



ERETZ CHEMDAH

AN INSIDE VIEW

Various Perspectives and Experiences of English Speakers Living in Eretz Yisroel

BY YOEL BERMAN



Paving the Way

BY YEHUDA ORZEL | GIVAT HAMOREH, AFULA

I am the youngest of eight siblings. We all grew up in England, and all of us ended up here in Eretz Yisroel for a few years of married life. That was the original plan—to be in this environment conducive to *shteiging* for a few of the formative years of life.

Most of my siblings had managed to make it here for at least two to three years before heading back to England. Finding that Yerushalayim was prohibitively expensive for a *kollel* couple, we had to think of an out-of-the-box solution for the longer term. Although we were still keeping two days of *Yom Tov*, we weren't quite ready to leave Eretz Yisroel.

The new *Litvishe* community in Givat HaMoreh, Afula, was the unlikely candidate. At the time we joined, there were about a hundred and fifty families, who, for the most part, were Israeli. The few English families who were there were mostly related to each other (and not to us), but it meant that there were enough people from a background similar to ours so as not to feel totally isolated. There were also a few Americans, as well as some English-speaking children of Anglo immigrants to Eretz Yisroel. Since the Israeli members of the *kehillah*—almost all young couples like ourselves—were also far from their hometowns and “natural habitats,” they were more open to creating new relationships with people a bit different from themselves, like us *chutznikim*. This was true even in regards to my wife, who at the time we came could barely speak in Hebrew.

Although the environment in Afula meant

moving quite a bit out of our comfort zone, one thing that brought us here was the prospect of taking part in the creation of a new *kehillah* in Eretz Yisroel. That wouldn't have been enough to make us stay, though. It took a while even here until we stopped keeping *Yom Tov Sheini*. Both my wife and I had almost all our family back in England, so we didn't have any of the natural physical and emotional support that comes with living near family. We were basically staking it out alone in the wilderness, at least in the beginning.

Being a small community with most members not having family close by, this fostered an environment of mutual care and responsibility. This made up to some degree for the lack of family living close by. Having people around us who care about us was definitely a cause in the eventual shift to the realization that we were here to stay. This was in addition to the fact that the affordable housing here meant that it was possible for us to seriously consider purchasing a home here, which would surely make our connection to this place much stronger.

Having lived here for about three years, we have come to appreciate our neighborhood and community. Members of the *kehillah* live peacefully with the surroundings, including traditional and not-yet observant neighbors, with some of them becoming inspired by the *kiddush Hashem* we make as *frum Yidden* and decent people. The unfortunate occurrence of cars driving on *Shabbos* is not uncommon, considering we do live in a mixed neighbor-

hood, but it is considerably less than what may sometimes be seen at the edges of some *chareidi* neighborhoods of Yerushalayim, as this is a quiet neighborhood.

As far as *chinuch* is concerned, the local *chareidi cheder* and school cater to a wide spectrum of backgrounds, including the diversity of the *Litvishe kehillah* itself, which includes *bnei Torah* who are *Ashkenazim*, *Sephardim*, *Teimanim*, and a bit of *chassidish*-oriented residents as well, and both Israelis and *chutznikim*. The *chareidi* populace of the general area, many of whom also attend these schools, includes a few *chassidim* as well as *Sephardic baalei batim*. The exposure to children from the homes of *yirei Shomayim* from all different *chareidi* backgrounds is, I think, an added benefit to the high scholastic standards of the schools.

After we settled here, others have considered following our path. My wife has a friend who eventually moved here with her husband, both originally from England, and I think it was much easier for them to make the move following our example. Of course, we also benefitted from their move, as it meant having more people around us with whom we more closely identify, who speak the same language as we do, and have a mentality similar to ours. We have a cousin from England who joined us here as well, and having us as cousins here already must have been a factor in their decision.

The *kehillah* now numbers about three-hundred families, *bli ayin hara*, *kein yirbu*, and although it seems that the *kehillah* will

definitely stay a predominantly Israeli one, there is definitely room for us *chutznikim* who want to join and be a part.

Although in the beginning we had to move a bit out of our comfort zone, it has become our very own zone, and we are quite content with it—our own little piece of Eretz Yisroel.

Why Didn't We Know About This?

One of the chutznik families here in Givat HaMoreh manage an apartment here that is rented out for weekends and short-term to vacationers.

A friend of mine was planning on terminating his stay in Eretz Yisroel, as it was just too expensive for him to stay being a youngster here. He decided to end his stay here with a weekend vacation and rented that apartment for a Shabbos.

After being exposed to the warm and fully functional kehillah here, and realizing that there were more English families here than only my own, he told me that it just never occurred to him that such communities existed where he would be able to afford staying here as a youngster. He was mistakenly comparing the finances of chutz la'aretz to only Yerushalayim and its surroundings.

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This article is part of a Yated series, "Eretz Chemdah," featuring Anglo-chareidim living in, settling, and building up Eretz Yisroel. For more info, contact yoel@naavakodesh.org or visit naavakodesh.org/eretz-chemdah.

