

Parents' Perspective on Their Children's Aliyah:

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly (It's All Good)

What motivated some of our children to make aliyah? Nothing comes from nothing.

Many of my mother's relatives emigrated from Germany to Israel prior to World War II. Due to Hitler, *yimach shemo*, my mother, as a teenager, lived in Palestine from 1936-39, where her brother was stoned in the Jaffa riots. Her father could not make a living there so he brought his family to the United States, always retaining his love and connection to Eretz Yisrael and its people. My parents were both active members of *Hapoel Hamizrachi*. My mom regularly went to Israeli dancing classes and to ulpan classes to improve her Hebrew. I am named for her Uncle Meir, and rather than give me an anglicized version of Meir, she preferred the Hebrew name Meira — not a common name for an American Jewish girl when I was a child.

At Maimonides School in Boston, founded by Rav Soloveitchik, Hebrew language was emphasized. I had an amazing Israeli Hebrew teacher, Mar Lamdan (that was really his name!), and as a result learned to be fairly fluent in Hebrew. In those days, college students spent their junior year in Israel. My year came out right after the Six-Day War in 1967. It was not an easy decision for my parents to decide to allow me to go to Israel



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for a year — not only were there no cell phones then, there was barely any phone service. I spoke to them twice the whole year by going to the central post office and making an appointment to call them at a later time.

My husband and I were brought up with Bnei Akiva youth groups in our formative years. After getting married, we visited Israel for three weeks. We spoke Hebrew with our children until they were about three years old — when it became too difficult for us to convey concepts. When my husband began getting partial Sabbaticals (Pesach to Rosh Hashanah), we spent them in Yerushalayim, learning Torah and experiencing as much of Israel as we could. This certainly impacted profoundly on our children. We even showed them the graves we bought for ourselves for after 120, in Eretz HaChaim in Bet Shemesh. It came with a lesson from my husband that we are now able to keep *shemita* by owning *karka* (land) in Israel and not working it during the *shemita* year. Eight of our nine children attended Yeshiva University, Stern College or the Yeshiva University S. Daniel

Abraham Israel Program. All spent at least one year learning in Israel after high school. Batsheva, our seventh child, was the first to make aliyah during her *shana bet* year.

Here are our children's responses when asked what motivated them to make aliyah:

- I grew up in a very Zionist home and once I realized I was presented with an opportunity to make living in Israel my reality, I took it! Israel is our homeland and I love being home.
- Israel is the home of the Jewish people. For nearly 2,000 years, we were denied access to our home, but that changed in 1948.
- My husband wanted to.
- I was raised in a Modern Orthodox, Zionist home, but my schooling was predominantly Yeshivish. Because most of my friends were Yeshivish and I had opted to go to a Zionist yeshiva high school, I needed to figure out where I stood. As a high-schooler, Modern Orthodox and Yeshivish seemed like opposite sides of the spectrum. I felt neither here nor there. My parents let me

I would like to thank my husband, Rabbi Edward Davis for his collaboration on this article.

visit Israel during winter break of eleventh grade. Something clicked while I was in Israel and I just knew that it is where I belong. A huge motivating factor for me was that two of my siblings already resided in Israel.

- *Tzionut*. My husband and I, each, separately and together, wanted to make aliyah from a young age. We both believe that Jews belong in Israel and wanted to raise our family there - we wanted to “come home.”

Distance Makes the Heart...

None of our children live closer than 1,100 miles to us. Four of them have made aliyah. Akiva and Sara and family and Elana and Oren Wener and family live in Hashmonaim. Batsheva and Gilad Adamit and family live in Neve Tzuf and Ariella is in Givat Shmuel. Our other five children and their families are in the northeastern United States — Dani and Chaya in Edison, NJ, Tamar and Allan Galper in Brookline, MA, Shoshana and Marc Lerman in Riverdale, NY, Shira and Jesse Mandell in New York City and Rena and Gabi Wittlin in Kew Gardens Hills, NY.

One of our *mechutanim* jokes with us about our children making aliyah: “We taught them so many things, why is *this* what they had to listen to?”

There is a midrash in the beginning of *Lech L'chah* (Breishit Rabbah 39:7) which states that Hashem

purposefully recorded Terach's death before Avraham “made *Aliyah*.” In actuality, Avraham's father was still alive when Avraham left Charan to move to Canaan. Hashem told Avraham that He exempted Avraham from the mitzvah of *kibbud av va'em*, honoring one's parents, in order to make aliyah. In the Midrash, Hashem says “I exempt no one else from this duty.” This is a powerful midrash because of its application to the modern situation. In our family situation, we as parents are very pleased with our childrens' decision to make aliyah, yet we are aware of the possible Halachic issue when these two *mitzvot* conflict.

A big challenge of having family divided between two continents is the pain of physical separation for long periods of time, difficulty in sharing in each other's simchas, and for children and grandchildren to spend time with each other. Phone communication can be hampered by the big difference in time zones. My husband and I feel *bishvili nivra* WhatsApp (WhatsApp was created for me), which enables our entire family, wherever they are, to share texts, news, pictures and videos at any given moment — a treasured gift. With other audio-visual technology options, i.e. Skype, Facetime, Google Hangouts, we can “visit” and “see” each other in real time. A true bracha. For me, this reinforces the much greater sacrifice of people who made aliyah years ago and the difficulty

for their out-of-Israel family to be in contact with each other.

Recently, my dear father, Mr. Erwin Katz, a”h passed away. The funeral service was in Brookline, MA. Our children and older grandchildren in Israel — who had each contributed some thoughts to be included in the *hespedim* (eulogies) — gathered together. Via the funeral home's high quality webcast, they viewed it together and felt as if they were at the funeral.

Traveling to Israel is expensive, time-consuming and draining. It makes it much harder to visit a child to help out for a birth or a crisis or while a husband is in army reserve duty. It is difficult for us not to be able to be there when needed, but our children have grown stronger as a result and are there for each other in every way.

Two of our daughters were married around Chanukah 2013. The weddings were planned to be ten days apart in New York and Massachusetts, so everyone from Israel could be present at both simchas. Only Hashem knows when that will happen again.

The Challenges

The Talmud, *Brachot* 5a, quotes Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai:

רבי שמעון בן יוחאי אומר: שלש מתנות טובות נתן הקדוש ברוך הוא לישראל, וכולן לא נתנן אלא על - ידי יסורין. אלו הן: תורה וארץ ישראל והעולם הבא.

R. Shimon b. Yochai says: Hashem gave three precious gifts to Israel – Torah, Eretz Yisrael and the World to Come. All three were given with struggles and challenges.

Our family is experiencing the struggles and challenges of Eretz Yisrael.

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Our children's perspectives on their biggest challenges of living in Israel:

- As a family, a challenge is finding affordable housing (to purchase a home). We currently live in a place a little more affordable due to our surrounding "cousins." Many of the people in the neighboring Arab villages do not like us (putting that *very* mildly) and make life a bit more complicated. Making smart decisions (taking security measures, being careful where you drive...) and having real faith are a must.
- Getting used to a 6-day work week. Really miss those Sundays!
- Missing family members who are not with us.
- Lower salaries.
- Being far away from our family in America is the biggest challenge I believe we face on an emotional level. There are hardships we encounter now and then with the language or not having an "in" or the *protektzia* that Israelis have. We're learning things along with our kids as they experience new things we've never done — *bagruyot, tzav rishon* from the army, and so forth — so we can't provide the support Israeli parents might be able to provide to their kids. But overall, I believe the biggest challenge proves to be the emotional one of being apart from our families who live far away.
- Adapting to the new culture, education system and healthcare system. Language is also a big challenge for some of us. But the real killer here is Sunday, or the lack thereof. Saturday night is a school night, which is something we may never come to terms with.
- Being conspicuous as an American or "*olah chadashah*"

— someone who is clearly not a native Israeli. Whatever the giveaway might be, my subtle yet present accent, my Western/religious fashion sense, my ethnic look, my gentle and patient mannerisms, most Israelis eventually pick up that I was not born and bred in Israel. It might sound like a petty challenge, but here are some less-than-desired reactions I have gotten when people realize I am American:

1. The price for whatever I wanted to buy went up because American equals wealthy in their eyes.
2. Marriage proposals, because American means rich.
3. An Israeli will speak to me in broken English. Annoying, because I learned Hebrew and now the conversation will be much longer, because I can't understand the broken English. My frustration translates into: I work hard on integrating into your society – so why can't you let me blend in instead of pointing me out as a foreigner.
4. And finally the most common reaction: "You're from America? Why on earth did you move here? Are you crazy?" I don't respond to this anymore, because if someone is asking this, they don't respect your decisions in life and will not respect your response. **The bright side:** 1. Being American has the advantage of knowing English which is a necessity to get into most lucrative fields in Israel. 2. American mannerisms may be perceived as "soft" and "very un-Israeli", yet are beneficial to Israeli society. I am often complimented on my patience and gentle manner in dealing with people. 3. Native Israelis are conspicuous at times.

If my "American-ness" makes me conspicuous, so be it – there are worse things I could be.

- A teenage grandchild's perspective: Personally, my biggest challenge here in Israel is the language. Even after eight years in Israel, I still struggle so much in school and it's mostly because I have a barrier that I cannot break down when it comes to Hebrew.

No Sundays (or *Shabbat Shenit Shel Galuyot*, as we now refer to Sunday)

We are blessed that our children look for every opportunity to get together. In Israel this is particularly daunting since there are no Sundays off and the children go to school six days a week. They really appreciate Chol Hamoed and summer vacations when they have a block of days with no school.

Financial Struggles

Many *olim* take a big cut in salary to live in Israel. Living on an Israeli salary is not so easy. Real estate prices in prime areas are exorbitant. Although some of our children in Israel work for less pay than they received in the U.S., they enjoy and appreciate their quality of life.

Healthcare System

Our children have, for the most part, done well with their various health-care providers in the Israeli socialized medicine system, Baruch Hashem. Occasionally, one needs to wait a long time for a referral to a doctor or specialist. Our mentality for medical treatment is: if you need it, get it. Sometimes we have encouraged the children to go to a private doctor at our expense so that they can be attended to in a timely manner. We have occasionally called on the kind physicians in our shul, who know our children, to consult about certain

situations. Baruch Hashem, everyone is well.

Do you Know Where your Children Are?

Safety and security are on every parent's mind, and especially for those with children living in Israel. Our children have shared many emotional and frightening incidents of proximity to terrorist activity — from the rockets in the past few years, crashes at the Jerusalem light rail stations, to being stoned on the road. There is no dearth of things to “worry” about. Here is an email we received in the fall of 2011, during Gaza rocket barrages, from our newly-married daughter when they moved to Beersheva.

Eema and Abba,

Here is an update on what's going on here.

Gilad came back to Beersheva last night because classes resumed at the university today. I told him I wasn't returning until there were at least 2 days of quiet. This afternoon I got on a bus to come to Beersheva. I walked into our apt at about 6:20. At 6:43, just 20 minutes later, a loud siren starts blaring (I had to open the window to make sure for a second cuz I have major paranoia and think a car revving its engine is a siren). I panicked cuz I realized Gilad was biking home and I didn't know where he was. That second I heard the stairwell door close. Gilad had just made it back to our building, threw his bike to the side and ran upstairs to get me to run into the stairwell (since the bomb shelter is too far). We stood there with a bunch of our neighbors and listened to a lot of noise which we found out afterwards was the Iron Dome- which had successfully intercepted one of the rockets, but had missed the other. The noise was the sound of the interception of one rocket and the landing and exploding of the

other. Very scary.

We finished our conversations with the neighbors, keeping their little kids occupied and happy and returned to our apt. So much for a ceasefire ... I can't go to the grocery store because I don't wanna be outside so I'm gonna order online and have them deliver straight to my door ... At times like this a lot of emuna (faith) and tefilla (prayer) are in order.

*Love you both very much,
Batsheva*

Here is an emotionally-draining WhatsApp message we received from Ariella this past summer:

Just had my first siren that I had to pull the car over, get out and lie on the burning hot ground with my hands on my head praying that the debris from the extremely close and very loud rocket explosion weren't gonna kill me. I may have cried and said a perek of tehillim. That was officially the worst siren I've ever experienced seemingly because I knew my hands weren't gonna protect me from anything!

I remember how alarmed I was when our two sons were at YU in the 1990s and reported on the dangers of the neighborhood at that time. Incidents happen in other places occasionally, but in Israel, there is an all-too-steady diet of it.

Bottom line: trust in Hashem.

Only in Eretz Yisrael

Chesed

In Israel, *chesed* can be found in abundance everywhere. The country itself is a shining example to the world as a first responder to world calamities such as Haiti and the Tsunami — as well as within Israel during time of crises. Our children are a part of what



Israelis do for one another — opening their homes to those living in war or rocket zones, bringing goodies to the soldiers manning the Iron Dome installations near them and sending supplies to the soldiers on the front. This past summer, our 15-year-old granddaughter ran a one-day program in Hashmonaim for residents and merchants from the South, bussing them in to provide respite from rockets and an opportunity to sell their wares.

Army Service

Then there's the army: children in *miluim* (reserve duty) leaving their families for several weeks and grandchildren going into the IDF. This has certainly spurred me to increase my *emunah* and *bitachon* in Hashem — and especially my davening. I try not to worry, and to put all my trust in Hashem.

Here We Go Again

Our connection to Eretz Yisrael grows stronger as we visit more frequently

than we used to — so we can spend time with our family and participate in the life-cycle events of our Israeli children and grandchildren. We schlep the maximum amount of allowed weight in our luggage, trying to fill all the requests for the American products and other items they request. One of my friends has all her children living in Israel. She goes loaded with stuff and often asks people to take something small for her. When her children pressure her to move to Israel, she responds, “And who is going to send you all the stuff you want/need from America?”

Anglo Connections

The informal Anglo support groups are helpful for our children. Our daughter, Ariella, lives in Givat Shmuel where the singles invite each other over for meals, fix each other up and run some activities for themselves. Our married children have mostly English-speaking couples as friends. The cultural divide is palpable but not always insurmountable.

Torat Eretz Yisrael

We see our children being very connected to the Land of Israel and the *mitzvot* related to living in Eretz Yisrael - *teruma, maaser, shemita, orla* and more, learning the Torah and historical connections to where they live and to places all over the country. Our grandchildren are active members of Bnei Akiva with the motto – *Torah Ve'Avodah*.

Hashmonaim

Almost all of our grandchildren in Israel live in Hashmonaim. Our special connection to there is two-fold. First, our daughter-in-law Sara's grandparents were pioneers of that *yishuv* (settlement). Second, before our

children made aliyah, my husband was consulted about appropriating assets of the defunct Glenwood Jewish Center in Brooklyn to some yishuv in Israel. He encouraged this and was pleasantly surprised to find the shul where our children daven in Hashmonaim bearing that name. We enjoy the community very much when we are there. It's socially comfortable as there are a large percentage of Anglos there — and we know many of them from various parts of our lives.

In Retrospect

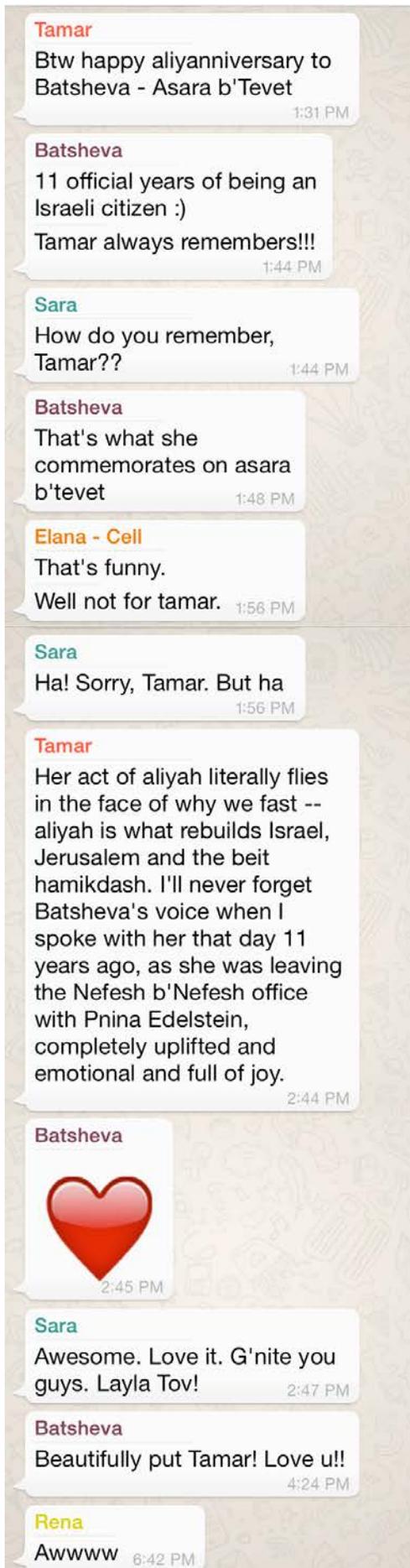
Comments from our children about any regrets related to their aliyah:

- The only regret I have is not doing any National Service. I would have loved to do *sheirut le'umi*, but I came with the American mentality of going straight to university after high school which is what I did.
- Regrets: that we didn't come sooner when real estate prices were more reasonable.
- No regrets – I don't see how doing things differently could have or would have changed anything. Maybe coming sooner, but we did okay.
- No regrets.
- A minor regret that I did not do a second year of National Service... it would have been an excellent opportunity to continue improving my Hebrew before beginning university. I think many American *olim* feel pressured to start university as soon as possible because of their American mentality, when it is not the reality or mentality of Israelis.

Final question to our children: What do you like best about living in Israel and what are the biggest benefits you

or your family have accrued as a result of living in Israel?

- We live in Israel — that alone is the greatest thing. We made it. We've returned to our homeland where we believe we belong. Of course, finding good friends and support systems are important, too, and thank God we've found those as well. The biggest benefits are that our children are growing up here, living and loving the land, knowing our history, being proud to be Jewish.
- A grandchild's response: One good thing about living in Israel is the freedom. Teenagers in Israel have a lot more freedom than teenagers in America have. Here in Israel, my friends and I can go out almost at any time we want without an adult accompanying us. We can take a bus from city to city without any kind of safety threat.
- Cheaper tuition. Living on a *dati yishuv* where the kids run around free on Shabbat with no worries.
- Israel is still in the Pre-Amber Alert Age. Children are able to be much more independent in this environment which benefits both their development and their quality of life. Religiously, there are obvious benefits to living in a Jewish country.
- I love that Hebrew, the *loshon hakodesh*, is the “mother tongue” here. It makes Torah and all our rabbinic commentary and literature so accessible and that much easier to learn. I love that my kids will grow up with a leg up in terms of Torah learning.
- I met my wonderful husband here in Israel where we live in a completely religious *yishuv* without having to worry about cars on Shabbat, etc. An amazing



life with incredible people.

- Israel is our home – the home of the Jewish People. Our roots are buried deep here and our blood is splattered all over this Land — the Land where our Forefathers are buried and the home of our Holy Sites. This Land has infused me with a passion and love for the Jewish People that I never felt before.

Concluding Thoughts

Bikitzur, as they say in Israel, we are very proud of how all our children have adapted to half the family being across the world, as painful as that separation has been for some. Baruch Hashem for Nefesh B'Nefesh under the leadership of Rabbi Josh Fass to whom we are deeply grateful. They have effectively eliminated the massive governmental bureaucratic barrier to making aliyah and transformed it into a user-friendly (formerly an unknown concept in Israel) experience. They are a real support group for *olim*, long after the actual aliyah.

We are very thankful that Hashem has created technology to keep us very connected. With humor, patience and great *emunah* and *bitachon Bahashem* we are navigating the challenges together.

The sidebar features a WhatsApp family conversation on Asara B'Tevet, which marks the date of the first child in our family to make aliya and live far away. I think this give and take aptly describes the sad emotions of separation and the humor, joy, pride, love and idealism of our family in Israel and America.

We are very proud of our children's decision to live in Eretz Yisrael, even with the challenges that result from their aliyah.

ותקרבנה בנות צלפחד וגו' גדולה להן וגדולה לאביהן גדולה למכיר וגדולה ליוסף שכך יצאו ממנו נשים, חכמות וצדקניות.
במדבר רבה, פרשת פנחס פרשה כא

The daughters of Tzelafchad approached ... it brought greatness to them and greatness to their ancestors, Machir and Yosef because these wise righteous women came from them.

Bamidbar Rabbah, Pinchas no. 21

In the Torah narrative in *Parashat Shelach*, the daughters of Tzelafchad demonstrated tremendous love for Eretz Yisrael by requesting to inherit their father's land. The laws of how women inherit land were included in the Torah based on their merit. The Midrash states that their request to possess their father's portion of land in Israel, brought greatness to their ancestors, Machir and Yosef. Similarly, our children have brought great pride to us through demonstrating their love for Eretz Yisrael.

כֹּה אָמַר ה' קוֹל בְּרָמָה נִשְׁמָע נְהִי בְּכִי תִמְרוּרִים רָחֵל מְבַכָּה עַל בְּנֵיהָ מֵאֲנָה לְהִנָּחֵם עַל בְּנֵיהָ כִּי אֵינָנּוּ: כֹּה אָמַר ה' מִנְעִי קוֹלְךָ מִבְּכִי וְשִׁינִיךָ מִדְּמָעָה כִּי יֵשׁ שִׁכָּר לְפַעֲלֹתֶךָ נְאֻם ה' וְשָׁבוּ מֵאֶרֶץ אוֹיְבֵי: וְיֵשׁ תִּקְוָה לְאַחֲרִיתֶךָ נְאֻם ה' וְשָׁבוּ בְּנִים לְגִבּוֹלָם: יִרְמִיָּהוּ לֵא: יד-טז

Thus said the Lord: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are not. Thus said the Lord: Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears; for thy work shall be rewarded, said the Lord; and they shall come back from the land of the enemy. And there is hope for thy future, said the LORD; and thy children shall return to their own border.

Jeremiah 31:14-16