy themselves a bit and to get some fresh air. In Piraeus, they sometimes go to a movie. In Tarragona they used to stroll around the lovely town. In Genoa there’s sometimes a chance for a good meal at a restaurant. In Halifax they go to the sailors’ club. In New York, entertainment in Manhattan if possible, and in Savannah shopping; for a second, the voyage route seems like stops on a tourist’s trip.

Upon arrival at Piraeus, where the ship will be supplied with fuel, the crew gathers for a briefing about the planned procedure. The fueling of the ship is carried out by a barge that connects pipes and pumps fuel into the hold, and there
Towards evening, at exactly the time of the festive Friday night dinner, the ship slows down and waits for the pilot ship.

is need for awareness and adherence to the rules both for reasons of safety and also to prevent the possibility of leakage that can create pollution. The Chief briefs the team and makes sure that everyone knows his role and the international hand signals used to signal the fuel attendants. The Chief Mate, Eyal Sason, radiates an air of tranquility and authority.

He is an officer of rich experience who grew up in Kiryat Yam (near Haifa) and saw the sea through the window of his house, as a child, but even beyond that, he grew up in a maritime family - his father and three of his brothers chose careers at sea: his father was a Chief Engineer and one of his uncles sailed as a Captain. It is likely that there is something genetic in choosing a maritime career, but Eyal, a father of young children, smiles when he is asked if the seafaring tradition in the family will continue with the heirs to the throne: “No chance”, he declares adamantly.
Eyal began to sail on Zim ships in 1990. He sailed on the Negba, among others, but he accumulated most of his seateime on container ships and in particular on the ZCS line. The Chief Mate is responsible for everything that takes place on the ship, whether navigation, safety, cargo, or dealing with the port authorities. He is the Captain’s right hand and oversees all that takes place on board.

**Maneuvering**

The ship never sleeps, and arrivals or departures from ports can occur at any time, day or night. Towards evening, at exactly the time of the festive Friday night dinner, the ship slows down and waits for the pilot boat. The pilot is late. “So it is, in Piraeus”, says one of the crew. “After all, it is a Mediterranean port” - and so part of the crew can continue to eat their Friday night dinner in peace.

The courses are served by a young Bulgarian, the steward Mihalyov Boyan Tonchev. He came on the ship for seven months, already having worked on Zim Hong Kong. He arrived at Zim after he applied through an internet site, but he does not see his future at sea. Maybe he will study to be a chef like the Chief Cook, Metodi Metodiev Staonevk, also from Bulgaria. He studied cookery in a town near Varna and then he was offered work in Tanker Pacific. He has been on Zim Haifa for six months already and will finish his contract in New York. From there, he will go home to his wife and seven-year-old daughter. With them in the team is Steward Lucian Lazar, from Romania; he also plans to leave the sea once he finishes building a new house.

While the pilot approaches and the ship progresses slowly towards the port, a little ship suddenly crosses in front of the bow from left to right, without giving any consideration to the rules of the road - like a reckless driver crossing an intersection against the red light. It also fails to answer the repeated calls of Chief Eyal Sason on the radio. The problem is, of course, that halting more than 50 thousand tons of steel and cargo takes some time. Zim Haifa activates its...
engine full astern in order to prevent a collision. “That’s life”, says the Captain.

About half past six, the Third Mate, Officer Angelina Egorenkov, reports over the radio to the bridge: “Pilot on board”. The Greek pilot pops up on the bridge, energetic, with a sharp, resonant voice, and starts to give steering and engine orders. The ship slowly approaches the pier, assisted by two tugs. The maneuverability of a ship of 300 meters is similar to driving a giant skyscraper, but after less than an hour, all is completed. The ropes are cast to the pier and the ship is moored.

In the port of Piraeus, the handling of the paperwork and documents of the ship is relatively simple. The smiling ship’s agent goes up to the ship’s office. A large part of the tasks related to documents, paperwork and licenses rests on the shoulders of the electrician, Igor Igel. “I am not sure that it is written in the contract that this is my job”, he laughs, “but it is customary”. Igor, born in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, studied for a Masters Degree in electrical engineering, but from an early age developed maritime ambitions. He came to Israel in 1994 and worked as chief electrician in a factory. Five years ago he started to work on Zim ships. Igor is married and father of two sons - one just finished his army service and the other is 16 years old, studies in a maritime school and is also aspiring towards a maritime career. His wife, by the way, sailed with him once and decided that it was not for her. The background picture on his computer screen shows an impressive Kawasaki motorcycle with a model sitting on it. “That is my private motorbike; it was photographed for a calendar printed in Russia”, he recounts. During his holidays, he goes traveling across the country, riding with a group of friends with motorbikes. Love of travel is probably a deeply rooted feature.

Third Mate Angelina Egorenkov has sailed through the Panama Canal seven times but still has not had enough of the green of the jungle in which the ship is immersed during its crossing. She takes photos again and again as if she were there for the first time and periodically posts the photos on her Facebook page. More surprising is the fact that she often also photographs the engine room of the ship for her pleasure, and still has not stopped marveling at the enormous power of the main engine, each of its pistons taller than a human being. “This, no one wants to see”, she laughs, “only the pictures of the jungle”.

Angelina came to Israel in 1991 and grew up in Acre. In her childhood, she loved water sports, sailing and kayaking and also considered studying at the Maritime Officers Academy at Acre, but in the end she continued on the track of regular studies. After her army service she found work in utterly regular fields, but the sea bug continued to nibble at her. During a
chance conversation with a retired maritime officer, things suddenly came clear to her, and the possibility of a maritime career, which she had not taken seriously before, opened before her. On the spot, she dialed 144 to ask for the telephone number of the Maritime Education and Training Authority at the Ministry of Transport, and from there she began to work her way towards the bridge of Zim Haifa. During her training, she already set sail on a short trip to the Black Sea and in 2006 received the “ticket”, her certification as Third Officer.

One of her duties is the responsibility for the ship’s life boats and safety gear. All on board get a chance of a first-hand acquaintance on the first day at sea during the life boat drill. Each person on the ship, crew member or passenger, knows his exact position and duties on the life boat. The crew practices an emergency situation and operation of the life boat, including starting its engine, with complete earnestness, quickly and efficiently. Some things are not to be compromised with and safety comes first.

When the pilot goes on the bridge, Angelina stands, alert and focused, watching the instruments and operating the telegraph machine when needed. “Dead slow ahead”, the pilot says, and Angelina echoes the command and operates the throttle. The ringing that accompanies each command to the engine is a reminder of far off days when there was a mechanical operating system. Angelina seizes the black contoured handle and passes the order to the engine control room.
promoted to the position of First Engineer and in 2010 to Chief. Sergey, a father of a son age 17, has an organized, ordered and broad vision of the principles and practices of work and manpower matters in the merchant marines. As Chief, he has ministerial authority on all that happens in the engine room, but it is important for him to delegate responsibilities. It is especially important in the light of the fact that the amount of paperwork, such as reports and follow ups - is great. The ongoing work is that of planned maintenance, he says, but the trick is to recognize the possible hitches before they occur and to prevent them.

When a hitch indeed occurs, the full professional skills of the Chief and the engine crew are required. “Everyone knows how to turn screws. The problem is dealing with an unfamiliar problem and overcoming it”. Zim Haifa is considered a good and reliable ship, but not easy from the operational point of view. He already sailed on the ship for a few cycles, and he dealt with an emergency situation of a fire in the holds. “We faced it well and overcame the problem”, he laconically sums up the event. The praises received by the crew after the event testify that it was not quite that simple.

First Engineer Oleksiy Maslov is due to get off the ship in Tarragona for a holiday after months at sea. “The last days before the vacation are the best - then you think about home and what is waiting for you on your vacation. At home,
after a little while you start to think about the next voyage”,
he said. Oleksiy, married and father of a baby, goes home
to the Ukraine and to a family that is entirely made up of
sailors, including his father and grandfather. He has been
sailing with Zim since 1997, and if it is left up to him, he
will continue with the company for a long time. “At Zim
there is a demand for an additional check by the Israeli
Ministry of Transport, and there are those that this deters”,
he says, “but I do not find it a problem. On the contrary, I
prefer Zim to other companies I worked with in the past.”

Artem Yevstratyev, Second Engineer, agrees: “At Zim there
is a team spirit and atmosphere of cooperation. In other
companies, everyone is for himself”, he says. Artem is also
from the Ukraine, got on the ship at Haifa and will sail now
for five months on Zim Haifa - a change of atmosphere
from his last ship, Africa Star, which made headlines when
it repelled an attempted attack by Somali pirates. They both
see their futures at sea and aspire to reach the top of the
professional ladder.

With them in the control room on the morning shift is also
Third Engineer Jury Treskunov. He lives at Nesher near Haifa,
is married and father of a baby daughter, two years old.
Jury is an aircraft Engineer who served in the Air Force. In
2007, he started to study in the Maritime Training Institution
with a view to training as an Engine officer in the Merchant
Navy. During his studies, he sailed and boarded Zim Haifa
in 2010. This is his fourth voyage as an officer. In addition to
the routine work, once every three days, like every engine
officer, he goes on a 24 hour shift. In the automation era, this
means that he is the doctor on call of the engine and in his
cabin there is an alarm system that warns of any irregularity
in the engine system. In the event of a hitch, Jury has seven
minutes to reach the control room and start to handle the
problem; otherwise a general alarm will be activated.

Jury admits that there is a feeling of loneliness in the seafaring
life: his wife, of course, is not enthusiastic about the long
absences, but she learned to get used to the reality. What is
important to him in his work at Zim is the security and the

professional horizon. Jury is the part-time librarian of the ship
and responsible for the distribution of books and movies, a
job that has become less essential since every member of
the crew takes care of a supply of movies on a disc-on-key.
On the ship, it appears, there are also real Gamers who play
internet games between the cabins of the ship in their leisure
time. Another means of entertainment on the ship, says Jury,
are the fitness room and small swimming pool which, when
the weather is good, they fill with sea water and dip in a bit,
for a feeling of leisure. But in March, in southern Europe it
is still grey and wintry and the pool is empty.

The engine team also includes Wiper Oleg Kornienko, age
23, also from the Ukraine. He has a boyish look and is only
starting out, but also as far as he is concerned, the sky is the limit and he is resolute when asked whether the maritime way of life and the many absences might not deter him: “If I had a problem with it, I would choose a different job on the mainland”, he says. Like his friends, he also prefers Zim after a brief experience with another company. With him on the crew are Motorman Junio Cesar Ballesteros from the Philippines and Fitter Nikolay Vasilevski from Bulgaria, whose vacation is due soon, after long months at sea.

On Deck

Every morning the Boatswain, more commonly known as Bosun, Naing Kyaw Kyaw goes out on the deck to perform sounding - a check on the level of liquids in the ship's tanks. Although there are electronic sensors, there is still no substitute for the physical check. He is from Myanmar (Burma) and studied in a maritime school in the capital Yangon. Although he completed training for Third Officer, changes in international regulations do not permit him to sail as an officer. During his work with Zim, he was appointed Bosun. He is responsible for all the nautical jobs and the maintenance on deck, and he manages the team of sailors. He is very serious, carries out his work stringently and by the book. “I respect all the rules and regulations” he said, pointing to the many instruction signs on the walls of the day room “because I understand the meaning behind them”. “I rely on him completely”, the Chief, Eyal Sasson says about him. The Bosun has three children and the oldest, who is 14, has already planned for a maritime career. “I won’t be able to, but he will become a captain”, Kyaw Kwaw Naing says with confidence. He has been sailing since 1990 and has worked on German and Japanese ships. He has been on Zim Haifa since May 2008.

The small team of sailors includes the OS Georgiev Nikola Todorov, from Burgas in Bulgaria. Nikola started to sail at a late age on the advice of his father-in law, a seasoned sailor who worked on big fishing boats. He has been sailing on Zim Haifa for about four months. He has three and a half months left, and when his daughter, age seven, asks him...
on the phone how long three months is, he suggests that she look on the calendar and mark off each day until she reaches ninety, and then he will come home, and bringing presents from New York.

He loves his Bosun – “always fair” he says, and not like some he has encountered in the past; “the heart has no color”, he quotes the Bosun. Next to him works Andres Bunado, an AB (Able Seaman) from the Philippines, the permanent Helmsman during maneuvers. On the departure from Piraeus he stands at an observation post on the bridge. Andres says that he is a part of the large community of Philippine sailors who serve in the Merchant Marine throughout the world.

Anders, married and father of a grown up son and daughter, both students, intends to qualify as Third Officer. He is waiting for his next vacation, which is still many weeks away. Andres says that he does not often go to shore at the ports - those days have already passed. At the most, he goes to buy presents for his family and to talk to them from one of the sailors clubs that were set up in different ports for the well being of sailors. The third sailor on the team is AB Ocol Erwin Joel, also from the Philippines. The Captain, Gidon Soshan says that the variety of nationalities of the members of the crew is a completely routine matter and he is used to working with them all. The only thing that counts is their professionalism and of course that they must know English, the international professional language in the Merchant Marine throughout the world. Whoever does not know English “will be sent promptly back home”.

In a conversation with the crew he tells them that the ship is their home for the coming months, and repeats and memorizes to them the basic rules that will make the ship a pleasant and safe place to be, and especially to look after their safety “so that at the end of the contract you will return home in one piece, healthy and in the same shape as when you came aboard the ship.”

**Messina**

From Piraeus the ship sails southwards, near the Peloponnese, in the same waterways on which the mythological sailors of Odysseus once sailed, near the islands the ancient Greeks knew like the back of their hand. We pass near many small islands, and the cell phones are active as we are in the area covered by the Greek telephone companies. As the ship changes course we are once more on the open sea, with no shore in sight. As a kind of introduction to the ocean, the ship even rolls slightly, so that a casual traveler will understand the purpose of holding handles in showers and toilets.

The Straits of Messina, between the southern tip of the Italian boot and Sicily, connect the Ionian Sea with the Tyrrhenian Sea. Legends and poems were written about the Straits of Messina, and they live up to their reputation. The landscape around the ship is spectacular. The pilot boat approaches and clings to the side of the ship, cruising at 17 knots. The pilot leaps from the fast-moving boat to the pilot ladder, like a protagonist of an action movie, and climbs to the bridge to escort the ship through the straits. “They used to sail here without a pilot - I navigated a ship through the straits when I was 16”, recollects Dan Brender, a teacher and instructor, accompanying three cadets on their first voyage - Guy Adler, Oded Eilon and Tymur Andriashyn. The future generation of Marine officers looks out from the bridge at the landscape, and at the Stromboli volcano, emitting a small cloud of smoke on the horizon.

**Zim Haifa** bids the pilot farewell with sunset and plies on northward across the Italian boot. Tomorrow we will reach Livorno, and this brief report of the short Mediterranean journey will end. **Zim Haifa** and its crew will continue towards the Atlantic. For them, the journey has just begun.

(See more pictures on page 65)