

SONGS OF ASCENT

Inspiring True Stories of Aliyah

Edited by
Rosally Saltsman



SONGS OF ASCENT
Inspiring True Stories of Aliyah

Edited by
Rosally Saltsman

First edition

Copyright © 2020 Rosally Saltsman

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be translated, reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means — electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise — without permission in writing from the authors.

The digital copy of this book may be forwarded and shared only in its entirety.

Cover design: Galina Bleikh

Cover photo painting: *Aliyah in Progress* by Yoram Raanan

Graphics and layout: Sara Hager

Copyeditor: Farla Klaiman

Printed in Israel

*Pray that God should give you longing
and desire for the land of Israel, and then you
will succeed in getting there.*

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov

שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת, לְדָוִד: הֲנִיחַ מַה-טוֹב,
וַיֵּמַח נְעִים שְׂבַת אֲחִים גַּם יַחַד.

A song of ascents by David.

*Behold, how good and how pleasant is
the dwelling of brothers, moreover in unity.*

Tehillim (Psalms) 133:1

L'ilui nishmot

פרימה רבקה בת משולם ובבצע טשרנא ז"ל
Frima Rivka bat Meshulem v'Babse Charna z"l

Ruth Klaiman

שמעון בן שמואל ואיטע פייגע ז"ל
Shimon ben Shmuel v'Ita Faige z"l

Sydney Klaiman

שמואל פינחס בן שמעון ופרימה רבקה ז"ל
Shmuel Pinchas ben Shimon v'Frima Rivka z"l

Dr. Stephen Klaiman

דינה בת שלמה ורחל ז"ל
Dinah bat Shlomo v'Rachel z"l

Donna Klaiman

from

Farla Klaiman

לעילוי נשמת

אברהם בן צבי הערשל
ויהודית אסתר פרל בת אהרון צבי

In memory of

Bernard and Pearl Garmaise z”l

CONTENTS

<i>About Pronunciation</i>	13
<i>Foreword</i>	14
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	16
<i>Dedication</i>	17
<i>I Love Going to Israel</i>	18
<i>Author's Note</i>	20
<i>Coming Home</i>	22
<i>The Voice of Clarity</i>	24
<i>I Am the Land</i>	26
<i>A Visit from Eliyahu</i>	28
<i>The People of Israel Lives and Endures and Eats Falafel</i>	30
<i>Stones</i>	33
<i>First Fruits</i>	36
<i>Accredited Aliyah</i>	38
<i>A Bowl of Toffees</i>	41
<i>Dog-Gone Aliyah</i>	47

<i>Don't Whine For Me São Paulo</i>	48
<i>From the Mouths of Babes</i>	50
<i>The Price Is Right</i>	51
<i>Three in One Day</i>	55
<i>Common Denominator</i>	57
<i>Dying to Live Here</i>	60
<i>Dreaming of Israel</i>	61
<i>Simply a Jew</i>	65
<i>With Their Own Eyes</i>	68
<i>Practical Halachah (Jewish Law)</i>	71
<i>A Cause for Celebration</i>	72
<i>Reasons</i>	75
<i>Need a Lift?</i>	78
<i>The Right Move</i>	80
<i>Roots of Aliyah</i>	83
<i>My First Week of Work</i>	87
<i>The Forty-Niners</i>	90
<i>Golden Hebrew</i>	94
<i>Plucking the Vibes</i>	97
<i>The Homecoming</i>	98
<i>It's a Relationship</i>	103
<i>No Choice</i>	108
<i>Rites of Passage</i>	112
<i>My Father's Aliyah</i>	115
<i>I Could Write a Book</i>	118
<i>Bursting Her Bubble</i>	120
<i>Flying Carpet</i>	121
<i>The Heart and Soul of Israel</i>	123
<i>All in the Family</i>	125

<i>From Russia with Love</i>	129
<i>I Say Ofanayim, You Say Mishkafayim</i>	131
<i>The Chicken Lady of Jerusalem</i>	132
<i>How I Brought My Mother-in-Law on Aliyah</i>	136
<i>The Real Light of Chanukah</i>	138
<i>Meant to Be</i>	141
<i>Getting Accustomed to Israel</i>	145
<i>Aliyah, So Different Then</i>	146
<i>A Letter from Israel</i>	149
<i>Living in a Conversation with Hashem</i>	152
<i>Relative Aliyah</i>	155
<i>Waving the Flag: Reflections on Israel Independence Day</i>	157
<i>In Israel You're Never A Lone</i>	161
<i>An "Aliyah" to Remember!</i>	164
<i>My Golden Aliyah</i>	166
<i>Conclusion</i>	168
<i>Glossary</i>	172

ABOUT PRONUNCIATION

Different groups of religious (and secular) Jews pronounce Hebrew and Yiddish words differently based on their ethnicity and their upbringing. To remain true to the voice of each of the stories, we have included all pronunciations. A glossary appears at the end of the book for further clarification. In the course of reading this book, you may feel like you are learning a whole new language. That's because you are.

In Israel, people who speak English (or any other language) as their mother tongue quickly adopt a certain lexicon of words that are always said in Hebrew (or Yiddish) even if they are speaking in their native tongue.

This book contains words of Torah. Please do not read this book in the bathroom, rest it on the floor, or dispose of any part of it.

FOREWORD

The Happiest Place on Earth

The happiest place on earth isn't Disneyland, though I would definitely put Disneyland in the top five. No, I'm convinced that the happiest place on earth is the arrivals' hall of Terminal 3 at Ben Gurion Airport. Everyone is happy. Whether they're waiting in nervous but happy anticipation for their loved ones to land, coming for a visit, home after a visit, or home after a lifetime, everyone is in various stages of euphoria to have landed on Israeli soil. The festivity is enhanced by the myriad balloons on the ceiling. I had wondered how they had gotten there until one time I came to meet my son with a balloon and, in my haste to hug him, I let it go and it floated up to join its friends.

There's contained Israeli mayhem as people talk on their cell phones, dogs bark, and people squeal and rush to greet their friends and family. The airport workers intermittently try to shoo people back behind the barrier as people stream in from the dozens of flights from all over the world. But they do so half-heartedly, knowing it is a lost battle. Israelis are fiercely loyal to their traveling relatives. And then there are the groups on pilgrimage or friends of Israel who, dressed in various

costumes, come in singing and dancing or beating drums. There are the Birthright groups and the tourist groups. People don't get disconcerted if you shout at them, "Hey, what flight were you on?" And everyone comes out smiling, beaming, grateful.

It's also a very user-friendly hall. For those of you who've never been here (what are you waiting for?), the arrivals' hall is in a semi-circular shape with a decorative barrier so that you can see the arrivals and they can see you as soon as they come out of the doors, and you don't get in people's way if you happen to jump the barrier in your enthusiasm to greet someone. A huge board clearly displays the arrivals and when they're supposed to arrive, and while you're waiting you're surrounded by food options. I've even seen someone bring brownies.

Unlike in bigger city airports, you will invariably meet people you know or make friends with people waiting. But as I stood watching the hugs and kisses, the greetings and joy, the children gamboling into the arms of waiting relatives, the groups being welcomed and the vestiges of chaos that still, *baruch Hashem* (thank God), give Israel that family flavor, it was clear to me that this was the happiest place on earth, the only tears being tears of joy and the only time, this moment.

Tourism is one of Israel's biggest industries. Groups coming on *aliyah* are a frequent news item and the wandering Jew perpetually wanders, even if now it's on a tourist visa. But whatever language you say it in, "Welcome Home" is always applicable here because there's no place like home.

Rosally Saltsman

First appeared in *The Times of Israel* blog.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am incredibly fortunate to call Israel my home, not only spiritually and historically, but because I have an Israeli address I write out on every form I must complete. It is a true privilege to live here and I sincerely thank God for that privilege.

It is also a privilege, though of a different kind, to be a writer and editor; in this volume, it is an honor to bring you the many *aliyah* stories that are just a drop in the Mediterranean Sea of millennia of stories of millions of Jews coming Home.

I would like to express my gratitude to all those people who shared their stories either orally or in writing.

A special thanks to Farla Klaiman, a dear and loyal friend and talented editor, who always makes sure the final product is up to par.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this book
to my son Josh, Yehoshua Yisrael,
my sweet *Sabra ad 120 shanah*.

I dedicate this book to all the people who planted
physical and spiritual seeds in this Land over
the millennia so that I could enjoy their fruit.

I dedicate this book to all those who never
realized the dream of coming to the shores of this
Holy Land and all those who have yet to realize it.

I LOVE GOING TO ISRAEL

Music by Michael Gilman

Lyrics by Michael Gilman & Rosally Saltsman

I love going to Israel

The best way to get there is to fly EL AL

It's really more than just a bargain you see

Getting shekels for my currency

People come to Israel, it plays the host

To Hungarians, Moroccans, and Broadway's toast

Speaking different languages, they're still understood

While learning Hebrew in their neighborhood

Haifa, Jaffa, Tel Aviv

From the top of Mt. Hermon to the dead Dead Sea

Milk and honey, all this and more

Israel's the place that I adore

Stay in a kibbutz and call it your own

Share everything with everyone; after all, it's your home

Israelis have a knack for hospitality

And the tradition you don't pay for, it's free

The people are warm and the climate is hot

With palm trees growing in the parking lot

Come sip a Turkish coffee in a sidewalk café

And watch the sunset over Haifa bay

West Coast, Upper Galilee,
Captivating places that appeal to me
Moshe, Yaakov, take my hand
And walk with me into this Promised Land

Miracles in Israel are commonplace
And history records them each and every case
Since the first prophet showed the way
Seems almost every day's a holiday

At the Kotel in Jerusalem your prayers will rise
On the orange groves and desert fields come feast your eyes
Shalom Aleichem everyone will chant
When the plane touches holy land

See Tiberias, Meron, and Tzfat
Then take an Egged bus and drive to Eilat
Breakfast on a mountain, lunch by the sea
Then dinner in the desert, just you and me

From Migdal HaEmek to Migdal Shalom
It's been a few millennia but now we're home
Ishimevet and Olga come with me
In Israel, you're Jewish and you're free

I love going to Israel
The best way to get there is to fly EL AL
It's really more than just a bargain you see
Getting shekels for my currency

You can hear this song on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wr98FKReRbQ&t=3s>

AUTHOR'S NOTE

My maternal grandparents, my mother, and my uncle lived in Israel, having made *aliyah* in 1933 from Russia via Egypt where my mother was born. My father escaped to Israel during World War II. My parents married and immigrated to Canada.

On January 12, 1982, I arrived in Israel on an EL AL flight after completing my B.A. The plan was to spend four months in Israel, one month in Europe, and return to Montreal to find a job or some such thing.

But Hashem had other plans. I got a part in the old Israel National Opera's swan song production of *Oklahoma*. It was performed in the opera building on Allenby by the sea. The building housed the first Knesset of the State of Israel and today is a rather unimpressive shopping mall.

By the time the show ended, I had found an apartment to rent and a year later officially made *aliyah*. Although I did spend three years abroad, since I left my heart in Israel, some part of me was always here and so I, thank God, am now celebrating almost four decades since returning Home.

COMING HOME

Akiva Gersh

WHEN I made *aliyah*, it was euphoric. I had brought my acoustic guitar on the plane with me to make sure it didn't get damaged with the cargo. As my wife, Tamar, and I were beginning to descend the stairs to the tarmac below, the thought suddenly entered my mind to take my guitar out of its case and play a song for this overwhelming, once-in-a-lifetime moment. I took out my guitar and, without any conscious thought as to what song to sing, "*Am Yisrael Chai*" (The People of Israel Live) burst from my lips. More than that, it burst forth from deep in my soul. There I was, arriving in Israel as I had many times before, but this time not merely to visit, not only for my annual recharge that would give me the strength to live another year outside of Israel. This time, I was coming to live for the rest of my life; to plant my roots in the land; to change the course not only of my life but of my future children's lives, and their children's and their children's as well; to be part of the greatest and most miraculous migration the world has ever seen.

I had no return ticket home. This time, a one-way ticket was all I needed to take me home. I landed at the bottom of the stairs and continued to strum and to sing as I walked between two rows of IDF soldiers who had come to celebrate with us. Their smiling mouths opened up and began to sing with me. Our voices joined together in what, for me, was two thousand years of Jewish history declaring loud and proud: *Am Yisrael Chai* — The people of Israel live!

That was in 2004. Since then, there have been many other euphoric moments living in Israel, as well as emotional and inspiring moments: at the Kotel praying with thousands of other people, viscerally feeling what it's like to be part of a nation standing together; hearing *Eicha* (Lamentations) recited on Tisha B'Av with a small group of battle-tired soldiers on the Gaza border during Operation Protective Edge; hiking in the Negev in the middle of the night with only the full moon to illuminate the ancient desert floor; crawling through two-thousand-year-old caves with my students, teaching them about Jewish strength and pride. In Israel where *Am Yisrael Chai!*

Excerpted from *Becoming Israeli: The Hysterical, Inspiring, and Challenging Sides of Making Aliyah*, edited by Akiva Gersh. Available on Amazon.com.

THE VOICE OF CLARITY

Chaiya Gold

After the wind came an earthquake. “Hashem (God) is not in the earthquake.” After the earthquake came a fire. “Hashem is not in the fire.” After the fire came a still, thin sound. (Kings I 19:11–12)

ABOUT three years ago, our family was debating whether to make *aliyah* to Israel. We agonized over the decision for months. My husband’s brother had made *aliyah* with his family about two years prior, and we were very close to them. But all my family lived in Australia.

Then a water pipe burst in our house, forcing us to temporarily relocate to a hotel, with our possessions in boxes, for safety. We spent most of our waking hours vacillating some more about this big family decision. Finally we took the next step and bought airline tickets. But to keep our options open, we made sure the tickets were transferable.

The week before our scheduled flight found us no more certain than before. On Shabbos morning, the whole family attended our usual *shul* (synagogue), which had recently moved to new premises. There I was in

the women's section, trying to redirect my distracted thoughts toward Hashem. During the *Amidah* prayer, I silently begged God for clarity. Should we stay or should we go? And if we went, should it be now or in a few more years? Should we remain in our birthplace with my side of the family and all our friends, at least until our children were older and more mature, or take the Israel plunge?

Suddenly, I was jolted out of my intense prayer by a siren, followed by a loud metallic voice booming through the silent *shul*. The voice said, "Evacuate now. Leave immediately!"

The congregants scattered, fleeing to the safety of the Kiddush room. I followed them in a daze. The president of the *shul* later informed us that a child had accidentally set off the fire alarm, which they did not know how to turn off in the new building. It was a false alarm. We were all ushered back into the *shul* to resume our prayers. Though such an interruption understandably bothered most of the congregants, I could not help smiling. Immediately after I had begged Hashem for clarity, He had sent the clearest answer in the boldest way. Evacuate. Now. Not to the Kiddush room. But to Israel. Immediately.

Thank you, Hashem, for granting me the clarity we craved. And a clear response to our prayers.

I AM THE LAND

Music and Lyrics by Chanale Fellig Harrel

Have you ever felt a calling
A stir inside your soul
Until it gets so loud you can't ignore
Do you know the taste of freedom
When you live a life of truth
And you finally close the miles
From you to her

*I am the land
I am her oceans
These are my mountains
I stand on my ground
I am the people
For we are the nation
Chosen by God
My home I have found
Her oxygen fills me
I breathe in her air*

*And no one can take it from me
 The land that I love
 The land that I need
 The land of, the land of Yisrael*

Have you ever made a journey
 Like so many have before
 Their footsteps aligning with yours
 Do you know how she awaits us
 To return to her once more
 When finally her kingdom's restored

*I am the land
 I am her oceans
 These are my mountains
 I stand on my ground
 I am the people
 For we are the nation
 Chosen by God
 My home I have found
 Her oxygen fills me
 I breathe in her air
 And no one can take it from me
 The land that I love
 The land that I need
 The land of my home
 The land of the Jews
 The land that is mine
 The land that is ours, Yisrael
 Yes I Am the Land*

“I am the Land” on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KIFqXvjRiVM>

A VISIT FROM ELIYAHU

As heard from Esther Alovitch

JAFFA, Pesach (Passover) 1950, Seder night.
Avraham and Chaya Coopershlack, religious new immigrants who had barely survived the Holocaust, arrived on Israel's shores in 1948 from Poland via Russia, Germany, and the most horrific of the extermination camps. They lived in a small apartment with Chaya's sister and niece and were sharing the Seder night with her brother.

As war refugees, they had no income. Just each other. Avraham Coopershlack was a shoemaker who had come from generations of shoemakers, maybe going back to Yochanan HaSandlar. Who knows?

Seder night. The small group read from the Haggadah. They came to the part of *Shfoch Chamatcha* and opened the door to receive Eliyahu Hanavi (Elijah the Prophet). As they were reciting the passage, there was a knock at the door. An old woman was standing there with a basket in her hand. She told them that she had nowhere to sleep and asked for a place to rest. In the small apartment, there was no empty bed to give her, but they graciously laid out a blanket for her to sleep on the floor.

Not everyone felt comfortable giving this woman a place to sleep, but who could refuse her request? After the Seder, they all went to bed.

Chaya Coopershlack woke up suddenly just before dawn and tentatively went to check on “her guest.” The old woman wasn’t there. But in her place, she had left the basket she had been carrying. Chaya woke her husband, who ran outside with the basket, trying to find the old woman who had left so suddenly and mysteriously. The whole episode seemed very strange to them.

After Pesach, Chaya went out with the empty basket and as she went about her errands from place to place, she announced that her husband, a shoemaker, was looking for work fixing shoes. Everywhere she went, they gave her shoes to fix. She went out in the morning with an empty basket and returned home with a basket full of shoes that needed mending. And from that day on, *baruch Hashem*, they had *parnassah* (a livelihood).

After a few months, the basket was lost. But the money kept coming in and Avraham eventually opened a store. He understood that this old woman had to have been a good messenger, perhaps Eliyahu Hanavi in disguise, and that now the basket had gone to someone else in need of a miracle.

First appeared in *The Jewish Press* and Reprinted in *The Beauty of the Story*.

THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL LIVES AND ENDURES AND EATS FALAFEL

Rosally Saltzman

EVERY year, on January 18, Dugo (Avraham David) Leitner treats everyone in the vicinity of the Zanani Falafel store in Ashdod to a falafel. January 18 is the anniversary of the death march he was forced to take from Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Dugo lived in a town in Hungary with a name as difficult to pronounce as that of the sweet confections Hungarians are famous for — Nyíregyháza. When Dugo was fourteen, the Nazis invaded in tanks. His life story is documented by his daughter Zehava Kor, a popular writer of books for children and adolescents in Israel. The book is called *Dugo: The True Story of David (Dugo) Leitner*.

“Courageous readers can go ahead and read the terrible story of what happened to me when I was a boy,” the book begins. “Whoever doesn’t have the courage can read a little bit and then close the book, go to the kitchen, and take some ice cream out of the freezer.” Not your typical

Holocaust narrative. “Wasn’t it enough that I was an orphan — did I have to be sad as well?” is the subtitle of the book and the motto of Dugo’s life.

In *Dugo*, Zehava Kor tells her father’s story in his voice, which is simultaneously lighthearted and profound, humorous and poignant, down to earth and full of faith bravery, and equanimity.

Dugo got two numbered tattoos. “There was a two-for-one special,” he quips. The first was given and erased but never disappeared. His second tattoo, from Birkenau, was B14671; in *gematria* (Jewish numerology) that’s nineteen — the same *gematria* as Dugo and as Zehava. His first tattoo was B12042. In *gematria* that’s nine, added to nineteen totals twenty-eight, the *gematria* for *koach*, strength.

And Dugo showed incredible strength, born out of a determination to survive because his father told him he must.

The Holocaust affected each person differently and we can’t judge any of them. But Dugo (who was given his nickname by a small child whose young life ended in Birkenau) came out of it not only with his faith intact but on a mission to do *Kiddush Hashem* (sanctification of God’s name) with his life because he was spared having to do it with his death.

Dugo’s story is one of optimism and humor, tragedy and introspection. If you can imagine a combination of Viktor Frankl, Roberto Benigni, and Ephraim Kishon, you’d have some idea of the kind of person we’re talking about.

Another trademark motto takes the form of “Just because something bad happened, do I have to make it worse?” Still another motto is *Am Yisrael Chai* (the people of Israel live!); wherever Dugo speaks, he has his audience, be they children or soldiers, or people eating his sponsored falafel, chant, “*Am Yisrael Chai!*”

Heeding his father’s directive to stay alive, whispering Psalm 20 of *Tehillim*, and using the life skills he learned as a youngster in the streets of Nyíregyháza, Dugo’s is a miraculous tale of survival.

After liberation, Dugo spent three years on *hachshara* (preparation program for *aliyah*) with Bnei Akivah (with parents presciently named Golda and Meir, how could he do otherwise?). Then, he and his brother Shmuel made *aliyah* in 1949. They were recruited into the IDF straight off the boat.

Dugo went on to be one of the founders of Nir Galim, a religious moshav (cooperative settlement) near Ashdod, and married Sarah, a pretty Sabra volunteer who came to work on the farm with her school. Like the original pioneers whose names they bear, Avraham and Sarah. They spoke Yiddish together for private conversations and Hebrew everywhere else. Since Dugo was a redhead and sensitive to the sun, Sarah insisted that he stop driving a tractor and be given a job indoors, and so he worked as one of the moshav accountants. He now gives testimony in Beit HaEdut (the House of Testimony) in Nir Galim. Sarah became a music teacher.

Despite the shadow of the Holocaust, the Leitners' family home on the moshav was filled with humor, music, love, and faith. Dugo and Sarah have two daughters, ten grandchildren, and over twenty great-grandchildren, *ken yirbu* (so should they multiply), all living in Israel.

In commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the destruction of Hungarian Jewry, Dugo was given the honor of lighting a torch at Yad Vashem. He also spoke to a group of Israeli soldiers, among them his grandson Yishay, whom he hugged at the end of the speech to applause, tears, and a chorus of *Am Yisrael Chai!*

“Just because I survived, does that mean I can’t *shep naches* (experience pleasure and pride), too?!”

To order the book *Dugo: The True Story of David (Dugo) Leitner* in English translation, email: zehavakor@gmail.com.

To see a video of Dugo buying everyone falafel:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e-h0YY7CS0E>

STONES

Chavi Chamish

THE Jewish souls that pass through my life take my breath away. I touch a simple stone, and it is enough to conjure up for me the life of one individual, whom I was destined to meet.

The year was 1990 and the Great Gates of the Soviet Union had opened. Jews poured into Israel, the number quickly surpassing one million. May we be capable of comprehending the miracle we witnessed.

It was at this time that my husband and I responded to the call to volunteer with the arriving *olim* (new immigrants), and as a result, met the Tzoref family, who had arrived from Tashkent the day before. Tzoref is Hebrew for silversmith. “What? It’s not possible! You are telling me my name is a Hebrew name?” said Ilya to my husband, Pinchas.

Pinchas had just placed a box filled with herring, wine, cheeses, black bread, and pickles on the kitchen bench, and Ilya’s wife was looking at it, dumbfounded, her hands pressed to her cheeks, emotional and confused by this unfamiliar generosity of strangers.

Over coffee, we discussed many topics. What stays in my mind all these years later is Ilya, who bore the features of Jewish aristocracy — the high forehead, powerful Jewish profile, and a *neshamah* (soul) that could dwell only in a Jew — telling us that his parents had not once made reference to religion. As a young boy, it had been his grandmother who had whispered to him not to believe what was written on the Memorial Stone at Babi Yar. “It was not ‘over 100,000 loyal Soviet citizens massacred in the ravine,’ she told me. ‘It was us, the Jews, whom the Nazis slaughtered. Thirty-three thousand of our Jewish people were murdered in the first two days. I know, because I dragged myself from underneath the bodies. Never forget it. And never repeat it. Not even to your parents. The communist party forbids any reference to Jews at Babi Yar, and I am sorry to say, your parents would be very angry with me for telling you.’”

A few days later, the Tzorefs came with us to a Chanukah party in Ofra. As we drove through the ancient stone-covered Judean Hills, Ilya asked my husband if he would stop the car.

“I need to do something,” he said.

With the sun beginning to set beyond the hills, Ilya lay face down on the rocky ground.

We stood a little distance away, sensing his need for solitude. Eventually, he sat up and said, “My grandmother was too ill to come with us on *aliyah*, though there is no other place in this world that she would rather be. Before we left, she called me to her bedside and said, ‘Ilushka, it is said that when a Jew goes to *Eretz Yisrael*, it is as though he throws a stone from off his heart. Now you are returning our family line to *Eretz Yisrael*. I ask of you, please, when you get there, kiss the ground for me. It will be as though you are throwing a stone from off my heart, too. Always know that I am there with you.’”

Ilya looked around him and, with a sweeping movement of his hand, said, “It is as though these stone-covered hills are the physical proof of her words.”

Years have passed since that trip to Ofra with Ilya, yet each time I drive through the Judean Hills, I recall that precious moment in time, Ilya casting off his stones. For me, it has become the symbol of our miracle, our triumph, and communism's failure to extinguish the precious Jewish flame.

This article appeared in *Hamodia Magazine* and *The Beauty of the Story*.

FIRST FRUITS

Manuel Sand

JMADE *aliyah* with my wife, Esther Ella, my daughter, and my two sons in 1968. Before we left for Israel, Esther Ella had some hesitations. It's normal. It's natural before moving your life to another country forever. At the time, she had gone to see a counselor and she asked him what he thought about her making the move. He said to her, "Here, in Montreal, you're a princess. In Israel, you'll be a queen."

Our daughter Channale was born in Israel in 1970. Channale married Nati Cohen in Jerusalem in January 1990. When I got up to speak at my daughter's wedding, I said, "In the Torah, in *Parshat Ki Tavo*, we're told that the first fruits of the land, the *bikurim*, are brought as offerings to the *Kohanim* (Temple priests) in Jerusalem. And the way it's done is that the person goes out, looks at his trees, watches them blossom and then bear fruit, and then he marks them; he says these are the fruits that I will be bringing to the *Kohanim* in Jerusalem.

"This is what's happening now. My wife and children and I came to Israel on *aliyah*. Channale was our first child born in Israel, the

first fruit of the Land. She was our *bikurim*. And now we have come to Jerusalem and we are giving our daughter to her husband, a Kohen, just as we are told in the Torah to do with *bikurim*.”

The counselor was right. Esther Ella looked like a queen at our sixtieth anniversary celebration in Eilat, surrounded by her beautiful family — children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren — radiant and dressed to the teeth.

Thank God, our family tree is blooming!

ACCREDITED ALIYAH

Miriam Sarnov

“A person is led in the path he wants to go.” (Talmud, Makkot 10b)

WHenever I approach a *caspmat* (ATM), I’m suddenly transported back twenty-six years to an incident that was truly sent from Above, although I still have to overcome my fear, each time anew, that my credit card will be swallowed.

I had come to Israel on a year-long Bnei Akiva program, the last few weeks of which would give me the tools to become a youth leader upon my return to New Zealand. After having spent the previous year in a mixture of places, we spent this leadership course in the Jerusalem suburb of Katamon.

It was Chanukah time, and I had just spent three months learning in Jerusalem’s Old City. Although I had planned to travel through Europe with a close friend a week or so after our program finished, I was starting to get cold feet. What I really wanted was to learn more about Judaism, having been inspired by my lessons in the Old City.

Every evening, I prayed at the Kotel that I would be able to learn in Neve Yerushalayim, a seminary for *ba'alei teshuvah* (returnees to Judaism) that a girl in my program planned to attend.

One evening, I went to the bank machine to try to withdraw cash with my Visa card. Apart from one remaining traveler's check, it was my only monetary source. I must have punched in the wrong code at least twice, but whatever I did, it was swallowed, never to return. The bank was closed, so I returned the next day, only to be told that the card wasn't there. My group leader found me the phone number of the Visa office in Tel Aviv, and I had to navigate bureaucracy in my broken Hebrew.

This was the day our program finished. My bags weren't packed, I had to evacuate my room for another group, and I had no idea where I would be staying. I was literally running up the stairs in the dorm building, when the dorm phone rang. Being the only one there, I answered. It was none other than one of my favorite teachers from my classes in the Rova (the Jewish Quarter). Both he and his wife taught us and had even spent one Shabbos (Sabbath) with us in the Rova's Sephardic Center. He offered to have me stay with them, or even just store my things there, till I had to leave Israel. They lived in the area, and I had just enough money for a taxi to their home.

My Visa card issue was still in the air and I had no idea if I would get it before I had to leave Israel for Europe. Getting a new one sent from New Zealand would also take time. I decided to cancel my trip through Europe; in any case I couldn't carry around my backpack, as a few weeks earlier I had fallen down the dorm stairs and hurt my back. Instead, I enrolled in Neve Yerushalayim for a one-month-long beginners' program before I had to return home. I eventually got my Visa card back, but instead of returning home, I extended my tourist visa and later made *aliyah*. I learned in Neve for another year and a half, and a couple of years after that, I got married.

Looking back years later, I'm so happy and thankful that the *caspmat* was hungry that day. I saw how Hashem's *hashgachah* (Divine providence) works, even through inanimate objects!

I'd like this story to be a *zechus* (merit) for a *refuah shleimah* (complete recovery) for my mother-in-law, Henya bas Sura (Sarah). Her help over the years has made living here much easier.

A BOWL OF TOFFEES

Rabbi Nachman Seltzer

As heard from Rabbi Yehuda Freilach

(Other names have been changed)

WHEN the secretary told me to go on in to the president's office, I had no idea what to expect. The man was famous in his industry, an innovative businessman, very intelligent, and known for his numerous accomplishments. Yet while I knew about him, I didn't know him. You can read about a person and watch a person and even listen to a person, but until you speak to the person you don't really know him.

I walked down the corridor and gave a gentle knock on his door.

"Come in."

I entered the office. It was a large room with a friendly vibe. There were colorful pictures on the walls and huge windows let in sunlight.

"How are you, Mr. Freilach?"

"I'm doing really well. Thank you for asking."

I took a seat in front of his desk, and after a few minutes of the

obligatory chit-chat we got down to business. Being practical-minded people who knew what we wanted and how far we were prepared to go, the deal didn't take us long to conclude. I was about to shake his hand, thank him for his time, and get on with my day when my eye settled on a bowl that was sitting on his desk. Somehow I had missed it before, but now it called out to me. The bowl was filled with toffees. Israeli toffees, their brightly colored wrappers alluring, calling to me, "Take me, choose me, you know I taste good"

I didn't feel a need to have a toffee. As a child I'd partaken of sufficient treats, and now that I'm older my tastes have changed. But I was filled with a certain element of curiosity, wanting to know why such a prominent businessman would have a bowl of Israeli candy on his desk when his company was located across the ocean in Florida, of all places!

"Excuse me, can I ask you question?"

"Of course you can. What's on your mind?"

"Well, I just noticed the bowl of toffees sitting on your desk and was curious as to why you have them there."

His face was pensive as he considered my question. "You should know something, Yehuda. Wherever I have done business I have kept a bowl of those toffees on my desk."

I waited, knowing that he was going somewhere with this admission.

"I have kept them on my desk and I will always keep them on my desk. But you have asked me why I do this and I will give you an answer."

I leaned back in my chair and prepared myself to hear his story. I had a feeling it was going to be time well spent.

"My parents took me to Israel for my bar mitzvah. This was back in 1970 and Israel was a different place than it is today. There were donkeys in the street and barely anyone drove cars. I enjoyed the visit to no end, and way too soon, it was time to leave and return to the States. We were driven to Lod airport — the airport's name would only be changed in 1973 in honor of Israel's famous prime minister — and we boarded our flight, bound for America.

“It was September and nobody had any idea that the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) was planning to hijack numerous flights that day. The terrorist group managed to hijack four airliners bound for New York and one for London. That same day they also attempted to hijack an El Al flight leaving Amsterdam, but that hijacking failed and one of the terrorists was killed. Such was life in those days of international terrorism and mayhem. Normally I wouldn’t have given much thought to the goings-on on flights around the world. But it was impossible for me to ignore what happened, being that I was on one of the hijacked planes.

“In the meanwhile, I had no idea of anything at all. All I knew was that my family and I were being kept on the plane, which had landed in the middle of Jordan. We were kept on that plane for a week. Can you imagine being locked on a plane for a week straight?! Can you imagine the heat and the stench and the feelings of terror, as the armed men walked up and down the aisles pointing their guns at the passengers? Needless to say, nobody who was on that plane will ever forget what they experienced.

“As I mentioned, we were returning home from having celebrated my bar mitzvah, only to have been taken hostage by Jew-hating Arabs. How many other kids can claim that they celebrated their bar mitzvah in such dramatic fashion? One thing was obvious. There could never be any question that I was a Jew! Not after having been on a hijacked plane, taunted and shamed. No. I would always know who I was, that was for certain.

“After a week on the plane we were ordered out and made to stand in the middle of a sandy field. Our belongings were brought to us and the terrorists examined every single thing we owned. Anything that had any connection to Israel was destroyed. I had two things with such a connection. One was the watch my father had given me for my bar mitzvah. I don’t think it had been made in Israel, but it had a picture of the Kotel on its face. The terrorist put his palm out and I dropped my watch into it.

“He then threw it down on the sandy ground and began jumping on it — up and down, up and down — until every part of it was cracked and broken and all the cogs and pieces were rolling around on the ground. He continued examining my belongings, and then he found the second item that caught his attention. It was an Israeli toffee.

“The Arab held that piece of candy in his hand. I can still picture the bright colors of the wrapper — yes, even now, after so many years. He opened the wrapper and stuck the toffee in his mouth, sucking on it for a few seconds, tasting the sweetness.

“Then he made a horrible face as if the toffee, by virtue of having been produced in Israel, was the most disgusting piece of candy in the universe. Spitting it out of his mouth, the toffee landed in the sand. He then began jumping on the toffee, grinding it into the ground with all his strength, determined to show me that Israel was not going to last, that he was the winner, and that we had no chance against the gun he held in his hand. At that moment I realized something with utter clarity. Wherever I would go in life, there would always be a bowl of Israeli toffees on the table before me.

“We were flown to Cyprus a few days later, where we were released. There was a giant tent in the airport, which was separated down the middle — half for Israelis, the other half for Americans. Being an American citizen, I naturally headed to the American half. The American ambassador was there and he was giving a speech.

“‘You have to understand the Palestinians,’ he was telling our group of survivors. ‘They have been displaced; they have lost their country, their land, their families ...’

“He was talking, but I couldn’t help looking over at the other side of the tent where the Israeli ambassador was handing out flowers to everyone. In an instant I knew that I belonged on the other side of the tent and I slipped away to join the Israelis. At that moment I told myself that I was going to move to *Eretz Yisrael* one day, together with so many other *Yidden* (Jews) from around the globe. I also told myself

that I would make sure to keep a bowl of these toffees in front of me wherever I may be.

“I kept my word. I live in Israel and I live in America. I have homes in both countries. But no matter what, no matter where we will meet, you will find a bowl of those toffees sitting on the desk.

“To me they signify the enemy’s best attempt to kill and destroy us, to demoralize us and to show us that we are meaningless. But while he managed to grind one toffee into the sand, the toffees on my desk tell another story. We have survived and we will always survive.

“Am Yisrael Chai, l’olam (forever)!”

“And that, my friend, is the reason that this bowl is sitting on my desk.”

“That’s a wonderfully inspiring story,” I said to him. “And you know something? It actually reminds me of another story. Would you mind if I shared it with you?”

He didn’t mind.

“For a number of years, I ran a Pesach program at a certain well-established Florida hotel. One of the traditions that developed through the years was the selling of certain *aliyos* (being called up to the Torah) and *kibbudim* (honors) for *tzedakah* (charity) during the davening (prayers). It was exciting and action packed and the guests looked forward to seeing how much money could be raised. Different people usually purchased different *aliyos* every year, but there was one constant that never changed. I am referring to a man named Mr. Velensky.

“Mr. Velensky was an elderly gentleman who had lived through the Holocaust. For some reason he always purchased the same thing every year. When the time came to bid for the *aliyos* and honors, Velensky always bought *hagba’ah* (the raising of the Torah). He was already very old by that time and every time he lifted the *Sefer Torah* (Torah scroll), four men surrounded him just in case he wasn’t able to lift it up. But he managed to do it every time. One year I approached him after *davening* and asked him why he insisted on buying *hagba’ah*.

“Reb Yehuda,’ he replied, ‘during the war I managed to escape the Germans. I then joined the partisans living in the forest, doing our utmost to blow up the enemy trains and to derail their every movement. Those were turbulent years and I almost died a hundred times. But every so often I told myself the following, “Yossel, when this is over and you are in America or wherever you end up, make sure to buy *hagba’ah* whenever you have the opportunity. And when you pick up the *Sefer Torah*, lift it up as high as you can to show the world that though we may have suffered and gone through terrible times, we are still here and our Torah is still here!”

“That, Reb Yehuda, is the reason I buy *hagba’ah*, and the reason I lift it up as high as I can. To show the world that our Torah is still here and will be here forever.”

The room was quiet when I finished sharing the second story with my new friend.

“You can see why your toffees remind me of the *hagba’ah* story, no?”

He nodded. “Great story,” he said.

We shook hands. As I began walking to the door, he called out, “Take a toffee for the road.”

I returned to the desk and chose a toffee from the bowl. I unwrapped it and made a *brachah* (blessing) before popping it into my mouth.

“How is it?” he asked me.

“Sweetest candy ever. Sweetest candy ever.”

Reproduced from *I Have An Amazing Story for You, Volume 3* by Rabbi Nachman Seltzer, with permission of the copyright holders, ArtScroll/Mesorah Publications, Ltd.

DOG-GONE ALIYAH

Faith Cohen

WE had been planning to make *aliyah* for many years and we were finally here. Our three daughters had already made *aliyah* and married, and on June 29, 1990, the three of us — my husband; our dog, Aviva, and I — left Montreal, arriving in Israel. Our dog already had a Hebrew name. We settled comfortably in the *merkaz klitah* (absorption center) in Kfar Adumim, deep in the very hot Judean hills. Help came from all around: *ulpan* (Hebrew language class for *olim*), country-wide trips; and a variety of sessions and activities to ease us in.

I remember my first real feeling of being an *olah*. It was thanks to Aviva who, as usual, was plastered to my side. That day the activity was a march to limber us up. We formed lines two by two. Exhilarating music stirred us up as we went all around the huge room in tune to this rousing music. Then I noticed Aviva's tail was waving from side to side in time to the music, exactly like a flag or a banner of unity. It came to me then that this dog feels it, too; this big, part-Canadian, black husky was declaring her happy feelings of *aliyah* along with me and the others.

Hashem, bless this beautiful land of ours!

DON'T WHINE FOR ME SÃO PAULO

Rosally Saltsman

FATA Morgana means “mirage,” but Morgana, a ten-year-old German shepherd fresh off the plane from Brazil, is as real and as big as life.

Morgana, named after King Arthur’s sister, Morgan le Fay, is the pet of Rivka Rochman Sitnik, a sixty-seven-year-old woman who is a three-week-old new immigrant from São Paulo. She is currently staying with her daughter Rosa, who has been in Israel for thirteen years, her Argentine son-in-law, Chaim, and her two grandsons who have welcomed her and Morgana into their home until they find a place of their own.

“The dog is the boss,” says Rivka as we sit down in her daughter’s living room in Petach Tikva. We converse in a combination of Spanish, Portuguese, and Hebrew, as she tells me of how she came to make *aliyah* at this point in her life.

“I wanted to come to Israel for many years but I didn’t want to leave my other daughter, Deborah, who was studying medicine, alone.” And now, Rivka, a retired pediatrician and a widow for the last sixteen years,

has finally made it here. Although very happy to be here, life is very different.

Rivka's Hebrew is quite good. She was born in Marilia, a small town in southern Brazil where there was no Jewish school. By the time she moved to São Paulo when she was nine, she was already too old for the Jewish education available there. Her mother taught her the Hebrew alphabet from the Yiddish she knew and only later in her life did Rivka take Hebrew courses.

As for Morgana, as Rivka points out, you can't explain to a dog in any language that you're making *aliyah*. Morgana had to endure three days in transit before being handed over to her master after her own bureaucratic dealings with absorption. Morgana likes it here, evidenced by her bark of welcome to me, but understandably she was a bit disoriented at first.

Morgana had to have a microchip with her ID information implanted under the skin of her neck. She arrived via Switzerland while her owner flew by route of France. Morgana was well cared-for during her odyssey, given food and water and taken out for walks, but she definitely would have preferred to be carry-on luggage. On Rivka's plane was a couple traveling with two dogs. But since they were poodles, they were allowed to be stored with the luggage. It took Morgana ten days to get over the trauma. But she was feeling well enough to give me a kiss.

Of course Rosa is happy to have her mother here. "How else can a daughter feel?" she asks, smiling.

Rivka says that she hopes her story will encourage other people to make *aliyah*. "Because you can bring to Israel everyone you love, even if it's a dog."

First appeared in *The Jewish Press*.

FROM THE MOUTHS OF BABES

As heard from Moshe Mendel

Dej, Romania, 1963

MY parents, Irena and Baruch Mandel, had miraculously survived the horrors of the Holocaust and numerous concentration camps. They had each lost their parents and almost their entire family. They were cousins, and after the war they married and applied for an exit visa to Israel. For fifteen years they waited without receiving one.

My father owned a store, which he would close in the afternoon to come home for lunch to eat with me, my older brother, and my mother. I was six years old. It was a cold day in December and I was wearing my winter coat. Suddenly, while we were eating, I have no idea why but I suddenly blurted out, "If the fur on my coat is from a kosher animal, we will get our exit visas immediately." My coat was lined with sheep's wool. I had hardly finished speaking when there was a knock on the door. An official was standing there with our exit visas.

Two months later, we left Romania and, after two months in transit, we arrived in Israel, welcomed by an Israeli spring, where I didn't have to wear a coat.

THE PRICE IS RIGHT

Kadassah Chaya Davies Pardo

“**E**MA (Mom)! Are you OK? We’re on our way to the Arab village again ...”
“Why, oh why had my navigation app failed me again?”

I queried aloud as I found a safe place to turn around. Getting CD (short for my son’s nickname, Cool Dude) to school each morning had become a bit of a contest. In my cousins’ borrowed Toyota, running on fumes, I considered how the previous four weeks since landing in Israel had played out ... we had some struggles, many victories, but one thing hung over my head like the ubiquitous Pardes Hanna rain in January — I needed a car. My own car, not the use of a well-meaning friend or family member’s car. And I needed it to cost 2,500 shekels.

Getting myself situated on the correct route to school, CD happily chattered about what happened on “his program” yesterday. Part of our enculturation into Israeli society had included me attempting to drive CD to school in Or Akiva and back each day. Most days — well, this was the second week, so there were not a lot of “most days” — included my getting lost, even with the dulcet tones of the navigation device

directing my every turn. I had a lot on my mind. Today, getting home in time for my cousin to make it to a work appointment was at the forefront. As I pulled into the driveway, I knew I was late.

“Elisheva, I’m so, so late! I’m sorry! I got lost again and almost ended up in ... in Haifa.” My red face and breathlessness betrayed my attempt at appearing calm.

“Dassi, you know you were not in Haifa, right? And don’t worry, my appointment was rescheduled for later in the week,” my cousin explained, breezily. “However, Marley (the family dog) has an appointment with Shirli, the veterinarian, in a few minutes. She makes house calls. Dassi, you look worried. It’s OK! Go get some fresh air!”

I went to the porch and decided I would use the time productively by looking for a car — that magical vehicle that would deliver me to independence. The conversation I had with myself earlier that morning replayed in my mind. I had to have a car, and it had to cost no more than 2,500 shekels. One of the neighbors recently bought a new car, so I sent him a text to find out the details. Maybe he could help.

“Hey Shai, I need a car. What are you paying for yours?”

“Hey Dassi, I pay 2,100 shekels, including insurance.”

I was hopeful!

“Shai, is that total? Everything? Just 2,100 shekels?!”

The phone rang. It was Shai, and he was laughing. “Dassi, you know that’s a month, right? Where are you going to find a car with everything for just 2,100?! That’s every single month for thirty-six months.”

“What about for a used car?” I hadn’t given up.

“*Motek* (sweetheart), that IS a used car. Try *Yad Shtayim* (second-hand classifieds), but expect to pay at least 10,000 for something decent. I will help you look, don’t worry. We’ll talk soon.”

I was still undeterred. There HAD to be a car for me for 2,500 shekels!

I opened the *Yad Shtayim* app and began looking for cars in my area. Marley disturbed my search with her incessant barking — Shirli the veterinarian had arrived, and the dog was having none of it. Marley

suddenly stopped and sniffed. She was no match for the power of string cheese, and Shirli knew it. Doctor and patient happily settled, I continued my search for my 2,500-shekel car. I knew it was out there, just waiting for me to find it!

Sigh. The app was not magic. Click, swipe. Click, swipe. Nothing in my price range. Fifteen unproductive minutes later, I turned to see what was going on inside the house. Shirli and Marley were still actively engaged in what appeared to be an assessment of health and fitness. “Marley is overweight,” I heard the vet explain to Elisheva. Click, swipe.

I clicked on another lemon of a vehicle. “Can’t people even toss the fast food wrappers before they take a picture of their car?!” I mumble to no one in particular. “Gross. And they still want 15,000 shekels. I guess the wrappers are included in the price.” Click, swipe. Click, swipe.

SWIPE. Suddenly, the door to the patio slides open omnisciently. Elisheva stands in the doorway, pensive. “Hey, do you want a car for 2,500 shekels? Shirli the vet just got a new work vehicle and has an old SUV that runs great but is old. Do you want it? I know you are probably not in the market for a car yet ...”

“2,500 shekels?! Did I mention to you that I wanted a car for 2,500 shekels?!”

I realize I hadn’t even discussed this plan with my cousin yet, as it was newly hatched. So how did she know that’s all I had to spend?!

“Dassi, what are you talking about? I just asked you! Do you want this car? Shirli has to go ... Why are you crying?!”

Of course I wanted the car, and of course, there was no coincidence at play. No clicking and no swiping! Shirli had recently put in new brakes, springs, and plugs, and the car ran great! Shirli even split the cost of registration with me. She wanted someone who really needed a break to have the car and had been asking clients all week if they knew someone. Hashem heard my mournful request that very morning, and in His wisdom, blessed me, and blessed me fast!

“I’ve been waiting for you!” Shirli told me, “I didn’t want to just hand over the keys to anyone. This car has been my mobile office for years — I’m attached to it!”

I promised her I would take good care of her baby. I named my 2,500-shekel car Susita (little horse, in a combination of Hebrew and Spanish).

I still get lost on the way to school, but it is a lot easier getting lost in my own car. Hashem is my Navigator. No coincidence at all!

THREE IN ONE DAY

Devora Pika

JHAD been given an Israeli driver's license automatically upon making *aliyah* in the 1970s. In those days, neither a practical nor a written test was required. That was the easy part of my *aliyah*.

One day, I borrowed a car to do some errands. I buckled up my baby daughter in her car seat and headed up Rechov Jaffa. Rechov Jaffa then was not like Rechov Jaffa today — there was no light rail, there were no cafés along the sidewalks, and there were very few cars compared to today's traffic and a fraction of the people. Still, it was the Machaneh Yehuda market, with its colorful stalls and only-in-Israel mix of vendors and customers with their raw honesty.

As I drove past Machaneh Yehuda, I was stopped by a police car. The policeman informed me that I had gone through a stop sign. He was right. I honestly defended my actions by telling him that I was new here and didn't speak the language (or read the signs in Hebrew, including those with symbols). He let me go. No ticket. Relief! I drove on for another few minutes and believe it or not, it happened again. A police

woman jumped out from her paddy wagon and was about to write me a ticket for not stopping at another stop sign. I again protested by virtue of my ignorance. She gave me a warning and let me go.

I started to feel that driving here was not for me, but I had to get home and return the car. On the way home there was one more errand to do. A travel agency on Shlomtzion HaMalka was my next stop. I parked on the sidewalk, thinking it was okay since every other car for a half a block up and down was parked on the sidewalk. Once I was inside the travel agency, the secretary pointed out the window to me that a policeman was giving out parking tickets. I ran outside and again repeated what I told the other two police officers. Another ticket averted.

Can you imagine what it was like to almost be given three tickets within one hour? I counted my blessings and decided it was best for me not to drive in Israel again. Fortunately, I live on a street serviced by bus routes to all over Israel.

COMMON DENOMINATOR

Sue Tourkin Komet

You are shaking ... so am I. It is because of Jerusalem, isn't it?

One does not go to Jerusalem, one returns to it.

That's one of its mysteries. (Elie Wiesel)

JT was early summer 1969, the end of my first year in Israel, and I was seated near the back of the bus.

I looked around for someone interesting. I'd already learned that, in Israel, it is usually perfectly acceptable, safe, normal, and "welcome" to converse with a total stranger.

We are *Am Echad Kadosh*, One Holy Nation.

I've always been able to converse with just about anyone, but no one really looked like a worthy "target."

Then I saw a middle-aged woman across the aisle from me, one row ahead, with a purple-blue number tattooed on her arm.

I stared, numb, not having grown up with such physical post-

Holocaust testimonies in suburban Maryland. I knew that my curiosity was at the expense of her past pain, her past life, her past losses, and her privacy, so I decided not to engage her in conversation. I left her alone, but I just could not leave the sight of her tattoo alone.

Suddenly I shifted, uncomfortable. The numerals on her arm seemed to remind me of some other numbers.

With reverence, with fear, with shaking hands, I took my student ID card out of my wallet, and yes, all the digits matched hers, albeit in a slightly different order! I double-checked, triple-checked, and quadruple-checked her number and my number, and they were the same.

The youthful, spontaneous, immature part of me wanted to tap her on her shoulder — *oy!* of the arm with the tattoo! — and share my “twin-ship” with her. But thankfully another part of me, the educated, sensitive, young adult part, begged me to hold back.

I didn't know about meditation in 1969, but I was capable of it, spontaneously and naturally. I was newly Observant with an upper-case O but had always been observant with a lowercase *o* — a newly Observant Orthodox Jew who had previously been a very observant traditional Jew.

I was new to the term *hashgachah pratit*, Divine providence, but I had always subscribed to such an elegant concept, instinctively and thoroughly, when I did my walking meditations to and from elementary school, day by day, year by year, while growing up.

So I sat back, in a kind of trance, to meditate on her number and on mine. Her number was meant to brand her, humiliate her, torture her, starve her, whip her, burn her, and a whole long list that would fill many pages.

My number was meant to register me at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, which in my mind obligated me to be a good student, to be ethical and moral, to progress in my studies, my Hebrew, my Jewish observance and Jewish commitments. And for me, being an idealist and a Zionist, my student card ID number carried with it the promise

of my becoming a future *olah* (immigrant to Israel), a social worker, a wife, a mother, a voter, an activist, and more.

Her number was meant to spell death and anonymity. But here she was, alive and well, and pleasingly plump, sitting seemingly calmly opposite me, a row ahead.

My number was meant to give me a chance to help build the young State of Israel, only twenty years young in 1968, just as I was twenty years old in 1968.

Mine was for life and hers was for death.

Hers was for death and mine was for life.

And both of us were on the exact same bus riding up to the Holy City of Jerusalem. I knew then that I'd be back in Jerusalem a year later, bachelor's degree in hand, to continue my life here as she had continued her life here, albeit a generation older than me and with a totally different personal history.

I knew then that Divine providence was at hand, and on her arm, and on my ID card. If I'd have missed that bus, I'd have missed her number — our common denominator.

Excerpted from *Jerusalem Out Front, Bethlehem Outback: Prose & Poetry* by Sue Tourkin Komet.

DYING TO LIVE HERE

Yoel Berman

WHILE doing some family research, I came across an ancestor of my wife's, Rav (Rabbi) Meir Fishels *zt"l*, about ten generations back, who was the head of the *beis din* (rabbinical court) in Prague at the time the Noda B'Yehuda was rabbi there. He had a very elaborate tombstone, and one of the inscriptions made note of the fact that his father-in-law, Rav Moshe Ginzburg *zt"l*, who was a *dayan* (rabbinic judge) in Prague, died and was buried in the city of Sidon (Lebanon), on his way to the Holy Land. This is also mentioned on Rav Moshe's son's tombstone. This was important enough to be noted on the tombstones of his family.

We have much to be grateful for: we can easily come to the Land that our ancestors literally risked their lives to come to, some of them not even making it all the way.

DREAMING OF ISRAEL

As heard from Libby Levine

I WAS born in Asunción, Paraguay, in the 1960s. The Jewish community numbered around a thousand people — about three hundred families. We were very close-knit and all the children attended the Jewish school that my maternal grandfather helped found. It only went up to the ninth grade after which we went to public school. The school was very Zionist and the Israeli principal and teachers filled us with a love of Israel. We took to it like ants to honey. Anything we saw from Israel, even if it was a soda bottle label, was holy in our eyes. I don't remember a time when I didn't dream of going to Israel both literally and figuratively. The longing was very strong.

When I was six years old, my uncle died in a car accident and his wife and daughter made *aliyah*. My cousin and I were very close and I missed her terribly. One night, when I was eight years old, I had a dream that Israel, being on the other side of the world, and the world being round, ended up being right next to my yard. There was a fence and on the other side was Israel, its land kissing my garden. I remember that dream vividly.

There was an agreement between our community and the Jewish Agency that students would spend the first half of twelfth grade in Israel on a kibbutz. We were on Kibbutz Ein Hashlosa in the south. We were separated from the non-Jewish volunteers and did a rotation of all the kibbutz jobs. We all came from rich South American families. I didn't even know how to wash a fork. We had to get up at five o'clock in the morning in the winter and go work in the citrus groves.

For almost all of us, our stay in kibbutz strengthened our desire to make *aliyah*.

It was very difficult for me to return to Paraguay. I did so only to finish high school. My head and heart were still in Israel — and it's very hard to function without your head and heart, but somehow I finished school. My parents didn't want me to make *aliyah*. I was the only daughter among four brothers. Today, as a mother, I can understand how my parents felt. Every night I would dream I was in Israel, only to be heartbroken to wake up and find myself still in Paraguay. Not that Paraguay was a bad place. We had a good life there but it wasn't where my heart was. It wasn't home.

I didn't want to start university because then I thought I would never go back to Israel. As a compromise, my parents sent me to Buenos Aires as I was already of dating age and in the small community where I lived and had grown up, every boy was just like my brother.

After three months in Buenos Aires, when I was starting to think about getting a job and settling down, a family friend called to tell me that my grandfather, the one who had helped found the school, had convinced my parents to let me go to Israel. That was his last and best gift to me. He died two weeks after I made *aliyah*.

My parents bought me a plane ticket for a month later. My father asked me if I wanted to live in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem. Although I knew Jerusalem held the answers for all my spiritual questions, I chose Tel Aviv because my cousin, who had come on *aliyah* a year earlier, had settled there and I also had some friends there already. My spiritual

journey would wait a few years longer.

Despite my desire to go, it was very hard for me. I had two young brothers I was leaving behind, although one would eventually make *aliyah* years later, as well as other family and friends. My mother took me to Brazil as a going-away present.

When I arrived, the Jewish Agency put me in the student dorms of Tel Aviv University. It was Divine providence that I chose Tel Aviv, because it was there that I met my future husband, a new immigrant from Canada.

I've been here since 1983. When I moved here, it was like something lost had been returned to me, although, in truth, I had returned to it and, at last, Israel was really in my backyard.

Libby wrote the following poem when she was sixteen, before she had ever been to Israel. It's been translated from Spanish:

YEARNING...

I reach out my arms with a strong desire to feel you
On the fragile skin of my hope
But ... I cannot reach you

I look forward with such strong intensity
But also with helplessness
Trying with my gaze to transverse borders, sea and fog
To reach you and to finally see myself
Reflected in your mysterious and powerful resplendence
But with no success

I close my eyes and immerse myself in a dream
That I am coming to meet you
And I am so deeply immersed
That when I open them

And am still without you ...

I cry

I so long to find the way to find you

I so long to meet you ... and to love you

I long with my entire being

With an unbearable intensity

To be within you and to taste for myself

The sweetness of your milk and honey

Hashem, You and only You,

Know how much I want to reach

The Land of Israel.

SIMPLY A JEW

Rosally Saltzman

RABBI Sharon Shalom was born *about* 1963 in Ethiopia. In Ethiopia they don't have birth certificates.

“When was I born?”

“When your older brother got married.”

“When was he married?”

“When you were born.”

Rav Shalom made *aliyah* with his family when he was around eight years old. His parents stayed behind in Sudan. For two years he thought they were dead. He found out they were alive when they came to Israel in the Ethiopian immigration operation known as *Mivtza Moshe* (Operation Moses).

Rav Sharon studied at Har Etzion, a *hesder* yeshiva (a yeshiva that is part of a program combining Torah learning with army service), and returned there after serving as an officer in the army. He was ordained as a rabbi but turned to academia when he encountered prejudice and politics in the rabbinate. He has a doctorate in Jewish philosophy from Bar-Ilan University, where he also lectures on the fundamentals of

Judaism. He is the rabbi of a community in Kiryat Gat, officiates at weddings, gives inspirational talks around the country to spellbound audiences, reducing them to laughter and tears, and is very active in *kiruv* (drawing Jews closer to Judaism).

His is not the story of most Ethiopian Jews, many of whom are still struggling with absorption into Israeli culture, the handicaps of poverty, and the prejudices of Israeli society. This is understandable when considering the vast differences in culture, upbringing, language, and history of Ethiopian Jewry, who dreamed for millennia of returning to the Temple in Jerusalem, only to be devastated when they arrived by the news that the holy Temple had been destroyed.

Ethiopian Jews celebrate Sigd on the twenty-ninth of the Hebrew month of Cheshvan, fifty days after Yom Kippur. On Sigd, Ethiopian Jews pray to God and plead to return to Zion. They celebrate as a community by going to Jerusalem in festive garb.

Rav Shalom works with an organization called Rabbanei Tzohar, which works in *kiruv* and tries to model the paradigm of the community rabbi and the community *shul* in the United States. "It's a *kehilla petucha* (an open community) in our synagogue; everyone feels at home."

In 2008, he took the position of community rabbi at a *shul* in Kiryat Gat called Kadoshei Yisrael, which was founded by Holocaust survivors in the 1950s in memory of their loved ones who had perished in the Holocaust, all the victims of the Holocaust, and the fallen heroes of Israel's wars. In 2007 it switched from being a synagogue to a community.

I'm sure, judging by the way that he peppers his speech with Yiddish expressions, that the rabbi feels right at home. Or it could be his Swiss-born wife, Avital, who is responsible for the *Mama Loshen* (Yiddish) in his speech. They were introduced by friends and have three boys to date. "*K'neine hora*," he says.

"I'm a Jew," he says simply. He respects individual tradition but he sees everyone as a Jew first. At his own wedding, he and his wife chose

the customs based on what they represented. In Ethiopia, for example, the groom wears a white and red braid tied on his head. The white represents the purity of the groom and the red, symbolic of blood, represents the bride's virtue. "People said, 'Here comes Rambo, only with a *kittel* (a white robe worn by a groom or on Yom Kippur).' We did everything and nothing bad happened." It requires a lot of patience and pluralism, he says. Everyone is right. Since Kedoshei Yisrael is an Ashkenazi *shul*, the *rav* conducts the service according to Ashkenazi tradition out of respect, but he injects Ethiopian tradition in his home. For example, they cut the *challah* standing up. Why? "Because that's how it is in Ethiopia."

"You know why Mashiach doesn't come?" Rav Shalom asks. "Because if Mashiach is Ashkenazi, the Moroccans won't accept him; if he comes as a Russian, the Jews won't accept him because he's a 'goy.' If he's Yemenite, they're not ready for that. The only hope is if he's Ethiopian. They'll all accept him then because everyone will go, 'Oh, he's so cute, Ethiopians are so cute!' But Mashiach says, 'I waited 2,000 years so that they'll say to me, 'He's so cute?!' I don't want to come!'"

He tells the story of Rav Aryeh Levin. A Jew in his community removed his *kippah* (skullcap) but was ashamed before the *rav* and wanted to hide from him. "I'm sorry if I offended you," said the *rav*. "No," said the man, "I'm embarrassed because I'm without my *kippah*."

"I just reach your heart," said Rav Aryeh, who was of diminutive physical stature. "I don't know what's going on in your head."

"We need to be at the height of each other's hearts. That is what we need to do to bring Mashiach."

First appeared in *The Jewish Press*.

WITH THEIR OWN EYES

Dr. Meir Wikler

JN the years following the establishment of the State of Israel, waves of Jewish immigrants came to *Eretz Yisrael* from the surrounding Middle Eastern countries. The Jewish Agency often separated Sephardic children from their parents and placed them in brainwashing centers disguised as resettlement camps.

When the Chazon Ish *zt"l* learned that one of these camps was being established in a remote location, too far from Bnei Brak for him to visit personally, he summoned two teenaged Chareidi *bochurim* (young men); we'll call them Yossi and Bentzy. "I need you to go and speak to those children and give them *chizuk* (strength) to hold on to their *Yiddishkeit* (Judaism)," he instructed them.

The guards at the gate of the compound took one look at these two seventeen-year-olds with yarmulkes and long *peyos* (sidelocks) and barred them from entering. Undaunted, the pair circled the camp several times, searching for another way in. Unfortunately, they could not find one. Half an hour later, they were back to where they started.

They decided to leave and come back to try again, assuming that the gate would not be under continuous surveillance. An hour later, however, the entrance was as carefully guarded as before. After devoting the better part of a day to their unsuccessful attempt to gain access to the Sephardic children being held in the compound, Yossi and Bentzy reluctantly returned home, bitterly disappointed.

When they arrived back in Bnei Brak, they went straight to the Chazon Ish, recounting, with long faces, their failure to carry out their mission.

“Don’t feel bad about it,” the Chazon Ish said softly, trying to comfort them. “You did all you could. Obviously, Hashem did not want or need for you to do more than that. *Bitachon* (faith) means believing that Hashem has a plan and a purpose for everything.”

Sixty years later, the nearly octogenarian Yossi was still living in Bnei Brak. One night, a Sephardic neighbor was marrying off his son. Although Yossi did not know this neighbor very well, he nevertheless decided to pop in to the *chasunah* (wedding) just to say *mazel tov*. After greeting his neighbor, Yossi was introduced to the neighbor’s father.

“It is such a wonderful *simchah* (happiness) for me to see my grandson, an outstanding *ben Torah* (Torah scholar), getting married,” the grandfather of the *chassan* gushed to Yossi. “You know, when I first came to this country, they tried to tear us away from Torah altogether. I arrived with about a hundred other children, and only a handful of us succeeded in remaining religious.”

“How did they try to turn you against Torah?” Yossi asked, curious to learn more details about this sad chapter of Jewish history from a near victim.

“We were separated from our parents and taken to an isolated resettlement camp,” the man recounted. “Our counselors tried to indoctrinate us with their secular ideology. They told us that our *kippot* (skull-caps) and *peyot*, *simanim* (symbols) of our Judaism, were only necessary while living in non-Jewish lands. They claimed that in the holy land of

Israel, where everyone is Jewish, people don't keep these *simanim*, and we too should discard these old-fashioned trappings of *galut* (exile)."

Yossi shook his head in disgust, utterly unprepared for what he was about to hear.

"One day, however," the grandfather continued, "I was looking out the window and I saw two boys, about seventeen or eighteen years old, walking around and around the camp. I jumped up and called my friends. 'Look,' I pointed, as my friends crowded around the window. 'Those are Israeli boys! And they look just like us, with *kippot* and long *peyot!*' We realized that the counselors had been lying to us, and that helped some of us resist their efforts to get us to abandon Torah and *mitzvot*."

It took sixty years for Yossi to learn that his mission had, in fact, succeeded; he had come face-to-face with one of the Sephardic boys he had helped to remain *frum* (religious). He then realized that the Chazon Ish's words were practically prophetic: "You did all you could. Obviously, Hashem did not want or need you to do more than that."

Reprinted from *Mishpacha* magazine (February 14, 2018). Also appeared in *Bye Coincidence* and *Drawing Closer*.

PRACTICAL HALACHAH (JEWISH LAW)

Yoel Berman

WHEN my wife's grandfather, Shlomo Abrahams, came to *Eretz Yisroel* as a young adult not long after the Holocaust, a cousin who had preceded him to *Eretz Yisroel* told him about the requirement of tithing from the local produce. He was astounded to find out that Shlomo already knew the basics of these laws, having learned them from his father while they were incarcerated in the concentration and death camps. His father had explained to him that when he will get to *Eretz Yisroel*, he will need to know these things ... This conversation was taking place right in the middle of *Gehinnom* (purgatory) under the accursed Nazis.

Being very weak and sick, the father passed away less than twenty-four hours after being liberated and merited a Jewish burial, but his son did have the opportunity to practice in *Eretz Yisroel* what his father taught him back in that dark *galus*.

A CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION

Rosally Saltzman

WE attended a bar mitzvah that fell during the three weeks (before Tisha B'Av) and was held at a youth hostel in Jerusalem on Shabbat. The bar mitzvah boy, Chanan, had the year's longest *parshah* (Torah portion) and handled it beautifully. He shared the stage, or rather the *bima* (platform), with a *Sefer Torah* that received almost as much attention as he did. But I don't think he minded because the Torah scroll and the bar mitzvah boy were intertwined in more than just a spiritual way. They were remarkably connected on a physical level as well.

Shenandoah, in Eastern Pennsylvania, used to have a thriving Jewish community, but now there are only a few elderly Jews left and the *shul* is selling off its contents. Among the things up for sale was a ninety-two-year-old Torah scroll. It was dedicated in 1912, the same year David Aranoff, the boy's grandfather, was born. He lived in Shenandoah until 1956. Being a *Kohen*, he was probably called up to this Torah

innumerable times and it is conceivable that he read his own bar mitzvah portion from this very Torah. Chanan was David's first grandson to be born a *Kohen*.

One of the cousins heard about the *shul* selling off its Torah scrolls and suggested its acquisition as a project to the boy's aunt. The family appealed to have the Torah brought to Israel so the *shul* waived half its fee, and the aunt and uncle paid to have the Torah brought to Israel. Chanan and his family formed a welcoming committee at the airport to welcome the Torah scroll home. It had been a long journey. The first *sofer* (Torah scribe) who saw it recognized the calligraphy as belonging to a *sofer* who had written *Sifrei Torah* in Europe. A *sofer* in Jerusalem worked on it day and night for five weeks. The main corrections were in the *Yamim Noraim parshas*, attesting to the sad fact that the Torah had probably only been read from during the High Holidays for the last few decades. Appropriately enough, the name of the *shul* that the scroll came from was *Kehillas Yisrael* (The Congregation of Israel). It is from this Torah that the bar mitzvah boy read so beautifully.

There was an official *hachnasat Sefer Torah* afterward, around the time of David Aranoff's *yahrzeit* (anniversary of a death). It found its new home in Lapid. Lapid means torch and there the light of this Torah scroll will be rekindled. It wasn't easy getting the *Sefer Torah* ready in time. The family had to contend with negotiations, travel arrangements, customs, bureaucracy, and technical details. The corrections were completed just in time. One can't help but marvel at the *hashgachah pratit* here.

Many of Chanan's family preceded the *Sefer Torah* to Israel, including a great-aunt (the grandfather's sister) and uncle in their eighties who had come shortly before on *aliyah*. And now, joining them, was a ninety-two-year-old timeless Torah scroll.

That eternal connection between us and the Torah through generations, over continents, and across the waves of history is what

a bar mitzvah celebration is truly about. Chanan, his grandfather, and the *Sefer Torah* reconnected in Israel.

May the bar mitzvah boy and the *Sefer Torah* share many *parshas* together, till 120!

First appeared in *The Jewish Press*.

REASONS

Menucha Chana Levin

1991

FC is puzzled, this photographer from *National Geographic* on assignment here in the Judean Desert, not expecting to find a family from Canada living in this tiny trailer perched on the edge of nowhere.

“Why did you come here?” he asks, a polite, valid question needing an answer.

As I try to hang the laundry, flapping like wild birds in the afternoon wind, I search for reasons that would make sense.

Remembering Grandpa, dying regretful, “If I had my life over again, I would have come to Israel as a young man and picked oranges.”

But those were his reasons, not ours.

Why then did we give up our comfortable existence? Leaving behind family and friends, decent jobs, a four-bedroom house with backyard and basement for the children to play in, Sunday morning brunch, drives in the countryside, winter vacations.

Unlike other immigrants, we did not flee hunger or oppression. Like adopted children, we are here by choice. But why?

Perhaps because we were tired. Tired of hearing a casual antisemitic remark in a colleague's conversation. Of having the only house on the block undecorated in December while everyone celebrated their holiday.

Tired of feeling excluded, always a minority, reading hateful lies about Israel in the local papers, concerned about what the *goyim* (non-Jews) would think.

Tired of that cold, gray country we knew was never ours, needing a warmer place to grow. Two thousand years of *galut* was long enough. Still, we knew it would not be easy. Other idealists had tried and failed but we promised each other, despite the difficulties, we would stay. And so we have.

It feels good to live in our own land, the world's only Jewish country, to finally have a place we belong. The first landscape our ancestors knew — morning mist rising slowly from the valley, bare rock dotted with black sheep, olive trees shimmering under a blazing blue sky — is now familiar to us, too.

The holidays here are ours, praying for rain at the right time, our lives in rhythm with the seasons. The bus driver wishes us, "Chag sameach (Happy holiday)!" as he also hurries home. Building our *sukkah*, we hear the hammer blows echo through the neighborhood. When we light our menorah, its flames are reflected in a thousand other windows. Tiny trees we planted in the mud on Tu B'Shvat have taken root and miraculously started to grow. Our children, all the children, march proudly through the streets in colorful Purim costumes.

When one calls "Eema!" automatically I look up. They are all our children. Hearing them speak Hebrew in perfect *Sabra* accents, we feel both pride and envy. On a crowded bus, a woman offers to hold my youngest son on her lap. His grandmother lives across the world but here there's no shortage of grandmothers. The people's faces are

different yet somehow familiar, all related, connected, openly sharing conversation, laughter, fierce quarrels, each other's pain, as one family.

Despite the divisions and danger, fears and frustrations, in spite of everything. We are here. We are home. These are our reasons.

NEED A LIFT?

Ruth Zimberg

Thornhill (Toronto), Canada, 2001

AS we turned the corner onto our quiet suburban street, the first thing we saw was the flashing lights of the police cruiser. Neighbors were out on the summer's evening, trying to catch a glimpse of what was going on. Everyone was focused on the long shipping container protruding several feet into the street from a driveway. OUR driveway.

"Officer, what's going on?" we asked in trepidation.

"You can't have that container sticking out on the street like that. It's dangerous and illegal. We're gonna have to tow it away."

"NO! You can't! Sir, the movers will pick it up in the morning to take to the port. We are moving to Israel, and everything we own is in there!"

After several minutes of polite but desperate negotiations, we settled on a \$100 fine, to cover the cost of the police towing vehicle that stood ready to hook up the container and haul it away. During the day, we hadn't thought about the fact that it would be dangerous to have a huge

metal box sticking out into the roadway in the dark. We agreed to park our car next to the container so when drivers avoided our car, they would also miss the container.

When we were planning to make *aliyah*, we had to decide whether to sell everything and buy new furnishings in Israel that would be suitable for our new home (with our new *oleh* [immigrant] discounts) or to ship what we had. As we already had to send my husband's large podiatry treatment table and other items that were not available in Israel, we chose to send a "lift" (shipping container). We had already purchased a home in Beit Shemesh and, with my husband's measurements in hand, we packed up everything we had, including new kitchen sinks! (Quality stainless steel sinks were hard to get in Israel back then and we got a plumber's discount via a relative!)

As we had to pack a three-bedroom house into the lift, we ordered a forty-foot-long container. The problem was that the distance from the garage door to the street was less than forty feet. This is what resulted in the container problem.

After spending the whole day supervising the movers, we were exhausted. We were grateful that our *machetunim* (son's in-laws) had invited us for dinner. As we were relaxing at their home, we suddenly got a phone call from our son. Fortunately, a friend of his lives a few doors away from our home. The friend called our son asking if he knew where we were. The police were at our door!

As we sped home, we were grateful that this friend "just happened" to live on our block and our son knew where we were. Everything works out for the best with a little "lift" from "Above."

THE RIGHT MOVE

Rosally Saltzman

Ra'anana, 2008

I WAS at a lecture and the woman sitting next to me was speaking with the organizer. She mentioned that she had recently made *aliyah*. I asked her casually how long she'd been in Israel. Eleven weeks, she answered. Eleven weeks!

My astonishment was due to the fact that in those eleven weeks, she had already managed to secure a place to live, a job, and three telephone numbers; she was attending *ulpan*; she already had a social network of friends and business contacts; and she was involved with the community. And she seemed very calm about the whole thing. She was like a poster lady for successful *aliyah*.

I asked to interview her. She amiably agreed. I was sure I would hear stories of relatives setting up house for her before she arrived or a job secured well before the plane took off. I was wrong. Nothing had been arranged previously. At least not by human design.

Felicia Edelstein and her husband, Mike, were living peacefully in Johannesburg, South Africa. She was a pre-elementary school principal

and he was in sales. They had a plan to move to Israel when Mike reached sixty-five. When he turned sixty, till 120, one of their two daughters (both of whom live in Israel) asked how their long-term plan was going. Felicia said fine. “Well, what are you waiting for?” her daughter asked.

Felicia couldn’t sleep all night. In the morning she called her husband, who was in a small town on the road. He had just finished his morning prayers. “I said, ‘I think we need to go to Israel,’” says Felicia. “He said, ‘When?’ I said, ‘Now.’ He said, “If that’s what you want and you’re sure about it, we’ll go.’ Three months and one week later, we were here.”

Felicia and Mike saw countless signs of Divine Providence since making their decision.

“The economy in South Africa is not good and we were told we wouldn’t sell our house and I said if this is meant to be it will happen. We sold our house within five weeks. Same thing with selling the car. I said if it is meant to be it will happen. And it was.”

The couple has been married for twenty years. Besides the Israeli daughters, there’s a son who had also made *aliyah* but is currently residing in South Africa.

Currently, Felicia is in *kita bet* (class 2) in *ulpan*. Mike can read Hebrew from a *siddur* but doesn’t speak it yet. This doesn’t present too much of a problem in Ra’anana, which has a large percentage of English speakers from all over the world.

The Edelsteins left Johannesburg the day of Yom Ha’atzmaut (Israel Independence Day) and arrived here Friday morning. It was obviously serendipitous that Mike had recently turned sixty and made *aliyah* on the State’s sixtieth birthday.

By the following Thursday, they had rented an apartment. “It was a *ness* (miracle)” Felicia admits. She says about everything that the timing was unbelievable. “It was *Yad Hashem* (the hand of God).” She approached a book publisher about a job and they just happened to be looking for proofreaders. Two weeks later, she started.

So what is the secret behind their successful *aliyah*?

“You have to make a decision but not conditionally; you can’t have a loophole. You have to come with the view that this is it. It’s all about attitude, I think. Also a lot about how you cope. Any immigration changes your status.”

They made *aliyah* through the Jewish Agency, which they say was more than helpful. Agency staff took care of the paperwork. Surprisingly Felicia doesn’t find the bureaucracy here too daunting. She says you just take a number and most of the time, it’s all right.

In case anyone thinks that it’s easier to come to Israel from affluent South Africa, that isn’t the case. Felicia says that they had to change their money twice, once into dollars and then into shekels, and they lost out each time.

“It’s a question of what you want out of life. Is it going to be about money or is it going to be about quality of life?” The Edelsteins are still waiting for their lift but that seems to be the only thing left to make their new lives here complete.

“It’s the best thing we ever did.” Felicia says with joyful certainty. “It’s the following of a dream!”

First appeared in *The Jewish Press*.

ROOTS OF ALIYAH

Ruth Fogelman

MY parents were armchair Zionists when I was a child in England. I did not hear my parents speaking about Israel. However, my Jewish identity was very strong and I learned the aleph-bet before the ABC. My parents sometimes hosted Israelis visiting London, and I would enjoy playing with their children. I was an only — and alone — child who never felt a sense of belonging in London or in Brighton, where my family lived.

My Uncle David was my storyteller. My favorite of his stories were how he built the first road between Haifa and Tel Aviv with his friends and how they lived in tents where they could see the stars and held discussions long into the night. These tales ignited my imagination. Only decades later did I understand that he and his comrades were some of the pioneers of *Aliyah Bet*.

Most importantly, Uncle David's stories, and his postcards from Israel throughout my childhood, fired my imagination and fueled my desire to leave England and come to Israel as soon as I possibly could. His stories and his picture postcards were part of my anchor to this

sundrenched, sacred land.

In 1963, three months before my thirteenth birthday, Uncle David brought us to Israel for the first time. My mother, father, and Uncle David stayed in a Tel Aviv hotel. I stayed with my friend, Rivka, whom I knew from her visits to England. When her family came to England in the summers, we were inseparable; we both stayed at Uncle David's. He understood that I much preferred to be with Rivka than in a fancy hotel.

Rivka was my age and my height and we both had long blond hair and Cleopatra bangs. I visited Rivka's school and sat in classes with her. My spirit rejoiced in the informality — no uniforms here, and the kids called their teachers by their first names.

"When are you returning to Israel?" Rivka's classmates asked me, one after another. Without hesitation I replied dozens of times, "As soon as I finish high school."

This was where I belonged — not in England with its strict formality and stiff propriety; not in England with its depressing grey skies, where the weather was cold and hearts lacked warmth. Uncle David knew this was where I belonged. He would help me return.

My soul sang when, during our break, we left the school's gates and went out across the street to a kiosk to buy pita and falafel — a whole pita with falafel, salad, and *tahini* — the best meal in the world. No seventh grader in England could walk outside to a kiosk during school hours.

In the afternoon, Rivka and I strolled along Dizengoff Street. I stared, enthralled, at all the Hebrew signs. We browsed in record stores and listened to the hits: "Irisim" (Irises, sung by Geula Gil) and Esther Ofarim's haunting "Ma Omrot Einayich?" (What Do Your Eyes Say?). Back at Rivka's place, we sat on her bed, listening to records of Israeli songs.

One of her friends called up from the street, "Rivka!" She leaned out of her bedroom window, talking in rapid Hebrew to the boy below. This direct mode of communication between street and window fascinated and elated me: the unthinkable in England's good homes was the norm for teens here, before the era of the mobile phone.

We both went outside and met more of Rivka's friends in the shade underneath the building-on-stilts. I loved Tel Aviv's buildings-on-stilts and had never seen anything like them. I loved this open space, protected from Israel's blazing sun, where friends could gather, close to, yet outside, their home.

In the evening, I went out with Rivka and her golden Labrador to pick lemons in her garden. I'd never seen a lemon tree. I was filled with wonder, as if I had entered the Garden of Eden. Rivka's mother made lemon tea for the guests in the living room: my parents and Uncle David.

Although I hadn't yet told him, Uncle David knew that I wanted to return to Israel as soon as I could. After all, he read my mind.

True to my word about returning to Israel as soon as I finished high school, I returned in 1968, with Uncle David's help. I came with a group of volunteers from England to Kibbutz Mei Ami on a hilltop in the Galilee, across from the Arab town of Umm al-Fahm. From our hilltop, we heard the muezzin's call to prayer five times a day. About the time of the 4:00 a.m. call, we, too, were woken up for work, mainly in the fields and in the kitchen.

After almost a year on the kibbutz, I told my parents I was staying "one more year." From the kibbutz, I went to an intensive academic *ulpan* in Kfar Monash for the summer following my kibbutz experience, and there I met a student named Zvi from Framingham, Massachusetts. Zvi was to become a good friend throughout my years at Hebrew University. We came together to Jerusalem and both of us lived in the student dorms on campus.

In our *ulpan*, Zvi made the decision to speak only Hebrew. This decision carried over to our time at Hebrew University. After I left the kibbutz, where I was forced to speak Hebrew with the Israeli Nahal* soldiers, Zvi was one of the main people, besides my Israeli roommate, who helped my Hebrew improve.

* *Nahal* A branch of the IDF where soldiers combine military service with agriculture. Until the Six Day War, our tiny outpost-kibbutz was on the Jordanian border and became a civilian settlement in 1969, soon after I left.

On the first day of my first semester at the university, I met Eliyahu Succot on campus and he invited me to his home for Shabbat. Thus started the next chapter of my life in Israel, and with it an ever-deepening of my roots in this Land. While at university, my “just one year” became “until I finish university,” and finally my parents realized that I was here to stay.

In memory of my Uncle David, Dr. David Diringer.

MY FIRST WEEK OF WORK

Leon Moss

JBEGAN work on May 1, 1978. After five months in the *merkaz klitah* (absorption center), I was bored and ready to work, confident that the Hebrew I had learned was enough to get me through any situation. I found a job at a small engineering company in Jerusalem that had just been awarded the management of a new construction project running to hundreds of apartment buildings.

I was a forty-six-year-old site supervisor. The two partners in the firm were nice enough guys, slightly older than I, and between them could raise twenty or so words in English. So when we spoke to each other, they did a lot of nodding at my English and I nodded at their Hebrew, meaning no one understood anything.

The office where I sat was a corrugated iron shack. A far cry from my wood-paneled office in Johannesburg, but I reckoned I would manage, new country and all. There was water from a tap at an adjacent road. My first job every morning was to fill a bucket from the tap and take it to the office so I would have water for the day. Inside the office was a table and one chair — mine. Building plans were kept in rolls

standing in cardboard cartons in the office. Hundreds of rolls with no visible markings or names, meaning I had to unroll and reroll maybe hundreds of rolls if I had to look for the plans of a particular apartment.

On the other side of the road were buildings, all occupied as far as I could see by very religious people — lots of black suits and skirts. I never crossed the road and they never crossed the road.

I had to supervise five or six buildings that were in the early stages of construction. Each one had an Arab foreman who spoke fair English, making things easy on site. After the second day one of the bosses called me over and asked how I was managing.

“Everything is okay,” I replied, “but I am having a problem with the Hebrew. I never learned any of the words they use.”

He looked puzzled for a minute and then he brightened and said, “The foremen are Arabs and they speak Arabic. The workmen are Romanian and they speak Romanian. You no speak Romanian?”

Another couple of days passed and it was Thursday. Again the boss called me over.

“Tomorrow you are here! Only you!” It was an order, not a question.

“Okay!” I replied. I felt quite pleased with myself. I was to be in charge of the whole site by myself. Pretty good after less than a week on the job! So on Friday morning I stopped at a *makolet* (grocery store) and picked up *The Jerusalem Post* to see me through the morning. There was no work going on. There was no phone in the office. What was I going to do?

At about ten o'clock there is a knock at the door and I yell, “Come in!” It is an Arab and I can hear the engine of a large truck idling outside. He is the driver. And he doesn't speak any English. But by pointing and using some strange sign language, he gets me to understand that he is delivering a load of sand or stone and where should he dump it?

I look at him over the top of the paper and point out the door, “*Sham!* There!”

“There?” He seems surprised.

“What’s the problem, Mack?” I ask. “Dump it there! Up against that pole.”

Again I get the surprised look. “You sure?”

“Of course I’m sure! Go! Do it!”

He nods and smiles at me and goes to his truck. I hear the contents sliding out and a few minutes later he comes in with the delivery slip in his hand to get my signature. I sign, he leaves, and I get back to the crossword.

An hour later, the door is wrenched open and the doorway is filled by a huge, bearded man dressed all in black. And he is shouting. I put the paper down and stand up.

“Bo!” he barks. I understand. This is a word I know from the *merkaz klitah* lessons. He wants me to come outside.

He is standing there; his face, or what I can see of it, is purple. He is pointing. I look and see the pile of sand that the nice Arab dumped and sticking out the side of it is a four-inch-diameter metal pole, to which is attached a thin wire.

The man is screaming and shouting, “*Ha’eruv! Hat’chum Shabbat! Mah assita lanu? What you did? Vos hos tzu geton?!*” The pole had been the *eruv* making it possible for the religious people across the street to carry on Shabbat..

I never explained to my bosses why I left work early that day. And I never explained the black tire marks on the road left by my brand new tax-free car either. The wheels always spin when you slam your foot down on the accelerator.

THE FORTY-NINERS

Susan Rosenberg

1949

MY husband never knew his grandfather, Max Stashower, but his mother and his grandmother had often spoken about this early Zionist who, before his death at an early age, had planted many trees with the Jewish National Fund, had worked hard from Cleveland to establish a Jewish State, and fervently believed in its worth. He taught his daughters, as well as his sons, to speak Hebrew, and because of all that was said of him, my husband and I decided to make *aliyah* after the State had been established.

With our two little girls, we traveled on the *SS America* to France, from France to Switzerland by train, and over the Alps to Israel by way of Malta in a little plane with no heat and no oxygen. When we finally arrived, I knew I was here to stay because it would be too much trouble to leave.

“Warmth” was my first impression of our new country because the day we arrived was balmy. Joy lightened my steps as I watched our two

children skipping freely and happily toward the terminal. It was the end of an ordeal and release from fear. We had made it! I thanked God. At first, I felt enormously enthusiastic about our beautiful surroundings in Haifa and relieved of all the anxieties, uncertainties, and strain that preparations for the move from Philadelphia had imposed upon us. However, my initial happiness and feeling of well-being was short-lived and I had many complaints. A big minus was being homesick, not just for family, friends, and a way of life, but also because I felt deprived of familiar products. I honestly believed that if I ran out of a certain brand of toothpaste, mouthwash, or deodorant, I would no longer be attractive, or that without a particular breakfast food, our children would not grow up with healthy bodies. I was lonely and felt the sadness of a stranger.

Adjusting to life in Israel was certainly a gradual process for me, but I can remember two precise moments that were turning points in the way I perceived things. I had felt uneasy and ignorant whenever I ventured forth from the security of my home. I didn't speak Hebrew. I was confused by the monetary system. I had no idea what things should cost or what quantities to buy. The gruff proprietor at the fruit and vegetable stand near my house would lose patience with me and take care of other customers who knew what and how much they wanted. I hated the place. It was dirty and fly-infested.

One rainy day, however, as I stood in the shop looking over the produce and rehearsing mentally what to say when my turn came, I found myself admiring the heaps of purple, green, orange, yellow, and red fruits and vegetables. They seemed more colorful and brilliant than usual. I watched the proprietor skillfully manipulate the weights as he placed kilogram after clanging kilogram into his customer's bags. I looked at the customers' interesting faces — all Jewish, I realized. Somebody smiled at me. I smiled back. Outside, the rain dripped from the shop's striped awning. I heard myself thinking, "What a beautiful painting this would make. How picturesque it is here. How pretty and

charming!” Then I was startled by the oddity of it. What? Me think this is pretty? How could it be? How could what had seemed so dismal and squalid only a short while ago suddenly find favor in my eyes? I realized I was happy.

Memories of those days swim in and out of my mind: of my daughter Carol’s rhythm band performance... “Echad, shtayim, shalosh...” (One two three); our pronouncing, practicing, growling the sounds of Hebrew... pronouncing, practicing back-of-throat sounds... pronouncing, practicing... studying the language, trying, MASTERING!!!

Of Betsy’s nursery school birthday party: Our small three-year-old daughter on a chair decorated with flowers, a floral wreath crowning her blond head, short Hebrew speeches made by each child expressing good wishes. “She should have good luck,” “good health,” etc. Then there were the imaginary gifts (flowers, a doll, an airplane) with Betsy having to guess from the children’s pantomimes what was being presented to her. Her father and I raised our little daughter in the air three times and one more for next year. “Mazal Tov! Mazal Tov!” followed by songs to the birthday girl. It seemed delightfully different from American birthday parties, although I couldn’t explain why.

My joy, when a friend waved to me at a concert one evening, calling her invitation before we hurried to our seats. “Will you come for tea this Tuesday afternoon? Bring the children? Good!”

An end to anonymity. A time of making new and interesting friends, of learning my way around, of bus trips to the beach (“We are swimming in the Mediterranean,” I wrote to family.) They seemed exotic and glamorous words to be writing. Slowly and happily we settled into a lifestyle and the lifestyle was Jewish. It was so good to feel at one with those around me.

In November of 1949, our son was born. “You see, in America they could only give you girls. WE give you a son!” I smiled at those first words heard after giving birth, and at the chauvinism of the woman who had uttered them. She was Dr. Pnina Ruttenberg, owner of and

obstetrician at “Ima Chut Hospital” in Haifa, a small, private maternity hospital, which had formerly been her and her family’s home. On the grounds was a tent given by King Abdullah I of Jordan, whose grandchild she had delivered. She used it to celebrate the *brit milah* of babies, such as our first son, born at the hospital.

When my smiling husband came in to meet our new son, we discussed his name and decided, of course, to name him after Dick’s Zionist grandfather, whose dying words to his wife had been, “I’ll see you in Palestine.” Did we make it happen because Max David Stashower had said those words? I felt a participant in somebody else’s vast scheme. Was it God’s? Was it the grandfather’s? It didn’t matter. I yawned and floated away wrapped in contentment and satisfaction. We belonged here!

GOLDEN HEBREW

Batsheva Pomerantz

IT was comforting to have Golda Meir as Israeli prime minister in 1969, the year that I emigrated as an eight-year-old child with my family from New York. It had nothing to do with her policies, her being a woman in a high position, or her slight resemblance to my grandmother. It had everything to do with her American origins and her spoken Hebrew.

I had learned Hebrew in a Jewish day school for three years, or so I thought until coming to Israel. I quickly discovered that what worked for praying or learning Biblical texts was not enough to comprehend Israelis and be understood. Besides having trouble with plural, possessives, and gender agreement, my throat hurt from trying to emulate the rolling Rs used by Israelis.

“Don’t worry about how you sound,” was my mother’s advice. She told me she had heard a political talk in Hebrew on the radio, by someone whose masculine-sounding voice spoke with a heavy American accent, including very flat Rs. After the speech, the announcer said, “You have just heard Golda Meir speak.” My mother suggested, “Listen to how

Golda Meir speaks. She's prime minister of Israel and her Hebrew sounds so American."

From then on, freed from feelings of an inadequate accent, my Hebrew quickly improved and flowed unhampered.

Golda never masked her heavy American accent while speaking Hebrew. And when she spoke English to world leaders on American or Israeli television, it was with a familiar accent. I realized then what an asset it is to know English well in this country.

Years later, I discovered that Golda had herself emigrated as a child from Russia (Ukraine today) to the United States, where she mastered English like a native speaker.

The country of my origin caused the first Hebrew misunderstanding I encountered when I attended the summer *ulpan* for immigrant children prior to the beginning of the school year.

We were living in the absorption center in Jerusalem's Katamon Tet neighborhood. It was part of the outermost circle of buildings constructed on the southern edge of Jerusalem, affording us a glorious open view of the Jerusalem Hills. Today, the orange-bricked block buildings are near Teddy Stadium, Malcha Mall and Begin Highway.

The immigrant children in the absorption center were from North America and Europe. I knew exactly who was from America (like me), Canada, Mexico, Britain, France, or Holland. We spoke English with the Anglos, and with the others we communicated in basic Hebrew. Sometimes we learned words in Spanish or French, especially counting until ten, which facilitated stamp-trading transactions. This brought us in contact with one another socially, as well as with the neighborhood Israeli children.

At *ulpan*, besides drilling Hebrew, I saw for the first time a blackboard that was black, not green. I learned how to write problems on gridded paper in my math notebook. I saw for the first time how the numerals "one" and "seven" are written European style. Teachers would respond to a polite "Morati" (my teacher) and would call on students who raised their index finger.

During the first *ulpan* lesson, the teacher asked us in Hebrew what countries we came from. I was relieved at the simple question and replied, “America.” I was amazed at the responses of the other children who I knew were from America just like me. They answered that they were from a place called *Artzot HaBrit*. I scanned their faces. Not a Brit among them! I couldn’t understand! Maybe there was a British connection to America; I wasn’t yet aware of New England. Perhaps my American peers were trying to impress the teacher.

After the lesson I asked them what they meant and was told that *Artzot HaBrit* is the Hebrew rendition of United States. I was relieved to find out that I also came from this mysterious-sounding place, and that America is an accepted reply and much simpler linguistically than *Artzot HaBrit*.

I recall the bewilderment in my first classroom encounter in Israel and the confusion about my origin and that of my friends. During subsequent lessons, I realized that everyone went through their moments of misunderstandings and doubt.

Many years later, when I encourage immigrants from different countries who are challenged by Hebrew, I bring up Golda’s heavy accent. I am still queried about my lightly accented Hebrew and my origins. Except that now many assume that I am originally from Britain!

First published in *The Jerusalem Post*, July 2002. Also appears in her book, *To Walk Four Cubits: Forty Pieces in Honor of Forty Years in Israel*.

PLUCKING THE VIBES

Ariella Zeitlin

AS an immigrant, living in Israel often has its cultural challenges. Even though I've been here fifteen years, people know I'm American right away. My vibe, my mannerisms, my... Me. Nothing to do with language or how hard I've worked to integrate, but just something they don't relate to. It's frustrating to say the least, but there are also benefits. Because we are a small country, I have been given chances to represent my great nation to the world. As a violinist, I have played countless times for the prime minister and visiting dignitaries; I have been flown around the world to play as a representative of Israel for countless organizations. I took a break from traveling after my son was born, but now I'm really excited to be traveling as part of an Israeli diplomatic delegation to the United States and Canada for all kinds of audiences, and I am so honored that I was chosen to share music with the people of those communities.

THE HOMECOMING

Susan de la Fuente

ONE wintry evening in 1985, Mordi and Tzipi went over to Ra'anana's immigrant absorption center. Breathless from climbing several flights of concrete stairs, they faced the occupants of the narrow room with smiles but some uncertainty. After greeting the family of four in Hebrew, they wondered how to continue. Communication was the problem. They spoke no Russian, while Bella, Sergei, and their two small boys spoke no English or Hebrew. This *refusenik* couple from Moscow in their early forties had just arrived in Israel with their sons. After ten difficult years trying to get out of Russia, they had finally succeeded when emigration was still only a trickle.

Mordi (Mordechai) and Tzipi (Tzipporah) were tipped off about them through a job ad. Hoping to find a cutter for his small sewing plant, Mordi hung an ad in the absorption center. Soon after, someone called to say, "I have a cutter for you. He's from Russia. He can't talk on the phone yet. Why don't you come over here and see him?"

Armed with Sergei's name and room number, they walked over to the center and were surprised to find that the family had been in Israel

a scant three days. Although Sergei was indeed a tailor, he needed to attend *ulpan* to learn Hebrew before taking a job. There was also a transportation problem, as the sewing plant was slightly off the beaten track.

Tzipi invited the family for a Shabbat meal as a welcoming gesture, and they agreed to come that Friday night. Shabbat in Israel is always a joy and an inspiration. The new immigrants sat in the glow of the Shabbat candles, wide-eyed with wonderment. They exclaimed enthusiastically over the tangy pink and white salad of grated radish, which reminded them of home, but otherwise were amazed at a scene that was novel to them. Occasionally Bella and the two round-faced, freckled-faced boys would get up and wander around the spacious apartment with curious eyes.

As Bella had a few words of Yiddish left over from her childhood, and Tzipi some rusty German from her school days, they somehow managed to communicate, with much gesturing besides. Bella said she was a piano teacher. The most impressive fact about this couple, however, was that instead of heading for the United States to join Bella's brother, they had opted to come to Israel instead. Given the tough economic conditions here at that time, and the hardship of coming on their own, it was a remarkable decision.

Mordi asked Sergei if he would like to visit the synagogue the next morning to express thanks for his deliverance from Russia by saying *Birkat HaGomel* (a special blessing said after deliverance from danger). Sergei hesitated lengthily and indicated that he wouldn't know what to do. He listened attentively then as Mordi explained what he should do and say in synagogue. The next morning everything went smoothly, with the congregation taking a friendly interest in the newcomer. After the service Shlomo, who was raised in Poland, spoke with Sergei for several minutes. He then approached Mordechai and said, "He's not Jewish and shouldn't have been called to the Torah." Mordechai listened in consternation. It hadn't occurred to him that the slight, bearded man

might not be Jewish, especially since Bella had said that she was the daughter of a *Kohen*.

“He never converted?” Mordi asked.

“He tried to convert in Russia but was turned away. I’ll explain to him about going to the Rabbinat here and they’ll find a Russian speaker to instruct him.”

Tzipi, too, heard the news with dismay. She had set up an appointment at the local religious school the following week, to enroll the two boys in the lower grades. Chaya, her good friend who spoke Polish, would come along as interpreter. Mr. Tsur, the principal, was a tough man of unrelenting standards, not given to compromise, and with this additional complication, Tzipi could not predict what turn the meeting would take.

A few days later, on a damp and inauspicious morning, a small group gathered in Tsur’s office. Tzipi and Chaya huddled round nervously, along with Bella, Sergei, and their two boys. Hashem was apparently on their side, for Tsur welcomed the family to the school effusively and with great warmth. He even spouted a few Russian phrases to put them at ease. Most importantly, he showed understanding when the women explained that they would try and help the newcomers integrate into the community and learn more about Judaism.

Relieved to have overcome an important hurdle, Tzipi and Chaya left together quietly, not without some lingering doubts. Luckily, friends rallied round, with many inviting the family over for Shabbat meals to ease their absorption.

Despite minor setbacks — colds, flu, and some missed school days — the winter passed without major trauma for the immigrants. Sergei, who was studying Hebrew and Judaism, had to learn many precepts and prayers by heart, and in due course he and the boys were circumcised. As soon as he was fully converted, he became Shaul, and the couple had a proper Jewish wedding. At their *chuppah* (wedding canopy), both radiated happiness. The local *kollel* (yeshiva for married men) laid

on a festive luncheon with white tablecloths, and that evening Chaya organized *sheva brachot*, a celebratory meal, for them at her home.

In Mordi's brief speech at the dinner, he focused on the verse from Deuteronomy that tells about God loving converts and guaranteeing to care for their physical needs, such as food and clothing, exactly as he had done for our forefather, Jacob. His words were well received, especially when he pointed out that Shaul was a tailor who sewed for his family!

Bella learned Hebrew amazingly fast and soon found a number of piano pupils. Her engaging personality, initiative, and keen intelligence made her a firm favorite with many. When volunteers were needed to help the overburdened librarian at the school, Bella was there. When oranges needed picking in the local orchards and there were no pickers, Bella organized a group of new immigrants to help out. Moreover, she made sure that any surplus oranges were channeled to the needy. Sometime later, Tzipi was surprised to hear that Bella had switched the two boys to a more religious school for a more intensive Jewish education.

As the years passed, her contact with the family was sporadic. She went over one day to say goodbye, as the family had received a small government apartment closer to Tel Aviv and were leaving Ra'anana. Only Shaul and the boys were home. He had had his ups and downs with employment, he explained in halting Hebrew, and the going was not easy. She heard occasional news of them periodically, mostly through friends. Bella was engaged in good works, they reported, such as collecting and distributing used clothing to other needy immigrants in her housing project.

When Tzipi heard that Bella was in the hospital, she went to visit with Chaya. Bella, her graying hair covered with a thin kerchief, had been operated on for thyroid cancer and was optimistic about making a full recovery. She had chosen a Tuesday for the operation, as that was known to be an auspicious day. The boys were now learning in Bnei Brak yeshivas, she told them.

Bella called Tzipi a couple of years later to invite them to the bar mitzvah of their older son, Sasha (Alexander), in a small Bnei Brak hall. It was a modest but inspiring party. Shaul, with flowing white beard, was resplendent in a wide-brimmed black hat and a shiny silk *kapote* (silk coat worn by Chassidic Jews) that he had sewn. He was trying to make a living sewing *kapotes*, he told Mordi. When business was slow, he sat and learned. Several distinguished rabbis spoke warmly in praise of Sasha, who was a diligent and promising student at the prestigious yeshiva he attended.

Bella introduced Tzipi to her mother, who had come over especially from New York, where she was then living.

“Does she like America?” Tzipi asked Bella later, struck by the woman’s general lack of enthusiasm.

Bella’s eyes crinkled with laughter as she replied vivaciously, “She didn’t like Russia, she doesn’t like the States, and she wouldn’t be happy here either!”

Too bad, Tzipi thought, comparing the two women. The worn, restless old lady couldn’t settle anywhere in the globe, but Bella and her family’s arrival in Israel was a blessed event, and they had made a true homecoming. Some would say that their story was a testimonial both to the power of the Torah and the holiness of the Land of Israel.

A version of this story was originally published in *The Jewish Press*.

IT'S A RELATIONSHIP

D.B. Estlin

From the east I will bring your seed, and from the west I will gather you in. I will say to the north, "Give up," and to the south, "Do not hold back. Bring My sons from afar and My daughters from the ends of the earth." (Yeshayahu 43:5-6)

IT doesn't seem accurate for me to say, "I made *aliyah*." It's more like, "I was gathered in, along with my three other siblings. We were beckoned. We were brought here by a force that had little to do with the ordinary way of changing one's place of residence."

Yes, it's been an "*aliyah*." But that's how I would describe the state of living here, not a one-time event of signing papers and getting rights on new refrigerators. Especially when changing my place of residence meant changing everything I knew about the world and my purpose in it.

I was a typical college student in the 1980s. My dream was to write for *National Geographic*, intent on traveling the globe — the more exotic the location, the better. Israel wasn't even on the radar. That changed when my brother decided to spend his summer vacation in

Israel. Adam was on a study-abroad program at Cambridge University in England. His international relations curriculum was great, but he was fed up with overcast skies and gloomy weather.

“Tell me where I can go where it’s always sunny,” he asked a friend on yet another cheerless gray day.

“Go to Israel,” his friend told him. “There’s not a cloud in the sky all summer.”

He came. He met people. He became religious. When he returned to New York, I noticed more than just the *kippah*; there was a subtle change. Adam had always been sharp, witty, and self-possessed. Now, there were unmistakable added dimensions to his character. “Was this softening of his personality coming from his recent encounters with the religious world in Israel?” I wondered.

I tucked this impression away for the moment because now it was my turn to do a semester abroad. I knew two things about Jews and Judaism at this point: Jews were funny, and there was this enigmatic horror called the Holocaust. Then in Vienna, two things happened: our secular Jewish professor (married to a Mormon Christian) took us on a trip to Buchenwald, and I went to the play *Fiddler on the Roof* (in German). That was enough, though, to respond positively when Adam invited me to meet him in Israel for the summer, where he had since returned for further study.

So, on the last day of the semester, I left Vienna with quickly dwindling funds and made my way south by train, through Yugoslavia and Greece. A short flight brought me to Israel with entirely empty pockets and a mind filled with curiosity. I hadn’t known this, but Adam had been writing letters to all of his siblings — our oldest brother, an electrical engineer living in Rhode Island; a sister, also in college; and me — and had convinced each one to meet him in Israel that summer. They were all there waiting for me.

The very next day, the four of us trekked up Masada, where we slept out under the desert sky. The morning felt full of magic. We explored

the mountain pedestal with its panoramic views of sea and desert and began to catch up with each other after years of going in different directions. Now in our twenties, we had begun to solidify certain life outlooks, our feet well entrenched on particular paths. Could we all connect to this Israel experience in some common way? With Adam as our tour guide, we explored the charm and mystery of Tzfat, the expansive beauty of the Golan, all the while absorbing whatever history lessons Adam had gleaned in his time in the country.

Now we were ready to settle down and explore Jewish learning. We fanned out in varied directions to learn more about Judaism, and then reconvened each week for Shabbos. Living in Israel together shook things up in our family enough that remarkably all four of us married Jewish (not the original trajectory) and two of us made Israel our home.

Each of us was captivated by Israel in a different way. None of us was running back to his or her old job, relationship, or university so quickly. We soon found ourselves — four of us siblings — sharing an apartment in Jerusalem.

Touring an exotic land was just my kind of thing, but living here?

The contrast was stark. I had just come from Vienna, where the university housed us on a charming cobblestoned street, in a plush B & B, with wall-to-wall Persian carpeting, chandeliers, and fluffy down quilts. Here, I was facing metal army beds, bare bulbs, and a dry barrenness that was entirely unfamiliar.

Sometimes over the years, my mind would play the comparison game of contrasting the lushness of a New York summer to our more arid home in Jerusalem. But something deeper must have mattered, because that summer turned into thirty-five years and counting.

What happened was that a relationship developed. What of all those exotic lands that awaited me? Why date others, when you found the one? Today, the beauty I find here finds no comparison elsewhere. I'm reminded of what Uri Zohar commented when he beheld the beauty he found in Switzerland. He said it's like the objective beauty you might

notice when passing a stranger: yes, there's beauty there, but it's not mine; it's not my beautiful wife who means something to me.

Recently, my husband, Chaim, and I slipped out of our Jerusalem apartment in the pre-dawn hours to catch a plane to Romania to go trekking in the Carpathians (I still like exotic outings). On the way to the airport, a fleeting sense of regret about our more ambitious travel plan crept in (we originally were headed for the *wadis* of the Golan.) The sun's glow crescendoed and hit the spruce forest lining the highway so every tree was divided midway into colorful halves — the top of the forest orange; the bottom, green — and I think, No turning back. The rocky mountainside, luminous as well in the early light, taunted: See how beautiful I am? Where are you running to? How can you leave?

And then I remember what Chaim told me years ago that made sense of so many things. The Land is not like other lands. It's one of the "big three," the three entities that are personified: Shabbos (think of the Shabbos Queen that we welcome in, honor, and then escort out); Torah, (with which we dance under a *chuppah* and give proper burial, etc.); and *Eretz Yisrael*.

Have you ever seen one of those photos of a new arrival to *Eretz Yisrael* — someone who just stepped down from the aircraft and, kneeling on the tarmac, kisses the ground? That act expresses a very real love — not just of an ideology or the idea of coming home, but of the Land itself. The yearning is real, for an actual place.

This intimate connection to the very geography reaches back at least as far as *Sefer Bamidbar*, when the Jewish people approached the Land and the mountains of *Eretz Yisrael* came out to greet them. The Emorim were hiding in caves, poised to attack as Bnei Yisrael passed through a valley. The Emorim began hurling rocks at them, trying to prevent their passage. When Hashem announced, "My people are coming!" the jagged mountains moved to meet them, crushing the Emorim who wished to keep them out.

And of course, the Land is infused with Hashem's Presence, beginning with Har HaMoriah and extending outward in concentric circles, so that a unique interfacing of physical and spiritual exists that makes our relationship with the Land different from any other. We don't see much earth-kissing anymore. But when I came home, I definitely felt embraced.

I may still travel, but living in Israel is consonant with a deepening relationship.

This article is a composite of three articles, "*My Family's Life-Changing Summer in Israel*" (Aish.com); "*It's all a Relationship*" (Hamodia 2019); and "*Winter in Vienna*" (Hamodia 1980s); and parts of the author's book, *It Happened at the Heritage House*.

NO CHOICE

Rhona Lewis

THE young girl in the black and white photo at the Atlit detention camp left me no choice. Her dark hair was pulled back tightly, but the turmoil of climbing out of the ship that had brought her from blood-drenched Europe to the shores of Israel, coupled with the sharp sea breeze, had set some tendrils free. Her eyes were focused beyond the swell of the waves that pulsed unfeelingly around her legs. She gathered up her dreams in her skirt, surging forward toward her future beyond the shoreline, beyond the barbed wire that was to be her home for the next many months. Her intense longing for a future, captured on film, morphed into a longing of my own. I didn't stop to consider that the gates of the world that were closed to her were open to me. I knew that her land would become mine. I really had no choice.

As a child growing up in Kenya, I knew, as surely as I knew that on a clear day I'd see Mount Kilimanjaro floating on the distant horizon as my mother drove me to school, that one day my family would move to Israel. It was the mantra of my childhood. "When we move to Israel, we'll buy a new set of dishes," my mother consoled herself every

time one of the solid yellow- and green-rimmed Pyrex plates would slip out of her hands, bounce on the floor, and spin to a triumphant halt still whole. Although my mother disliked the dishes, she dutifully used them because my grandmother had given them to her as a wedding present. But that didn't stop her from wishing for something prettier.

Living in Kenya meant living with servants, which should have meant that I was free of household chores. But my mother's eyes were focused on the future. "You have to dust the bookshelves in your room," my mother would tell me whenever we had school vacation. "When you get to Israel, you won't have servants to do it all."

"What kind of a house will we have in Israel?" I asked my father one lazy Sunday afternoon, when my brother and I had gravitated to my parent's bedroom. "Will we have a pool? Tennis courts?" Plenty of my friends had spacious houses surrounded by grassy gardens in which, like a blue jewel, a pool was set. Mentally, I toured our modest two-bedroom semi-detached home. If we were going to get pretty dishes when we moved to Israel, it made sense to assume we were also going to upgrade our home.

"Not really. Housing in Israel is expensive. People don't live in houses. They live in apartments. We'll be lucky if we can afford what we have now."

I would have suggested that giving up on the dream of a pool was a foolhardy move, but then I saw a distant look in my father's eyes that reflected dreams bigger than a pool. I would have suggested that we move to a house with a pool for the years that we'd still spend in Kenya, but I knew that my suggestion wasn't practical, because, after all, we would soon be moving to Israel.

The message I absorbed at home was reinforced whenever I went to *shul*. In all the prayers and the snatches that I caught of the *parshah*, at the Nairobi Hebrew Congregation, Israel and Jerusalem were always mentioned. It was obvious that just as Israel was important to my parents, it was important to Hashem.

One late afternoon, when I was about twelve years old, I was walking barefoot up the little gravel-covered hill that led to the garages where we parked our cars. Perhaps I was chewing on a piece of sugarcane. For some reason, I suddenly realized something. I had always believed that Hashem knew what was best for me. I also knew that Hashem had chosen Israel to be the homeland for the Jewish people. The conclusion was clear: He expected me to live there; whether I wanted to or not was irrelevant. At that moment, with the black-and-white clarity of childhood, I felt that I had no choice and my parents' dream became my obligation.

I grew up, spread my wings, left home for Israel, and went to kibbutz and from there to seminary. Over that year, I began to lose the crystal-clear conclusion that I had come to as a child: I wasn't sure I wanted to live in Israel, despite what my parents and Hashem wanted. Israel was simply too small for my soul. Life in Kenya had given me plenty of room to breathe. Nature was never-ending: the savanna plains almost at my back door spread out to meet the horizon undisturbed. Trips into the wilderness left me feeling I was the first to see the landscape. But in Israel, every hike was marked out, every path trodden by hundreds of feet before me. Besides, the people were so different, the climate so harsh.

Then the seminary organized a trip to Atlit. Here I wandered around the twenty-five acre detention camp that the British had maintained from 1939 to 1948 as they acceded to Arab demands to limit Jewish immigration in violation of the Mandate. The camp, surrounded by barbed wire and watchtowers, became home to thousands of illegal Jewish immigrants, many of them Holocaust survivors, as soon as they left the ships that had brought them from Europe.

In 1986, the neglected site was renovated and declared a "reserved national site." In one of the corrugated barracks of the museum, I stopped opposite a black-and-white photo of a young woman struggling through the sea to reach British-controlled Palestine to be incarcerated

in a camp similar to one she had probably only recently escaped. The hopes of my parents, the expectation of Hashem, and the passion that I saw in her eyes joined together to remind me of the clarity of my childhood. If Israel was big enough for her soul, it was big enough for mine. As she surged forward to make Israel her home, I knew I would, too. I really had no choice.

First printed in *The Jewish Press*.

RISES OF PASSAGE

Dena Feldbaum

MY parents made *aliyah* in 1985. My father took early retirement and my mother left her nursing position. We were worried about the changes that would affect them once they arrived. After all, for a couple in their mid-fifties, language barriers, cultural differences, employment, and all the other little issues that crop up can be problematic. We needn't have worried. They worked hard to prepare for *aliyah*. They took *ulpan* in America, met with other families preparing to move, and went to *aliyah* meetings.

As they worried that leaving a ten-room home to move to a tiny apartment in Israel would be a shock, they decided to sell their house a year in advance and rent a one-bedroom apartment as a practice run for Israel. They had to downsize in every way. Their long L-shaped couch would never fit an Israeli apartment. There was an accumulation of over thirty years of paperwork and possessions to sort through, discard, donate, junk, or pack. My mother bought cookbooks with recipes for the Israeli budget. She practiced saying the names of the cuts of meat in Hebrew and listened to Hebrew-language radio programs.

When they arrived, they were placed in the *merkaz klitah* in Gilo. The *merkaz klitah* housed *olim* from many different countries, cultures, and backgrounds. The families there became their new family. Both of my parents got involved helping other families, inviting them over and going to greet them. Some have stayed in contact over the decades that have since passed.

One family of Ethiopians became a second family to them. Their children picked up Hebrew faster than the parents and translated whenever and wherever possible. One day, my mother was visiting with the Ethiopian woman. She was in pain and gripping her stomach. With hand motions, she tried to explain what she was feeling. My mother, who was a nurse, was concerned but couldn't communicate with her. When her son, Yaakov, walked in, he was able to translate.

The family had left Ethiopia on foot, a long, arduous journey. The mother was pregnant, yet continued on with everyone. Along the trek she lost the baby. There was no medical help available for her. My mother's concern grew as each detail emerged. She got the doctor of the *merkaz klitah* and decided to send her on to the hospital. *Baruch Hashem*, she had surgery and recovered completely.

Yaakov's mother was so thankful, and the two women shared a tearful goodbye when they left the *merkaz* for private housing. My mother stayed in touch with the family for many years, Yaakov came to visit my parents every now and again, and my mother thought of them frequently and in time deeply mourned the mother after she passed.

On a funny note, a memory that we hold dearly is of my parent's first Sukkot in Israel. They were able to build a *sukkah* at the *merkaz* and were so excited to invite us over for a meal on *Chol Hamoed*. In upstate New York, it was normal to have a cold, rainy Sukkot. It frequently snowed at that time of year. I remember a year when the *sukkah* was covered in a foot of snow! So, they were very excited to have pleasant weather and to be able to host a meal in their first *sukkah* in Israel.

That year, Israel experienced an unprecedented rained-out Sukkot! The water was ankle deep when we arrived and we couldn't even get out of the car without getting wet! We spent the day in the living room and watched the rain. My eleven-month-old decided it was time to teach my parents the Israeli way to wash floors. This tiny bowlegged boy waddled over to the bathroom, took a washing cup, and scooped up water from the toilet. He poured it out on the floor and grabbed a *sponja* stick. He squeegeed the water to the drain and started all over again. He kept this up for hours. Our laughter brightened up the day.

Another humorous story is about the first car my father bought in Israel. A foreign visitor was going back to his country and wanted to sell his car before he left. Being as both of them knew very little Hebrew, they decided to prepare for the sale by going to the post office to find out what the procedure was. They explained to the clerk that they wanted to learn the procedure. The clerk was very willing to help. He explained the process and showed them how to pay and what forms they would need. Then he handed them a form and told them where to sign on it. The two men thought they had to sign that the clerk had explained everything precisely. After they signed, the clerk said, "Mazal tov; the sale is complete!" This was a total shock for both. My father acquired his car, yet hadn't paid, and now the man had to hand over the keys, a week earlier than planned!

My parents wanted to fit in and speak Hebrew as soon as possible. They told my children that they would speak to them only in Hebrew. We had wanted our children to speak English to their grandparents; it was a great way to encourage their English. After all, my father was a schoolteacher! We honored my parent's decision and gained a greater gift; the children were able to create a closer relationship with their grandparents! The children didn't have to struggle to explain what they felt. There was no tension for them to rack their brains for the right word. My parents learned slang and nuance from the grandchildren. They also were able to step into their lives in a natural way.

MY FATHER'S ALIYAH

Ester Katz Silvers

“GIVE your father two to three months to live.”
“You have a small window of opportunity for your father to be able to fly.”

“We can get your father Israeli citizenship within a week. Just Fedex his passport to Chicago.”

Those were samples of the information I received after my father was diagnosed with cancer in November 2006. In light of his diagnosis, he accepted our offer to come live with us in Shilo, Israel. So my husband and I flew to Wichita, Kansas, to pack up his belongings, close down the house, and bring my father to Israel. He'd recovered from his hospital stay enough to make the journey, and we'd been given a week to get everything done.

It was important for my father to have Israeli citizenship so he could sign up for an Israeli health fund. However, as much as the Jewish Agency representative guaranteed us that we'd have the passport back in time to make the trip, we were afraid to take the chance. My father's insurance company assured him he'd be covered for the first couple

of months of living overseas.* So, when my father landed in Israel on Thursday evening, the night before Chanukah, he entered the country as a tourist. With most of his grandchildren, granddaughters-in-law, and a couple of great-grandchildren waiting at the airport to meet him, being an Israeli citizen or not was probably the last thing on his mind.

For me, though, it was one of my biggest concerns. Sunday morning I began my phone calls. Right away I was told that it would take several good weeks, at least, to get an appointment with the Department of Interior, the office that issues citizenship. I began calling some of the immigrant organizations and got quite a runaround until I dialed AACI, the Association of Americans and Canadians in Israel. They gave me the name of a specific woman to ask for in the Department of Interior. By the time I had that information, though, her office was already closed. First thing the following morning I was on the phone. Unfortunately, I don't remember the name of the woman I was supposed to ask for, but I do remember how she listened to my sob story with patience.

"Can you be here (at the Department of Interior) at eleven?" she asked me.

"Eleven," I had the *chutzpah* to hesitate. "Can it be a little later? My father's still recovering from surgery and jet lag."

"Eleven or nothing," she was adamant. "Someone was supposed to be off because of Chanukah but she came in today and has one opening."

"Just a minute," I told the woman. "Daddy," I asked my father. "Do you think you can be ready to leave in half an hour?"

I explained the urgency and my father nodded. "I think I can do it."

* Once my father was registered with a health fund, I tried to make an appointment for him with a certain oncologist. There was a waiting period of several months but by paying privately we could see him the following week. We opted to go privately and get our reimbursement from my father's insurance company. Unfortunately, we got bogged down in countless forms and never got our compensation. However, after seeing the oncologist once and getting into the system, my father never had to pay another penny for a visit, tests, or medicine. The cost of that private visit was one of the best investments we ever made.

“We’ll take it!” I told my angel ecstatically. Then I called my husband and asked if he could leave work and take us to Jerusalem. I shudder to think what I would have done if he hadn’t been able to do so. However, he was available and helped my father into the car, folded up the wheelchair and stowed it in the trunk, drove the hour drive to Jerusalem, pulled up in front of the Department of Interior, helped my father out, and then went to park.

My father and I were directed to the elevator. At that time the Department of Interior was located in an old building, probably from before 1948. The elevator was so tiny that I couldn’t enter with the wheelchair. Thankfully, my father was able to walk, albeit slowly, so he entered the elevator while I collapsed the wheelchair. Waiting for us in her cubicle was another angel.

It took quite some time for this angel to finish all the necessary forms but once she’d done so, she left her desk and came to my father. Holding out her hand she said, “Mr. Katz, I want to be the first one to welcome you to Israel as an Israeli citizen.” Both my husband and I had tears in our eyes as my father accepted her welcome. At the age of eighty-six he had come home. He lived in Israel as a full-fledged citizen for eleven months. Then my father died and was buried in Israel.

In the Torah portion, *Chayei Sara*, we learn how Avraham bought a burial plot for his wife, Sara, in Chevron. Later he, his son, Yitzchak, and Yitzchak’s wife, Rivkah, were also buried in the Cave of the Patriarchs, as were Yaakov and Leah. Since that time Jews have longed for the honor of being buried in the Holy Land. My father was privileged not only to have been buried in Israel, but also to have lived for almost a year in the Land of Israel. We are blessed to live in a time when any Jew can do so.

My father came home. You can, too.

First appeared on the writer’s blog, *It’s all from HaShem*.

I COULD WRITE A BOOK

Tzvi Ben Gedalyahu

Dear Rosally,

I AM happy and disappointed that you are writing a book on *aliyah* stories — happy that you are writing it and disappointed in myself that I did not continue a similar project I undertook approximately fifteen years ago.

I interviewed several families, sometimes for two hours and more, and began writing the book until I realized it was way over my head at the time. I was trying to write a mini-book on each story rather than sticking to what you apparently are doing — keeping it short and to the point.

Most or all of my copy has been lost on a hard disk that died, but I remember some of the stories, all of them fascinating, such as the Brooklyn boxer, totally secular and non-Zionist, who picked up a book by Meir Kahane in a dentist's waiting room. He and his wife subsequently sold everything and moved to Israel. Another story was about two Texans who met in a bar (sounds like the opening to a joke) and

struck up a relationship after seeing that each had a Star of David tattooed on their arms.* Well, that's not really an *aliyah* story...

The best one, at least for me, is that of my late mother z"l, who swore she would never leave her house in Baltimore unless it was on a stretcher. On the eve of her ninety-ninth birthday, she broke her hip and was taken out on a stretcher. Two months later, we brought her on *aliyah*, removing obstacles that would have remained had it not been for the helping Hand of Hashem.

I wish you success. I am sure the book will be very popular and it will relieve my conscience a little bit if some of my stories go to print.

* Getting a tattoo is against Jewish law, but it's possible that these gentlemen were unaware of this and wanted to wear their Jewish identity on their "sleeves."

BURSTING HER BUBBLE

Channa Dunner

LOSE to fifty years ago, my uncle and aunt came on *aliyah* to Israel with their six children from Monsey, New York, and settled in Bayit Vegan. My aunt didn't know much Hebrew, or hardly any. Some kind family members prepared food and groceries in the apartment to help them settle in. Among other items, there was a blue container of *Ama*, the standard washing-up liquid. On the container it said "Shemen," as this liquid is produced by the Shemen factory (along with toothpaste, etc.) in Haifa. Knowing that *shemen* means oil, my aunt began frying eggs and other things with this Shemen product! The kids complained that the fried eggs have a strange taste, but the mother told them that apparently this is how eggs taste in this country. Only some days later did one of the kids see the warning on the container that read "*Lo Lema'achal*" (non-edible)!

FLYING CARPET

Rosally Saltzman

JN 1966, when the Shah still reigned in Iran and relations with Israel were still diplomatic, the YomTovian family (literally, the holiday family) made *aliyah* from Isfahan, a large city in central Iran. Hilda Klein is the third of their eight children and the last to be born in Persia.

“Jan” is a suffix of many names in Iran. The name YomTov hints at a story of family legend. When Flora, Hilda’s mother, was pregnant with her, she and her husband took a trip to visit the graves of Mordechai and Esther in Hamadan, much the same way people in Israel do day trips to *kivrei tzaddikim* (graves of the righteous). While she was there, she said that if she had a girl, she would name her Esther, and if she had a boy, she would name him Mordechai. But Flora heard the name Hilda from some tourists and had liked the sound of it.

They named the first child born after Hilda in Israel, Ora (God’s light). When the next child was also a girl, Flora decided she’d better make good on her promise and named her Esther.

In Iran, Hilda's father Yeshua z"l would travel during the week, selling cloths and material from a donkey. Her mother was a seamstress. Since Persian carpets were considered valuable, the family asked how many they could bring with them on *aliyah*. The limit was one for each family member. The family smuggled another one in by using it as a blanket to wrap around Hilda.

When the family arrived in Israel, they lived in Kadima and worked picking fruits.

Today, Hilda is an accountant and lives with her husband and three children in a lovely home in Petach Tikva. And she still has the Persian carpet that served as a blanket on her journey to Israel.

THE HEART AND SOUL OF ISRAEL

Rosally Saltsman

ISRAEL Yechiel Markowitz was born in Cluj, Romania, in 1938, not an auspicious time. Fortunately he and his parents survived the war. From a very young age, Israel wanted to live as a free, independent Jew. At age eight he asked his parents for Hebrew lessons in clandestine preparation for *aliyah*. He left Romania with his aunt and uncle at the tender age of ten. The next time his parents saw their only child was twelve and a half years later, at his wedding, when they were finally free to leave Romania.

Israel boarded at Kfar Haroeh and then at an agricultural school, Mikve Israel, until he was inducted into the IDF in July 1956, just before the Sinai Campaign. He joined the paratroopers, one of the few religious men to do so. The Sinai Campaign was the only time that Israeli paratroopers parachuted into enemy lands. Of the 240 soldiers, half were killed or injured, but Israel was neither.

The twenty-eight- year-old Ariel (Arik) Sharon was his commanding officer. Sharon called him over and said, “Listen, Srulik, we have a problem. All the soldiers have two holes in their belts for two grenades; you have one grenade and a pair of *tefillin* (phylacteries).”

Israel answered, “Arik, I’m not sure the grenade will save my life, but I’m sure the *tefillin* will.” Arik pinched his cheek and said, “You know, Srulik, I like you so much, we’ll make another hole in your belt so you have two grenades like the rest of the soldiers along with your *tefillin*.”

Israel married Rachel and they had two sons, Alon and Erez (oak and cedar trees). After the Six Day War, the family left Israel so the parents could pursue higher academic degrees. Israel received two doctorates, in education and psychology, and worked in both fields.

When the time came, Israel bought two plots in Israel, saying, “My heart and soul is with my country.” A week after his eightieth birthday, Israel returned his body to its holy soil, close to the graves of his aunt and uncle, who had brought him here as a young boy many years ago.

Israel has four grandchildren living in Israel and two grandchildren in the United States, the fruit of the trees he planted and the fulfillment of the dreams he had as a young boy.

ALL IN THE FAMILY

Adina Hershberg

IT was June of 1967. I was almost a decade old. There was an electrifying feeling, a cacophony of voices, and a feeling of togetherness in the college gym in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. All of the people in that gym had gathered together to raise money for the State of Israel, which had been attacked on all sides by its Arab enemies.

My parents had felt it important to bring all seven of their children to the fundraising event. I remember that my parents pledged \$1,075, which was a large sum of money in those days. To give it perspective, the annual Hebrew day-school tuition in our town was \$250 per student.

So it should come as no surprise that the major force propelling me to make *aliyah* was my parents' Zionism. The source of my father's strong feelings toward Israel was his mother, my late grandma, Tillie Sullum, who had been the head of a chapter of a Zionist organization in Wilkes-Barre. My father, in turn, made a strong impact upon his girlfriend, Helen Rosen, my mother. During his college years, my father would travel to various locations and speak about topics related to Palestine.

My parents married in November of 1948. They worked on two different farms in order to train for kibbutz life in Israel. My mother's mother, my Bobi, was not keen on my pregnant mother making *aliyah*, so it was pushed off. My parents' first trip to Israel was in the summer following the Six Day War.

I grew up in a home in which the topic of Israel was a main topic of discussion. My parents often hosted meetings of the Zionist Organization of America. It was natural to have loads of people over for a Sunday brunch.

One of my strongest childhood memories was an annual event. My parents would order a crate of Jaffa oranges from Israel. It was so exciting when the crate of holy oranges arrived. Each one, much larger than the American oranges of the time, was wrapped in orange tissue paper. I remember unwrapping each one with reverence.

In those days, correspondence with people in Israel actually entailed pen and paper. It was so exciting to receive letters written on lightweight stationery and enclosed in an air mail envelope. I remember how I would go over to my father's desk and pick up a letter that had been sent to my parents from the Holy Land. I loved touching the paper and hearing the crinkling sound.

My first trip to Israel was in 1974. Due to that trip to a faraway land, I became the expert on Israel in my public high school. I remember how my non-Jewish teacher of behavioral psychology had asked me to speak about the kibbutz. What did I know! I researched the topic and gave a talk to my class.

My high school senior dinner was surprisingly not held on Shabbat, but it was not kosher. No accommodations were made for kosher food. I decided I would attend, but only after the meal was finished. There were the various speeches, by teachers and by class officers. Someone predicted where various students would be in ten years' time. Only about fifty or so (ten percent of the class) were included in this presentation. I was included on this list. My fame of being an ardent Zionist had left

its mark; the speaker stated, “In ten years’ time, Adina Sullum will be Prime Minister of Israel.”

Well, maybe I wouldn’t be prime minister, but there was no doubt in my mind that I would make *aliyah* when I was older. It was simply a given. However, before that, I wanted to complete my undergraduate and graduate degrees in the United States.

Unlike two of my older siblings who had spent a year of university in Israel, during their junior year abroad, I chose to learn in a newly founded women’s yeshiva, where I had a very special year. It brought me closer to Judaism and it brought me closer to the Land and its people. It was during this year that I learned about the mitzvah of tithing produce grown in Israel.

I planned *aliyah* for the summer of 1981. There was a large kink in my plans, and I had to reconsider whether to make *aliyah* at that time. During Pesach of 1978, my dear and only sister, Naomi, had been diagnosed with squamous cell carcinoma, which had begun as a sore on her tongue. It was surgically removed with no subsequent treatment. In 1980, Naomi felt a lump in her neck, and it was downhill after that. She passed away in 1981, the day after Tu B’Shvat, the Jewish arbor holiday.

After much thought, I decided to bring my *aliyah* plans to fruition as planned. I made *aliyah* the day that I graduated from Yeshiva University’s Wurzweiler School of Social Work. I didn’t want to burden my parents with coming to New York City for my graduation and then again to see me off to Israel. I didn’t even attend the graduation party!

At that time there was no Nefesh B’Nefesh organization to help people make *aliyah*. I made *aliyah* alone (no group flights or fanfare when I arrived at Ben Gurion Airport). My parents were very supportive of my *aliyah*, but I do remember that shortly before making *aliyah*, my father told me that I could return to the United States if I wanted to. I am ecstatic that all of my seven children were born and live in Israel and I don’t have to experience such a separation.

Instead of going to an absorption center, I went to the tiny apartment my parents had bought in Jerusalem. They had purchased it on paper in the early 1970s. It was a luxury not to have to pay for rent as well as for utilities. I pretty much spent my tiny social work salary on food, transportation, and clothes.

My late parents finally came on *aliyah* several years after me. Eventually, one of my five brothers and his family made *aliyah*. I wish that the rest of my family, my friends, and Jews worldwide would come home. *Aliyah* has never been easier!

FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

Rosally Saltzman

THE Speaker of the Knesset is the second most powerful position in Israel, next to the Prime Minister. But Yuli (Yoel) Edelstein, the previous Speaker of the Knesset and a Likud MK, began his public career as a *refusenik* in Russia.

Edelstein had started learning Hebrew when his maternal grandfather died, carrying the torch of Judaism aloft amid the dangerous winds of Communist Russia.

Both he and his late first wife, Tanya, were underground Hebrew teachers (it was illegal to teach Hebrew in the USSR under the communist regime); they met when she took his class.

People would come from abroad to clandestinely bring them books and recordings of Hebrew lessons but wouldn't eat in their house because it wasn't kosher, so they started keeping a kosher home. Edelstein said, "People are endangering their lives to bring us books and recordings of Hebrew lessons, so how can we not serve them food?"

Yuli spent three years in prison while his wife advocated for him, slipping him *matzah* on Pesach and saving him from Siberia by

threatening to go on a hunger strike. When Yuli was released in 1987, the couple made *aliyah*, and Yuli has been in the Knesset since 1997.

As Speaker of the Knesset for seven years, Edelstein appeared in many venues from education to television, from politics to ceremonies. He also chairs the Bible Quiz on Yom Ha'atzmaut, which marks the anniversary of his release from prison as the second-to-last Soviet Jewish dissident freed.

Today, Edelstein is a fully observant Jew, a dignitary and a diplomat honored at functions in Israel and abroad. He has many portfolios and speaks many languages. He has been on numerous committees, championing the rights of everyone from Holocaust survivors to Knesset members. He has always supported the underdog, even quite literally, legislating a law that prohibits abandoning pets. Edelstein loves Israel and every creature in it.

He describes antisemitism and hatred of Israel as a multi-headed monster, each head having its own motivation and agenda: one is religious, one political, one economic, but they all result from ignorance. Edelstein wants to overcome this ignorance, especially among the young and innocent who have not yet been poisoned by it. "Most people don't know the first thing about Israel, and we have to give them the basics and prove that Israel belongs to us."

A version of this article first appeared in *The Jewish Press*.

I SAY OFANAYIM, YOU SAY MISHKAFAYIM

Esther Malka Fein

ON one of my crowded bus trips, a passenger unknowingly dropped his glasses. Without noticing the incident, the crowd was rushing to get off at the bus stop. Being a new *olah*, struggling with my new language, I couldn't think of the word for eyeglasses in Hebrew. But before the crowd had a chance to step on the glasses, I wanted to alert someone to pick them up. I stood up from my seat (in the back), pointed to the floor of the bus, and screamed out repetitiously, "OFANAYIM, OFANAYIM."

Everyone turned around to look at me. *Ofanayim* means bicycle, not glasses. Nonetheless, to my relief, my urgent-sounding message prompted someone to bend down, retrieve the glasses, and hand them to the person who had already exited from the bus.

First featured on the *AACI Blog*.

THE CHICKEN LADY OF JERUSALEM

C.B. Savant

THE Third *Aliyah*, the wave of immigrants who arrived in *Eretz Yisrael* from Europe in the years 1919–1923, was well underway. In the early period of the British Mandate, hundreds of European Jews arrived at the Palestinian ports every month — Sara and Meir Resnick among them. The Resnicks stayed in *Eretz Yisrael* for three years.

Letters arrived constantly from Sara’s family in America, urging the Resnicks to join them there. With the few doctors in Haifa telling Meir that his wife had no chance of survival where she was, he realized that there was little choice but to relocate the family once again.

As they sailed past the majestic Mount Carmel, abutting the Haifa Port, Meir stood up on the ship’s deck and called out, “*Mir veln tsurik kumen!* We’ll be back! I guarantee you, we’ll be back!”

This stirring declaration made a lasting impression on his young daughter. Although Clara would spend the next four-and-a-half

decades of her life in America, she always knew that the day would come when she would return to her beloved *Eretz Yisrael*.

After graduating from the Teacher's Institute, Clara continued to educate herself by attending lectures and classes. Every Sunday, she attended a Yiddish lecture given by the famous lecturer Chaim Greenberg.

Once a month, the lecture was in Hebrew. As Clara entered the hall one week, she saw a table of books for sale. She stopped to look. Although she had only five cents in her pocket for the subway ride home (she couldn't even afford a winter coat and had to borrow one to go out!), she couldn't resist their magnetic pull. A book by Bialik translated into Yiddish caught her eye. As she looked at it, she chatted with a bystander in Hebrew.

A young man standing nearby overheard her and asked in the same language, "If you can speak Hebrew, why don't you buy the book in Hebrew?"

"I'm not buying anything today," Clara retorted, knowing she had only five cents in her pocket with which to get home.

"*Ani koneh lach et hasefer* (I'm buying you the book)," the young man told her.

"*Todah rabbah* (thank you very much)," Clara responded proudly, "but if I would have wanted it, I would have bought it."

"I want you to take it," he said. "Give me your name and address and we'll read it together."

During their short courtship, Clara made Ephraim promise her three things: that they would speak Hebrew in their home; that they would eventually move to *Eretz Yisrael*; and that he would teach her how to drive. The young couple married on February 26, 1928. Later they would joke that it would take a Yiddish book by Bialik, of all things, to make a match between two Hebrew teachers.

As a teenager, Ephraim had participated in a *hachsharah* program in Poland that trained men in farming so they could go to Palestine and build the land. He had been issued a visa to Palestine, his ultimate

destination. Before he could leave Tomashov, however, a woman approached him, frantic because her son had been drafted into the Polish army. She begged Ephraim to give her son his certificate so he could be saved. Ephraim gave her the treasured certificate and ended up with a visa to America instead, where he met Clara.

In 1969, Ephraim and Clara had saved ten thousand dollars toward their dream of moving to *Eretz Yisrael*. They bid goodbye to their children, grandchildren, and extended family, as well as their many friends and students, and boarded the ship that would bring them to their beloved *Eretz Yisrael*.

Standing on the ship's deck, catching sight of her beloved land, Clara clasped her hands to her heart and burst out in song, "*Me'al pishgat Har HaTzofim shalom lach Yerushalayim* (From above the peak of Mount Scopus, peace to you, Jerusalem)." She never doubted that *Eretz Yisrael* would be her final destination.

On a spring Friday morning in 1980, seventy-year-old Clara walked into Hacker's Butcher Shop, on Achinoam Street in the Sanhedria neighborhood of Jerusalem, to place her weekly meat order. Within minutes, for hundreds of families in Jerusalem and its environs, the world began to change. For it was then, standing in line, that Clara Chaya Hammer saw an urgent need and stepped right in to fill it.

She noticed the butcher giving a young girl a large bag filled with skin and fat. When her turn came, Chaya good-naturedly asked the butcher, Altie Hacker, how many dogs and cats the girl's family had.

Mr. Hacker sadly explained that the skin and fat were for Shabbos, to feed the girl's parents and their seven children. They would make a soup and a cholent out of these scraps. The father was on dialysis. They were already very much in debt, and the Hackers just couldn't give them any more chickens.

Chaya was deeply moved. But more than being moved, she went into action. "From now on, give the family a chicken and some chopped meat every week, and put it on my bill!"

And that's how the Clara Hammer Chicken Fund was hatched.

Chaya began helping this family and as she became aware of more families in need, she began helping them, as well. Her concern grew and by the time she returned her soul to her Maker, thirty years later, one month shy of her hundredth birthday, the fund she established was regularly feeding over 250 needy families weekly and being run by her daughter Chana, assisted by her great-granddaughter Elisheva.

Excerpted from *The Chicken Lady of Jerusalem, A Life of Giving: The Remarkable Story of Clara Hammer 1910–2010* by C.B. Gavant.

L'ilui nishmat Chaya bat Meir.

To make a donation to The Chicken Fund: <http://chickenladyofjerusalem.com/>

HOW I BROUGHT MY MOTHER-IN-LAW ON ALIYAH

Manuel Sand

MY mother-in-law Tilly (Taibel) Bromberg was born in 1899. She made *aliyah* with her sister, Ray, in May 1981 when she was eighty-two years old. She lived in Israel till her death at 104 years old.

My family and I had moved to Israel in 1968. My father-in-law, Harry, passed away in 1970 from pancreatic cancer. My mother-in-law's sister, Ray, lived with her.

Because of the rise of the separatists in 1970s' Quebec, many Jews left, moving either to Israel, the United States, or Toronto. Tilly and Ray moved to Toronto to be near their brother and sister-in-law. Every time we came for a visit, we said, "Why don't you come live in Israel?" Every time she said, "No."

Then one visit, we asked her and she said, "OK." It took us all by surprise. I told her, "I'm going to move you!"

I called the Jewish Agency *shaliach* (representative from Israel). He said, “Can you come to the office now?” So we jumped into the car and drove over. An hour later, we had all the papers filled out. Then he said, “You need a medical.” So they called the doctor and he says, “Can they come now?” Then I asked for a Yellow Pages and called a moving van. They said, “Can we come in an hour to give an estimate?” They came and said, “We’re coming tomorrow to put a container on your lawn.”

Within a week, everything was done and Tilly and Ray were on a plane on their way to Israel. There was an apartment for rent in the street behind us, so we rented it for them.

In the meantime, my daughter, Malka, had just given birth to her first daughter, Tzipi. We had given our plane reservations to return to Israel to Tilly and Ray, and my wife, Esther Ella, wanted to go home to Tzipi. We went to the airport hoping she could fly standby, but there was no room. We were very disappointed. While we were there waiting, a woman checked in and twisted her ankle and broke her leg. Now there was room. Esther Ella flew back to be with Tzipi.

When my mother-in-law arrived in Israel, my son, Tzvi, picked her up and drove her straight to the hospital to see her first great-grandchild. Then he took her to the apartment we rented for them behind us.

There you have it, *aliyah* in a week!

THE REAL LIGHT OF CHANUKAH

Chara Dumas

WHEN I was growing up in America, Chanukah was always overshadowed by the non-Jewish holiday that occurs during the same season. There may have been a lot of Jews in New York, but in my elementary school there were hardly any. This was most noticeable on Wednesday afternoons, when the majority of my class was excused to go off to religious instruction, leaving behind those of us who were unaffiliated or Jewish.

In December, our neighbors' homes started sprouting round wreaths on their front doors. Every week, when we would drive to Queens to visit my grandma and cousins, I would look for even one lone domicile that was devoid of this decoration. If I spotted an unwreathed door, I would enthusiastically shout, "JEWISH!" My father loved my annual outburst; he would swing his head around, give me an enormous grin, and repeat, "JEWISH!!" We continued like this, searching and shouting with joy, and I sensed from his pleased reaction that being Jewish was something special and important to him.

When I was about twelve, my father took my mother, baby sister, and me on a trip to Israel to visit relatives: my grandma's first cousins and all their progeny. My brothers didn't go; they were farmed out to different aunts and uncles. One thing I clearly recall from that memorable odyssey was our search for a menorah. It had to be just right: strong, solid, and nearly unbreakable. No thin silver or glass for our rambunctious bunch! We visited a lot of gift shops, not just to buy this particular religious item, but also to bring back Holy Land souvenirs for all of our family and friends. Finally, in the umpteenth store, we found a large menorah made from various pastel shades of green, pink, white, blue and beige stones cemented together in four beautiful arches. It was a heavy piece, thick and solid, and in my mind the weight symbolized a direct connection to Jewish history — Jews were made of tough material and would last forever. When we returned, we placed our new menorah in the middle of the mantel above the fireplace in the living room. It stood there majestically, eight arms curving boldly upward, awaiting the moment when it would light up our home with its historical message.

When we first moved to Israel, in 1985, we were living in Nachlaot, near Machane Yehuda. It was the eighth night of Chanukah and I stopped by a neighbor's. She had nine children and all of their school project menorahs were arranged on top of folded, crinkly aluminum foil that covered the table. Each round metal bottle cap was glued to a base and held a brightly colored candle. Ninety flickering lights, dancing shadows on the red, blue, yellow, orange, pink, green and white candles, illuminated the faces of her thrilled, excited children. The living room, with its arched, domed ceiling and massively thick, white plaster walls, built over one hundred and fifty years ago, was aglow with a historical presence of significance, as though the shimmering shadows wished to speak and tell a story.

Contemplating those slender burning candles, I could hardly believe that I was here in Jerusalem, surrounded by Jews celebrating a Jewish

holiday, and not still in a place where this festival is swallowed up by the dominating influences of Western society and culture. Imagine my delight to discover during my first Chanukah in Jerusalem the custom in many families of having each individual child light his own personal menorah! Witnessing the wonder of the abundance of this inspirational radiance in the windows and on the streets of Yerushalayim was quite a revelation. Walking past the building entrances, peering into the sturdy glass-paned metal boxes that contained small cups of brightly burning wicks floating in olive oil, completely enveloped my *neshamah* with warmth.

My first Chanukah in Jerusalem — winding through the city streets, exploring every neighborhood, seeking out the brilliance of the hundreds of lights glimmering in the darkness — was an unbelievable experience. What a contrast to the paltry light of my childhood Chanukahs! As I've been privileged to continue living in *Eretz Yisrael* for many decades, on Chanukah I always try to walk after candle-lighting to marvel anew at the sight of so many menorahs burning brightly in all the windows of this small country. Everywhere you go, they are lit. Every individual's radiant contribution is of great relevance to all the Jewish people. Every single person counts. Each Jew's additional light has mighty significance. "We are here! We are here! We are here," those flames proclaim to all who see them.

And now, I was here, too.

A longer version of this article first appeared in *The Jewish Press* and *Aish.com* under the title *Destiny in Stone*.

L'ilui nishmas Avraham ben Yizchak Isaac z"l.

MEANT TO BE

Azriela Jankovic, Ed.D.

IT was December of 2014. Our pilot trip to Israel was coming to a close. Sitting outside on a rickety bench, across from a kibbutz *makolet* (grocery store), I took the last few minutes before dashing to the airport to have a heart-to-heart with Hashem.

It had been a long trip. My husband and I had traveled with our three small children all the way from Los Angeles to scout out the possibility of making *aliyah* and realizing our lifelong dream.

Seeds had been planted so many years prior. From my first experiences as a high school student in the '90s traveling from secular, suburban California into the ancient city of Jerusalem, I was drawn in to a near indescribable connectedness to the rich history, culture, and spirituality of the land of Israel.

As a newlywed in the early 2000s, I was introduced to my husband's Israeli cousins. The warmth of their homes and communities painted a new paradigm in my life for what a rich Jewish life in Israel could look like.

When we returned to California from our year of Torah learning in Israel in 2004, my husband and I held on to a dream of one day returning to Israel to raise our family.

Months turned into years, and years turned into a decade. Before we knew it, our eldest child was turning ten.

We were involved in our *shul*, community, our children's Jewish day schools, and many organizations in the Los Angeles area. Each communal event and celebration that referenced Israel stoked the flames of our desire to pursue our dream of *aliyah*.

In the spring of 2014, we decided that it was time to go and scout out the land.

Our plans to visit in July of 2014 were postponed due to the war with Gaza. Israel was in our hearts and prayers that summer as we witnessed the devastating situation from afar.

Watching the tragic situation of the three boys unfold as the entire Jewish world came together in solidarity, my heart was in Israel; I prayed for her peace, and the dream of *aliyah* became central in my personal prayers.

We left for our pilot trip at the end of November and came upon a gorgeous land, hills freshly covered in winter green sprouts, promising blossoms in the coming months. We traveled the entire country, exploring communities that we had researched prior to the trip.

On one of our explorations, a friend from yeshiva mentioned the name of a small *yeshuv* (community) that we had never heard of before. As intrigued as we were, our trip was full, and we weren't sure that there would be time to fit in any other stops along the way.

As our trip was winding down to a close, we decided to spend the last full day visiting family near the city of Modi'in. On our drive that day, we glanced out at the Ayalon Valley at a gorgeous view, as the sun poked through the clouds and illuminated a sign on the side of the road.

Seeing that sign illuminated, I knew right away — this was the neighborhood my friend from yeshiva had told me about. "Let's turn in, even if just for a few minutes ..." I suggested.

Perhaps it was the beautiful scenery, or simple curiosity at that spontaneous moment, but it appeared as though everyone was on board with the plan.

We were immediately charmed by our surroundings. It was exactly what we had been envisioning for all of those years.

Our day was spent investigating the area, and everything checked out. It was our absolute ideal community, with only one exception. According to the office administration, there were absolutely no homes available at present. It was an extremely small community, and there was simply nothing available.

We went home that evening wondering what would be. We were leaving the next day, and we had yet to secure our future home or come up with any concrete plans for where we would live.

The next morning at dawn, I awoke feeling inspired to go back and do a bit more investigating. We had heard about another part of the neighborhood, which we had yet to explore, and I was hopeful that maybe ... just maybe ... we would find our future home there.

Working against the clock, I set out early and went straight to the administrative offices of the neighborhood. As I stood across from the manager, I shared our dream of making *aliyah*. My Hebrew was emergent, at best, and she listened patiently as I told her about our years of praying to live in Israel.

“I would really like to help you,” she replied, “but our community is very small and there is simply no availability. You can take an application and stay in touch. *B’hatzlachah* (Good luck).”

I walked out, but before getting into the car, I took five last minutes to sit down under a tree and speak to Hashem. Whispering, and gazing up into the cloud covered sky, I beseeched:

“Hashem. Our trip is coming to a close. We planned, we came, and we visited community upon community, and finally, here I am, sitting in the one place that feels like it could be ‘our’ place. Everything about it is perfect for us, except for the fact that there are no homes available.

I can envision our kids learning in the schools here and thriving with the other children. Surrounded by the nature of a kibbutz, I feel so connected to Your land, and ... to You.

“The people here are so dedicated to Torah and to *Eretz Yisrael*... if only there were homes available.” I exhaled, lowered my eyes, mindful of the ticking clock, and realized that a blue-uniformed soldier was walking out of the *makolet* directly toward me.

“Shalom,” he began, as I noticed many army badges on the lapel of his blue uniform.

“My name is Yaakov Cohen. I built a home in this neighborhood and it has been vacant for a few years now. My father is not well, and so our family is staying in Jerusalem to be with him.”

He continued, “If you are going to do the mitzvah of making *aliyah*, I can make my home available for your family, and perhaps, in doing so, I will get a bit of the *zechut* (merit) for your mitzvah.”

“Yes,” was all that I could manage to say.

“I’ve got five minutes and can show you the house. I come here once per month to pick up our mail, and I just happened to hear you telling your story to the office manager. Come, let’s see the house.”

I knew in that moment that wherever he was taking me would be my new home in Israel.

What were the chances that in the five minutes per month that he visited the community, he would overhear me speaking to the office manager in my very last few hours of our pilot trip?

Five years later, I write this story from that very same home. That moment was the answer to my prayers, and to me — a clear sign from Hashem that this *aliyah* was meant to be.

GETTING ACCUSTOMED TO ISRAEL

Jessica Fischer

NOT long after making *aliyah* in 1969 with my husband and two children, I went with my parents to Haifa to clear customs on a number of things they had brought for me and themselves to help them with an extended stay in Israel.

Along with several other people with the same objective, we were in a small building where several clerks sat behind windows.

As we got to the head of one line, the clerk looked at the papers my father had and told him to get in another line to receive the proper purple stamp. Then he had to go to yet another man to pay before completing this whole procedure.

Everyone in the room was getting the same run-around and there was a lot of tension and exasperation in the air.

In my loudest voice, I said, “This is how we give jobs to more Israelis!” The smiles that broke out on the faces of the people in the room made them all relax and we finished up and left with mission accomplished.

First appeared on *A Daily Dose of Kindness* newsletter.

To subscribe: info@traditionofkindness.org

ALIYAH, SO DIFFERENT THEN

Batya Medad

I DIDN'T grow up in a Zionist home, nor a religiously observant one. I had no idea that there were foods forbidden to Jews, a Sabbath full of restrictions, nor a piece of Land on the other side of the globe from New York, a Holy Land of religious and historical significance for Jews. Considering that I had been born in Brooklyn, grew up in Bayside, Queens, and lived as a teenager in Great Neck, which are all on Long Island in New York State, I took it for granted that I'd continue eastward, maybe to Suffolk County.

If someone had told me that instead of moving a few miles to the east, I would move thousands of miles to a new country, new language, and new culture as a strict adherent to a Judaism I barely knew, I wouldn't have believed it for a second. But that's what happened.

As an adolescent newcomer to Great Neck, I needed a place to make friends, and my parents forced me to go to the Great Neck Synagogue's Teen Club. Of course, if they had known how that would change me, I think they might have preferred me friendless in Great Neck North.

The Orthodox Great Neck Synagogue's Teen Club was an NCSY (National Conference of Synagogue Youth) chapter, which introduced me to authentic Judaism, the Soviet Jewry Movement, and, finally, as one of the local Jewish activists, to Zionism. I supplemented NCSY and SSSJ (the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry) with Betar, a Zionist youth movement, and met my husband at a Soviet Jewry demonstration the summer of 1967. We got married in June 1970 and boarded a ship to Israel just two months later.

At the time we made *aliyah*, it's no exaggeration to say that the only people my parents knew with a child in Israel were my in-laws. But within a few years my mother was the person local people consulted for advice. I must say that my parents became surprisingly supportive of our move.

We first lived in the Old City of Jerusalem, before there was a renovated Jewish Quarter. We had to walk through the Arab market to get to our apartment. I barely knew Hebrew. For the first few months, we had to walk to a post office to make phone calls on a public phone. I did the laundry every night in the bathtub. My husband would climb up to the roof to hang the wash on a clothesline he set up.

After our first child was born, we moved to an apartment in Bayit Vegan. We still didn't have a washing machine and were dependent on a pay phone a few minutes' walk away. I used a "diaper service" the first few months, while my peers in the States thought nothing of buying disposable diapers. Eventually, we furnished our apartment, had more children, and moved to Shilo in 1981.

A half a century has passed. Today Israel is one of the most technologically advanced countries in the world. Life here is more intense, more exciting, more fun, and more Jewish than any place else. My husband served in the IDF's basic training, leaving me home with two small daughters. We all got through that, and about thirty years later, our sons served in the army.

Our children and grandchildren are Israeli educated. Even though my Hebrew is heavily American accented, making people mistake me

for a newcomer, as a parent and grandparent the only school system I'm familiar with is the Israeli one.

Living here in Israel I've seen the country change and grow. I enjoy that national holidays are the Jewish ones. My husband and I descend from American Jews who had previously lived in Eastern Europe, but our grandchildren are also of Tunisian, Moroccan, and Greek Jewish descent. Here in Israel we're part of a much larger Jewish family, culture, and history.

We've been living in Shilo since 1981, and we feel like we're truly part of Jewish history, past and present.

As many *olim* say, in their accented Hebrew, my move to Israel was the best decision I ever made, thank God!

A LETTER FROM ISRAEL

Rabbi David Lapin

Chanukah 2019

CHANUKAH Same'ach to all:

We have just passed our first three months of living in Ra'anana, Israel. What a surprising journey it has been!

The surprises are how relatively easy and smooth it has been, *baruch Hashem*, and how exceptionally wonderful the people we are coming across are. Ra'anana is a magical place, rich in the diversity of its people and fortunate in the type of people who live here, both the religious and the secular. There is an enormous amount of *shiurim* (classes) and learning, a very active community *kollel*, and countless daily *minyanim*.

Of course, it takes time to learn the complex cultural nuances of any country, especially this one, and the ways to get things done. The country is very relational — so much is done face-to-face. There is a lot of bureaucracy, but if you connect in a personal way with a bureaucrat, he or she will help you navigate the system and at times even circumnavigate the system!

Another surprise has been how efficiently you can get things done face-to-face, if you take the trouble to connect with people authentically and respectfully. People are so very worthy of respect. Many of them have made awesome sacrifices for us or have had incredible experiences, are doing amazing things or have unbelievable educational backgrounds. As you peel the layers, you quickly discover the most beautiful *neshamot Yisrael* (Jewish souls) in them. They are almost always willing to help. They may not be the most courteous, but they are the most genuinely caring by far.

Every person one meets has an inspiring story, and it is important to elicit their stories, which are so enriching to hear and learn. The country, even just within the Jewish population, is more diverse than any country I know. Unlike the USA, where every category of the population is insulated from most of the others, here you encounter and engage with diversity daily. People are from so many different backgrounds and cultures; people speak so many different languages. I never imagined that *Kibbutz Galuyot* (the ingathering of the exiles) would be so vibrant and enriching.

The power of *hashgachah* is ever visible, both on a national level and on an individual level. When emotionally and spiritually aligned to Hashem and Torah, one feels the ease with which things happen and the serendipitous intersections that seem like little daily miracles. One feels the magic fade when one is unaligned.

Israel is palpably vivacious. It is pioneering and future-focused; it teems with children of all ages. The things people are busy with, particularly in the technology field, are changing the world. It is worth following *Israel 21c* to get a feel for this exciting space. In music and the arts, Israel is as edgy as it is in all other areas.

In Torah, as well, exciting new things are being done, experimented with, and distributed. Torah seeps into every area of life — even the secular, the Hebrew language, legal concepts, and day-to-day experience. The Hebrew press (whether or not one agrees with its stance — and

there is a spectrum) is of a high standard of language, journalism, and intellect. And for those who enjoy the culinary, the country is a treat.

Infrastructure is growing and improving so rapidly that you see the progress from day to day. The building that is taking place is another manifestation of the country's future focus; a real expression of *Tzipita Liyeshu'ah* (you have awaited salvation) and planning for *Biat Hamashiach* (the coming of Mashiach, the Messiah). One can choose to engage in all of this with curiosity and joy, or to hide from it in an insulated unicultural and unidisciplinary bubble.

Amber and I are settling in well. We miss our children, who are scattered everywhere, but love the proximity to those who are here.

We have been blessed with so many friends, both old and new, and are enjoying the many opportunities to spend time with them, connect, and reconnect. We hope that those of you who are here will be in touch, and those who are far, will visit us.

LIVING IN A CONVERSATION WITH HASHEM

As told to Tova Younger
by Mendel Schulman

J GREW up in a religious home in West Hempstead, New York. When I was in tenth grade I came to *Eretz Yisroel* for the first time on a Young Israel–sponsored trip. We had one Shabbos off, and I decided to go to Tel Aviv. A friend of mine had European grandparents there, and I was happy to get around the country a bit. I enjoyed a lovely *Shabbos seudah* (Shabbat meal) but was surprised to discover that they were not really Shabbat observant! Although I felt bad for them, I was actually impressed with the idea that despite their lack of observance, they still valued and honored Shabbos. I somehow realized that *Eretz Yisroel* is different from America. Here, all kinds of people are keeping Shabbos in their way. Of course, it was a pity they were not keeping Shabbos properly; still, it had some merit. Somehow,

this concept gave me a desire to live here.

After high school I came to Reishit Yerushalayim, an American yeshiva program, and there I “*frummed* out” (became really religious). I felt like here in *Eretz Yisroel* I could be authentically religious, a goal I could not really aspire for or reach in America. Although my Tel Aviv experience of years before had shown me diversity, in yeshiva I saw the real appreciation and celebration of what Shabbos was. I learned there for a year and then, although I wanted to stay, my parents were hesitant. They wanted me to finish college first and get a job. I went along with this plan only partially; as soon as I finished college, I said I’m heading back to *Eretz Yisroel*! I knew that I had to in order to lead a meaningful life. I truly feared that if I stayed in the USA, I would just lose my enthusiasm. I said goodbye and returned to the same yeshiva, working there as a dorm counselor and learning in a small *beis midrash* (study hall) near the Mir.

During that time I met my wife. Originally from Florida, she held a job similar to mine — she was a *madrichah* (counselor) in a seminary. Like me, she had also come to visit *Eretz Yisroel* when she was young and was attracted to the realness, the authenticity. Somehow it just feels more real here than it did in the USA.

We started out in Ramat Eshkol, and after a year or two we were able to move to Ramat Beit Shemesh. I started out learning in a *kollel* and then became a *rebbe* (Jewish studies teacher) in Reishit Yerushalayim. Currently I have a job underwriting loans for a financial company in New York, working American hours. As far as community involvement, I was *gabbai* (synagogue manager) of our local *shul* for many years, during which I tried to help build it up. *Baruch Hashem*, we started having children, and my wife is a busy and devoted stay-at-home mom.

Obviously, most trips here are also really Jewishly oriented; it’s the default. With *kivrei tzaddikim* (graves of the righteous) and places where stories from *Tanach* happened, *Eretz Yisroel* is full of *kedushah* (holiness). You can’t deny it.

Today, unbelievably, many secular Israeli writers and singers are singing about Hashem. Yishai Ribo is a *frum* fellow with *tzitzis*, singing about Hashem and *teshuvah* (repentance)... in secular gatherings! Imagine, a stadium full of secular Jews, coming together for entertainment, and what are they doing? Singing Torah topic songs! Can't at all compare to rock stars in USA: there, they are not singing about religious topics!

This then is what I think is unique about *Eretz Yisroel* — here everyone is in a conversation with Hashem and the Torah. It's all about Yiddishkeit and what it is supposed to look like. Some may be against, but many are for as people struggle to understand their role and the future of *Eretz Yisroel*. But what is amazing is that that is what people focus on. Even secular Jews are focused on it. *Eretz Yisroel* is a Jewish family and life here is a Jewish conversation. People dress differently, wear different hats, focus on different points, but with all the differences, Judaism is the topic. Even as *chilonim* (secular Jews) are complaining about *chareidim* (ultra-Orthodox Jews), they are focusing on Torah although they may not realize it. It's a disagreement about what the Torah means, and although they err, they are on the page!

From the *Naava Kodesh* website: <https://naavakodesh.org/haaretz-hatovah/>

RELATIVE ALIYAH

Rosally Saltzman

as heard from Yehudit Levy

THE Goetschel family lived in Strasbourg, France, a city that boasted a large and flourishing Jewish community in the 1960s. As religious Jews, they sent their children to Akiva Jewish school, and from third grade, the children attended Yeshurun (a poetic name for the People of Israel) youth group.

From the mid-seventies to the mid-eighties, one by one, the Goetschels' five children (two boys and three girls) made *aliyah*, the girls at eighteen and the boys after completing university.

The parents, of course, despite their love of Israel and their agreement in theory with the ideology of *aliyah*, were not thrilled to have their eldest daughter leave the nest, but as one by one their children made *aliyah*, they not only got used to the idea, but eventually, at ages seventy and sixty-seven respectively, Roland and Nicole Goetschel got on a plane and joined their family, which today, *baruch Hashem*, numbers

twenty-six grandchildren and the same number of great-grandchildren (*ken yirbu*, may they increase).

Nicole passed away in 2019 but leaves behind a legacy of her own portion of Yeshurun in *Eretz Yisrael*.

WAVING THE FLAG: REFLECTIONS ON ISRAEL INDEPENDENCE DAY

Wendy Dickstein

I MADE *aliyah* in 1986. I was thirty-nine and a single parent with two children, aged ten and fourteen.

About a week before Israel's Independence Day, one of the large banks supplies Israeli flags to everyone who buys a Friday weekend paper. The nylon flag is compressed into a neat square and packed in a plastic wrapper in the middle of the paper's magazine section. During the next week, all these flags, as well as many others, appear all over the country, hoisted on balconies and fluttering from windows, cars, fences, and garden walls.

This year, early on Sunday morning I unfolded my flag from Friday's *Jerusalem Post* and went outside to hang it on the blue bars that surround my windows. There is a little rectangular stone box there that I call my "garden." The white amaryllis for which I waited a whole year is in full bloom, despite the fact that I can't do much to encourage its growth because this is a *shmittah* year — a "seventh year" when the land of Israel is supposed to lie fallow — and there's not a lot you can

do in your garden, except for a minimal amount of watering. I attached the flag to the bars and it fluttered out over the garden proudly.

As I stood there admiring it, I realized how much my attitude to flags has changed. When I was growing up in Connecticut, my nonconformist Quaker-Jewish parents made it a point to impress upon me and my four siblings that flags were only shallow symbols and that saluting the flag was a very superficial act and should not be encouraged. Not only that, but the Pledge of Allegiance clearly contradicts the Society of Friends' (Quakers) historical refusal to take oaths.

My parents were both Jewish. But they were attracted to the Quakers because Quakers were pacifists. My father served in the Second World War and he had been told that it was "the war to end all wars." So when the Korean War started, my parents were disillusioned and began attending Quaker meetings.

I took the best from my Quaker upbringing — their simplicity and honesty, their nonsectarian acceptance of everyone as God's children, their quiet meditation on spirituality in everyday experience — and later graduated to modern Orthodox Judaism with a proud measure of Zionism mixed in. I had thrown in my lot with Israel and come to live here with my family.

And somehow, that blue and white "symbol" had twined itself around my heart and I no longer seemed to have any objection to it at all.

A few days later, I was summoned to my post in the volunteer civil guard to attend the Remembrance Day ceremony at the Rechavia Gymnasium in Jerusalem. This was the second modern high school, built in 1928 during British Mandate times. The ceremony was to begin with the nation-wide two-minute siren at 11:00 a.m. Wrapped in luminous yellow-green vests, with "Citizen Police" splashed across our backs, my fellow volunteer, Israel, a recent immigrant from Venezuela, and I positioned ourselves near the school's parking lot and watched as the entire high school assembled under a blue-and-white awning in the

schoolyard for the ceremony. The siren sounded and everyone stood silently. Then the principal spoke, followed by the sweet voices of the choir raised in sad song. Then a female and a male student alternately read out the names of all the former students of the school who had fallen in Israel's wars or in terrorist attacks throughout the school's eighty-year history. Every name struck me like a blow. It seemed as though the rain of names would never end.

Later in the day, my son and my daughter came to visit with their families. I asked them what my two little granddaughters, aged five and two, made of Remembrance Day for Israel's fallen soldiers. My son told me that his five year old had marched him through the kindergarten class exhibition of photos of young soldiers on a background of somber black velvet among the ubiquitous blue-and-white flags, and she excitedly pointed out each one, saying, "This one fell, and this one fell, and this one fell." Then she stopped and looked puzzled. Turning to her father, whom she clings to for dear life when he's not doing his month of reserve duty each year, she asked, "Abba, what does it mean, they fell? Why didn't they look where they were going?" Relating this to me, my son pointed out that explaining Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, had been even more difficult to explain to a five year old.

My daughter, a psychotherapist, had another answer for her two year old, who was curious about the eleven o'clock siren that had torn through the morning calm at her playgroup. "Everyone stands very quietly and thinks about all the people who have *petsas* [hurt themselves]," her mother explained. Little Maya was thoughtful for a while and then looked at her mother and replied, "We need to hug them."

The "hug" comes a few hours later, when Remembrance Day wanes and leads us into the joy of celebrating Israel's Independence Day.

That evening, when the setting sun brought an end to Remembrance Day and a beginning to Independence Day, Yom Ha'atzmaut, we headed over to Jerusalem's Great Synagogue for a festive prayer service and dinner. There was much spirited singing and dancing with large flags

and small flags. The synagogue was honoring forty-four young soldiers who were in the process of converting to Judaism. They danced with us all, and during the dinner, special guest Malcolm Hoenlein reminded us that we had to remember what a great miracle it is that we have this state and how much we have to be thankful for and to be proud of.

At the end of the week, when I went outside to take down the flag and put it away until next year, I thought about all the emotion that is attached to a flag. The strange fact that a meter's length of blue-and-white nylon cloth can move me to tears and overturn all my previous self-righteous feelings about symbols and loyalties of the heart is just another mystery that goes along with the many paradoxes of living here. And I wouldn't change this for anything.

First published in *Hadassah Magazine* and also appears in Wendy Dickstein's memoir, *And a Time to Dance*.

IN ISRAEL YOU'RE NEVER A LONE

Michelle Gordon

FROM the early days of our *aliyah* ten years ago, I discovered the profound truth in the phrase, *Kol Yisrael arevim ze le ze* (everyone in Israel is responsible for one another). It really is true. The thread of caring that weaves through the fabric of life in Israel will show itself just when you least expect it.

In America, you can go to the same cashier at the grocery store for twenty years and she won't so much as acknowledge your humanity. In Israel, if the cashier thinks that you might miss out on the sale price of chicken because you didn't buy enough, she'll send you back to the butcher counter, way in the back of the store, while the other customers at the checkout wait for you.

On a bus, you might marvel as a fistful of change or a Rav-Kav bus card passes through six pairs of hands to the Egged bus driver and the receipt makes its way back to the elderly passenger or young mother balancing a baby on one hip and a toddler on the other. Once, on a bus to Tel Aviv, I saw a young woman hand her infant to the bus driver to

hold while she rummaged through her purse for her fare.

You're never alone, even when you think you are. One time while my husband cycled up a Jerusalem hill, a woman — a total stranger — handed him a green fluorescent ribbon to attach to his helmet so he would be more visible to car drivers.

All of Israel is responsible for one another. And you never know when you will be called to that duty.

Wednesday, July 23, 2014, was a sunny, hot day. My husband and I decided to cycle to our favorite spot, Yad Kennedy, just outside of Jerusalem, on top of a mountain with a panoramic views of the green Mateh Yehuda region. On a clear day you can almost see the coast.

We were striving to have a normal day during the tense period of military Operation Protective Edge in the Gaza Strip. We had made *aliyah* in our semi-retirement years when our children were already grown. Our offspring had not served in the military, but, like everyone else, we prayed for the safety of the Israeli Defense Forces. *Kol Yisrael arevim ze le ze.*

On that particular Wednesday morning, we chose our cycling route from our Rechavia apartment up to the Israel Museum, up some more to Herzl Boulevard, past the light rail and past Yad Sarah. On a typical weekday morning there is usually not much foot traffic in that part of town, but we began to notice people walking up the hill from all directions, converging on Mount Herzl Cemetery.

Slogging up the steep hill, sweating in our spandex, we asked a passerby what was going on.

“Max Steinberg’s funeral.”

Oh my goodness. How could we have forgotten? Lone soldier Max Steinberg had been killed in the Gaza Strip just three days earlier. He was twenty-four years old, a native of Los Angeles, and had volunteered to serve in the IDF, serving in the elite Golani Brigade, after pressing to be placed in a combat unit. Max had joined the IDF only a few months after visiting Israel for the first time on a Birthright trip. He was determined. He was a legend.

And as the temperatures continued to rise on that brilliant summer day, Max Steinberg was everyone's son. All of Israel's. We later learned that thirty-thousand people attended his funeral, ascending to the heights of Har Herzl in the heat, to pay their respects.

We just had to join them. How could we not? But I was in spandex bicycling shorts and felt that it would not be respectful to enter a cemetery dressed like that.

"If only someone could lend me a skirt..." I said aloud to myself and to my husband.

No sooner had these words left my lips when I saw, walking down the hill right toward me, one of my dance students, Shira. I jokingly asked her, "You don't happen to have an extra skirt with you?" She looked at me, opened her purse, and pulled out a large square green paisley scarf. I tied it around my waist. It covered my spandex shorts. I gave Shira a big hug.

The cemetery grounds were packed. The temperatures continued to rise and I had not been drinking enough water in my distracting quest for a skirt. We walked our bicycles up another hill along with the throngs of civilians, soldiers, and students who had draped themselves in Israeli flags. I seem to recall watching the ceremony and the speeches on a closed-circuit television screen. Or maybe I'm only imagining this because as the crowd grew, I got separated from my husband, parked my bicycle by a low stone wall, and sat down in the shade of a tree.

And then I fainted. I don't remember fainting. But I do remember reviving and the kind faces of the young women in green IDF uniforms and medics helping me to drink water, to lie down, and to locate my husband. I remember them taking my vital signs and caring for me in this most unlikely place where I remained for the duration of the ceremony. They made sure that I rested, hydrated, and was well enough to leave when the huge crowd dispersed.

I was not alone. Max Steinberg had been a lone soldier, but he was not alone. In Israel you're never a lone.

Kol Yisrael arevim ze le ze.

AN “ALIYAH” TO REMEMBER!

Rabbi Mordechai Bulua

SOME years ago, my wife and I received news of the birth of a new grandson, *baruch Hashem*. The *bris* was to take place in Yerushalayim, and we decided to fly to Israel to attend. On the day we arrived, while I was taking off my *tefillin* in *shul* after *Shacharis* (the morning prayers), I heard someone calling my name. I turned around and stood face to face with a total stranger. He asked, “Don’t you recognize me?” I hadn’t the foggiest. When he mentioned his name, it all came back. He was my roommate in yeshiva over forty years ago! He told me that he had just been thinking about me the day before! I asked him if he often thought about me. His answer shocked me. He said that it was the first time since we last met that he thought about me!

That piqued my curiosity and I asked him further what made him think of me after all these years. His answer floored me. He said that he never had a *gemarakup*, a head for learning Torah in depth. He decided to make *aliyah* soon after he left yeshiva, settled in Jerusalem, and

became a group tour guide. The previous day, upon coming home after a long day's work, he took out a Gemara to study. Try as he might, he couldn't understand the content even after numerous attempts, and decided to call it a night. While lying in bed, just as he was about to fall asleep, he suddenly had a flashback of me sitting at the table between our two beds in the dormitory, learning Gemara late at night! That gave him the strength and determination to get up, make an "*aliyah*" from his bed, put on his robe and give it another shot! *Baruch Hashem*, he finally got it! My roommate also informed me that he hadn't been going regularly to *minyán*, but remembering the previous day how I used to go on a daily basis to *minyán* made him make up his mind to start going every day as well! That day was the first day he put his plan into action. Who knows if we would otherwise have met?

One never knows how one's actions, without realizing it, can affect other people. This shows us the power we all have within us to have a positive effect on others and glorify Hashem's Name.

My roommate had made *aliyah* but still had room for another "*aliyah*", one that brought him closer to Hashem and His Torah!

First published in *The Jewish Press*.

MY GOLDEN ALIYAH

Horbert (Natan) Weinberg

November 2018

AFTER a six-decades-long rabbinic career in Massachusetts, I found that the constant delays in my *aliyah* began to resemble that of the Jews in the desert prior to their entrance into *Eretz Yisrael*. Three of my four daughters were already settled in Efrat and my fourth daughter hoped to make the move soon. Four of her six children were already living in Israel. I was blessed to see the family growing to the point that it was a virtual *chamulah* (large group). I refer to twenty-four grandchildren and forty-two great-grandchildren, most of whom are living in Israel.

I began the challenging job of collecting the necessary official papers vital to becoming a candidate for Israeli citizenship. One such required document had to state that I was Jewish. How does a rabbi comply with such a request? I had to certify countless congregants as to their Jewish religion, but do I write a letter about myself? Since I had completed my rabbinic tenure, I was now attending services in a very friendly Chabad

shul. I approached the rabbi and asked him if he would certify that I am Jewish. He gave me a funny look (possibly worried that he had erroneously counted me for a *minyán*), after which I explained the reason. No problem ... he had done this many times in the past.

By this time, I had arrived in Israel and my wife and I had rented a very nice *dirah* (apartment) in Efrat. I went through all the necessary details of opening a bank account, registering here and there, and many other tasks. I felt that it was good practice for entering *Olam Haba* (the Next World) in the future.

If I was helpful to my daughters while they were growing up, they certainly repaid me tenfold in this undertaking. They made innumerable calls for me as they were being switched from one office to another. Utilizing their rapid Hebrew, they obtained all my required documents and made the ultimate appointment for me, with the help of Nefesh B'Nefesh.

It was a great day when I received my final interview, had my picture taken, and was told that I am now a citizen of Israel! I carry this citizenship card (*teudat oleh*) proudly at all times and now understand the adage that the captain has joined the ship in its harbor.

It is wonderful being a citizen of Israel, the country I have loved and cared about my entire life. I no longer feel like a visitor. One of the exciting times was prior to the recent elections. Now that I could vote, my relatives, especially my grandchildren of voting age, assaulted me with the names of candidates whom I had never heard of and issues that I knew nothing about. In America, the general rule of thumb is to avoid discussing religion and politics. In Israel, it seems to be just the opposite. So I just nodded my head sagely to all the advice in the happy knowledge that my ballot would be cast in the strictest privacy.

Born in Germany in 1931, as an eight-year-old boy I narrowly escaped the Holocaust with my parents and siblings, traveling via England to New York. My dream was always to make *aliyah*. Now, eight decades later, I have finally come home.

CONCLUSION

IN its young life of statehood, Israel has accomplished miraculous things in every area — agriculture, technology, the military, medical research, scientific advances, Torah study, innovation, and the arts. But some miracles have yet to be achieved.

I was speaking with a childhood friend who lives abroad. We speak a couple of times a year. Religion and politics are always skirted over but mentioned nonetheless. Sentences like “Israel is a war zone” or “Arabs are suffering under the Israeli regime” creep into the conversation. Ignorance is not bliss.

The next day I was taking a bus home. A religious soldier who looked like he had come off duty was standing near me. I offered him my seat. He declined. Then he had a phone conversation. It was a couple of days after a terrorist ramming attack where two soldiers were killed. Two young men at the beginning of their lives were dead at the bloody hands of a terrorist. Does anyone condemn them? No! This soldier was talking about another soldier who had been injured and was recovering from his wounds. It wasn't clear whether he had been injured in that attack or the one the day after. So this soldier was

talking about his condition and from what I heard he was going to be all right. Thank God! While listening to the conversation, I started to cry.

The bus we were on goes through Petach Tikva toward the Arab village of Kfar Kassem. The bus driver is an Arab, as are many of the passengers. No oppression. No war zone, just a soldier upset about his comrade in arms, injured while protecting, among others, the passengers on the bus.

We have a way to go before the lion and the lamb are bedfellows.

Elor Azaria, who was sentenced to fourteen months in prison for shooting a terrorist who had just killed a fellow soldier and appeared to still be dangerous, had his sentence reduced by one-third. While the world is bemoaning and condemning Israel's treatment of Arabs, a young man had had to sit in prison for close to a year for the audacious crime of killing a terrorist who had shot his friend before his eyes and was out for more blood. To appease the Left, the media, my friend... But no one was appeased.

We bury young men, little children, parents and grandparents, people going about their lives or sitting defenselessly in their homes, may God have mercy, and the world still condemns us as aggressors and as occupiers, guilty of the crime of wanting to live in the land of our forefathers, the land of our children.

However we celebrate each Independence Day — in synagogue with prayers, on the streets watching fireworks, at home watching the International Bible Quiz on livestream and the ceremony awarding the Israel Prize to those who have contributed to Israel's achievements — we also celebrate having one of the ubiquitous barbeques that seem to be almost a law in Israel on Yom Ha'atzmaut, both imitative of our American friends and reminiscent of the offerings in the Holy Temples. While we're celebrating, we can't forget the price we have paid and are still paying for our beloved little country. The world is blinded by the light that we shine upon the nations and they can't differentiate

between right and wrong, true and false, victim and aggressor. This includes Jews worldwide, who are under-appreciative of the security Israel provides should they need to escape their Diaspora homes.

There is only one thing that will secure us forever and bring Mashiach. Only if we come home; return to our ancient and modern homeland Israel, where we can together raise our voices against soldiers being imprisoned for killing terrorists and drown out the cacophony of the world protesting against us, no matter what we do.

Israel is a land of miracles where the air is redolent with holiness, history, jasmine, orange blossoms, and pine. Some miracles have yet to be achieved. But all of us, together, can help make them happen.

Come celebrate Israel — this year in Jerusalem.

Rosally Saltsman

Appeared in *The Jewish Floridian*.

For inspiring stories of life in Israel:

Only in Israel on Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/OnlyInIsrael/>

GLOSSARY

<i>Ad 120 shanah</i>	Till 120 years; the blessing given for long life
<i>Aliyah</i>	(Lit., ascent) The term used for immigrating to Israel
<i>Aliyos</i>	Honors of being called up to the Torah
<i>Alon</i>	Oak tree (also a boy's name)
<i>Am Echad Kadosh</i>	One holy nation
<i>Am Yisrael Chai</i>	The people of Israel live (also a song by the same name)
<i>Amidah</i>	A prayer said at every prayer service, also called <i>Shmoneh Esreh</i>
<i>Artzot Habrit</i>	The United States
<i>Ba'al Teshuvah</i>	A returnee to Judaism, a male who becomes religious (also <i>ba'alat teshuvah</i> [fem.], <i>ba'alei teshuvah</i> [masc. pl.], <i>ba'alot teshuvah</i> [fem. pl.]
<i>Baruch Hashem</i>	(Lit., Blessed is God) Thank God
<i>Beis Din</i>	Rabbinical court
<i>Beis Midrash</i>	Study hall

<i>Beit HaEdut</i>	House of Testimony
<i>Ben Torah</i>	Someone who is knowledgeable in Torah learning
<i>B'hatzlachah</i>	(Wishing you) Good Luck
<i>Biat HaMashiach</i>	The coming of Mashiach, the Messiah
<i>Bikurim</i>	The first fruits, brought to the Temple in ancient times
<i>Bimah</i>	Raised platform in a synagogue from which the Torah is read
<i>Birkat HaGomel</i>	A blessing made after having been delivered from danger or potential danger
<i>Bitachon</i>	Faith
<i>Bnei Akiva</i>	An Orthodox Jewish youth group
<i>Bochurim</i>	Young men
<i>Bo</i>	Come
<i>Brachah</i>	Blessing
<i>Brit Milah/Bris</i>	Ritual circumcision and the celebration of it
<i>Caspmat</i>	ATM machine (a play on the words <i>kessef</i> [money] and automatic)
<i>Chag Sameach!</i>	Happy Holiday!
<i>Chamulah</i>	(Arabic) A large group of people, usually family
<i>Chareidim</i>	Ultra-Orthodox Jews
<i>Chassan</i>	Yiddish pronunciation of chattan, bridegroom
<i>Chasunah</i>	Yiddish pronunciation of <i>chatunah</i> , wedding
<i>Chilonim</i>	Secular Jews
<i>Chizuk</i>	Strength (as in giving strength to someone)
<i>Cholent</i>	Also known as <i>chamin</i> ; a stew prepared before and cooked over Shabbat on a

	hotplate or in a crockpot to be eaten with the Shabbat meal
<i>Chol Hamoed</i>	The intermediate days of the holidays of Passover and Sukkot
<i>Chuppah</i>	Wedding canopy
<i>Dayan</i>	Rabbinical judge
<i>Davening</i>	Prayers, praying
<i>Dirah</i>	Apartment
<i>Eema</i>	Mother
<i>Eichah</i>	The Biblical book of Lamentations
<i>Eliyahu Hanavi</i>	Elijah the Prophet
<i>Eretz Yisrael</i>	The Land of Israel
<i>Erez</i>	Cedar tree (also a boy's name)
<i>Eruv</i>	A border delineating the area in which one can carry on the Sabbath (T'chum Shabbat)
<i>Frum</i>	(Yiddish) Religious
<i>Frummed out</i>	Became very religious
<i>Gabbai</i>	Synagogue manager
<i>Galut</i>	Exile; the Diaspora (outside Israel)
<i>Gehinnom</i>	Purgatory
<i>Gemara</i>	The Talmud
<i>Gemarakup</i>	Someone who has a head for Talmud study
<i>Gematria</i>	Jewish numerology
<i>Goyim</i>	Non-Jews
<i>Hachnasat Sefer Torah</i>	The celebration accompanying the completion of writing a Torah scroll
<i>Hachsharah</i>	A program that prepares individuals for <i>aliyah</i>
<i>Hagba'ah</i>	Raising the Torah
<i>Halachah</i>	Jewish Law
<i>Hashem</i>	God (lit., the Name)

<i>Hashgachah pratit</i>	Divine providence
<i>Hesder</i>	A program combining learning in a yeshiva and serving in the army
<i>Kapoteh</i>	A silk coat worn by Chassidic Jews
<i>Ken yirbu</i>	So may they increase or multiply (usually referring to children)
<i>Kibbud</i>	Honor
<i>Kibbudim</i>	Honors
<i>Kibbutz Galuyot</i>	The ingathering of the exiles (i.e., returning to Israel from all over the world)
<i>Kiddush</i>	A prayer over wine said evening and morning on Shabbat and Jewish festivals before the meal
<i>Kippah</i>	Skullcap
<i>Kittel</i>	A white robe worn by a groom or on Yom Kippur
<i>Kivrei Tzaddikim</i>	Graves of the righteous
<i>K'neine Hora</i>	Without giving an evil eye
<i>Koach</i>	Strength
<i>Kohanim</i>	The Temple Priests
<i>Kohen</i>	A family name indicating ancestry from Aaron, the High Priest
<i>Kollel</i>	Yeshiva for married men
<i>Kotel</i>	The Western Wall
<i>L'ilui nishmat</i>	In memory of (lit., for the elevation of the soul of)
<i>L'olam</i>	Forever
<i>Lo Lema'achal</i>	Non-edible
<i>Machatunim</i>	Child's in-laws
<i>Madrich/ah</i>	Counselor
<i>Makolet</i>	Grocery store
<i>Mama Loshen</i>	Mother tongue; another name for Yiddish

<i>Mazal/Mazel Tov</i>	Congratulations
<i>Merkaz klitah</i>	Absorption center
<i>Minyan</i>	A quorum of ten men for prayer (pl. minyanim)
<i>Mishkafayim</i>	Eyeglasses
<i>Morati</i>	My teacher (for a female teacher)
<i>Moshav</i>	Cooperative settlement
<i>Neshamah</i>	Soul
<i>Neshamot Yisrael</i>	Jewish souls
<i>Ofanayim</i>	Bicycle
<i>Oleh/Olah/Olim/Olot</i>	New immigrant/s
<i>Olam Haba</i>	The Next World
<i>Parnassah</i>	A livelihood
<i>Parshah</i>	Weekly Torah portion
<i>Pesach</i>	Passover
<i>Peyos/peyot</i>	Sidelocks
<i>Rav</i>	Rabbi
<i>Rebbe</i>	Jewish studies teacher or rabbi of a Chassidic group
<i>Refuah shleimah</i>	A complete recovery/healing
<i>Refusenik</i>	The term referring to a Russian Jew who had applied for an exit visa and had been refused and imprisoned
<i>Rechov</i>	Street
<i>Sabra</i>	A prickly pear, a fruit indigenous to Israel that is prickly on the outside but soft and sweet on the inside, and the nickname for native-born Israelis
<i>Seder</i>	A special meal held on Passover, during which the story of the miraculous Exodus from Egypt is recounted
<i>Sefer</i>	Book
<i>Sefer Torah</i>	Torah scroll

<i>Seudah</i>	Festive meal
<i>Shabbos</i>	Shabbat, the Sabbath
<i>Shacharit/Shacharis</i>	The morning prayers
<i>Shaliach</i>	Representative from Israel
<i>Sham</i>	There
<i>Shemen</i>	Oil
<i>Shep naches</i>	Derive pleasure and pride
<i>Sheva Brachot</i>	A celebratory meal held during the week following marriage where, in the presence of a <i>minyán</i> , seven blessings are recited
<i>Shfoch Chamatcha</i>	A portion of the <i>seder</i> , where the door is opened to admit Elijah the Prophet who visits every <i>seder</i>
<i>Shiur</i>	Class (pl. <i>shiurim</i>)
<i>Shomer Shabbos</i>	Shabbos observant
<i>Shul</i>	Synagogue
<i>Sigd</i>	An Ethiopian festival celebrating Jerusalem
<i>Simanim</i>	Signs or symbols
<i>Simchah</i>	Happiness or celebration
<i>Shmittah</i>	The Sabbatical year
<i>Sofer</i>	(Torah) Scribe
<i>Sponja</i>	Squeegee stick; also the act of cleaning the floor with it
<i>Sukkah</i>	A temporary living structure where Jews eat and sleep during the holiday of Sukkot/Sukkos, the Feast of Tabernacles, as well as the name for the booths lived in during this holiday
<i>Tefillin</i>	Phylacteries
<i>Teshuvah</i>	Answer or return/repentance
<i>Teudat Oleh</i>	Certificate of <i>Aliyah</i>

<i>Tisha B'Av</i>	The ninth day of the Jewish month of Av, a day of mourning commemorating many tragedies in Jewish history, foremost among them the destruction of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem
<i>Todah (Rabbah)</i>	Thank you (very much)
<i>Tu B'Shvat</i>	The fifteenth of the Hebrew month of Shvat, celebrating the New Year of the Trees
<i>Tzipita Liyeshuah</i>	You have awaited salvation
<i>Ulpan</i>	Hebrew-language class for new immigrants
<i>Wadi</i>	Arab word for valley
<i>Yad Shtayim</i>	Second-hand (a classifieds column)
<i>Yahrzeit</i>	Anniversary of a death
<i>Yeshiva</i>	Religious school of higher learning
<i>Yeshuv</i>	Community or settlement
<i>Yidden</i>	Jews (Yiddish)
<i>Yiddishkeit</i>	Judaism (Yiddish)
<i>Yisrael</i>	Israel (also a boy's name after the Patriarch Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel)
<i>Yom Ha'atzmaut</i>	Israel Independence Day
<i>Yom HaShoah</i>	Holocaust Remembrance Day
<i>Zechut</i>	Merit
<i>Z"l Zichrono/a livracha</i>	May his/her memory be for a blessing
<i>Zt"l Zecher Tzaddik livracha</i>	May the memory of the righteous one be for a blessing

OTHER TITLES BY ROSALLY SALTSMAN AND ROBIN MEYERSON:

From This World to the Next: Amazing True Stories about Jewish Burial and the Afterlife. Available through NASCK

www.nasck.org/product/from-this-world-to-the-next-amazing-true-stories-about-jewish-burial-and-the-afterlife/

Celebrating Shabbos: Inspiring True Stories that Warm the Heart and Uplift the Soul

Drawing Closer: Inspiring Stories of Small Acts of Kiruv with a Big Impact

These latter two books are available from Robin Meyerson.

Contact her at robinjdm@gmail.com.