



WELCOME HOME!

## GO HOME JACOB

**W**hen we married sixteen years ago, we were on the “five year aliyah plan.” Rebecca would get her doctorate in psychology, and Elie would finish law school and start a career as a corporate lawyer — because it was realistic for an American to practice corporate law in Israel. We had our plan!

But as we soon learned, life was more complicated than our plan. Elie wasn't satisfied with corporate law and began exploring assistant rabbi positions. Before we knew it, we were pursuing a different dream, and living a deeply meaningful and interesting life as a community Rabbi and Rebbetzin. We got our feet wet at the Young Israel of Staten Island, and came to Congregation Suburban Torah in Livingston, NJ, eight years ago — where we immediately threw ourselves into the joys and challenges of community life.

The rabbinate is all-encompassing; between long-term projects, lifecycle crises, and the day-to-day intensity of work and family life, the aliyah dream slowly moved to the backburner of our consciousness. The cognitive dissonance of believing in the imperative of aliyah while working day and night to build up a community in the Diaspora was simply too great — and so we tried not to think about it, at least not too often.

But just beneath the surface the yearning was always there, periodically muscling its way to the forefront of our minds and shouting for attention. The inevitable disappointment of the American Yom Ha'atzmaut experience; the pang of jealousy we felt when hearing that another friend was making aliyah. As one sibling after another moved across the ocean, we couldn't help but feel left behind. Most of all, it was the yearning that

every Jew feels, the cry of the soul that G-d directs to every one of us: “And I will put my spirit in you, and you will come to life, and I will place you in your own land...” (Yechezkel 37:14)

When we shared our aliyah plans with the Livingston community, we were astounded by the reaction. The vast majority of the congregation reacted in the same way: “We wish we were going too!” Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlop writes that “the nature of a Jew is opposed to exile, and is constantly seeking ways to leave exile and return to the root of his nature” (*Mei Marom*, Volume 6, Chapter 57). It's one thing to read these words, but quite another to see and hear this yearning expressed throughout the community.

Still, why *now*? Why give up meaningful jobs that we both love and are deeply grateful for to make aliyah this summer? The answer is multilayered.

With children already in high school, we feel the clock is ticking. In a few years, our older children will be graduating high school and leaving home. Though we are far from old, our window for making aliyah together as a family is closing.

On a deeper level, turning forty this year strikes us as an opportune time to take the leap. The Mishna in *Pirkei Avos* teaches that “with the age of forty comes understanding.” The source of the Mishna’s teaching is a verse from Moshe’s final message to the people of Israel, after forty years in the desert: “But Hashem did not give you a heart to understand, or eyes to see, or ears to hear until this day” (Devarim 29:3). The people of Israel achieved a new level of understanding of life as they entered the land after forty years of wandering in exile — a transformation we hope to experience ourselves.

At the same time, our decision to make aliyah is based on more than purely personal considerations. In the last two years alone, we’ve seen a spate of anti-Semitic attacks in America, from extremists on both the left and the right. Never before has our community felt so vulnerable, and so afraid to speak its mind. Rav Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, in an oft-quoted passage, explains that we are experiencing a pattern of events that has repeated itself throughout our exile:

היודע קורות הימים והמצולות אשר שטפו  
באלפי שנים על עם המעט והרפה כח וחדל  
אונים הנה דרך ההשגחה, כי ינחו משך שנים  
קרוב למאה או מאתים ואחר זה יקום רוח  
סערה ויפוצ המון גליו וכלה יבלה, יהרוס  
ישטוף לא יחמול, עד כי נפזרים בדודים ירוצו,  
יברחו למקום רחוק ושם יתאחדו, יהיו לגוי,  
יגדל תורתם, חכמתם יעשו חיל, עד כי ישכח  
היותו גר בארץ נכריה, יחשוב, כי זה מקום  
מחצבתו, בל יצפה לישועת ה' הרוחניות בזמן  
המיועד, שם יבוא רוח סערה עוד יותר חזק,

יזכיר אותו בקול סואן ברעש יהודי אתה ומי  
שמך לאיש, לך לך אל ארץ אשר לא ידעת.  
*“For the thousands of years that swept  
over the diminutive nation, so weak  
and helpless, it was the way of Divine  
Providence that they would rest for  
close to a hundred or two hundred  
years. Afterwards, a storm wind would  
emerge and give rise to many waves;  
it would destroy, decimate, wear them  
out, demolish, and sweep away without  
mercy. The Jews would flee to a distant  
place and there they would reunite into  
a nation. They would grow, rise up, their  
wisdom would lead them to success, until  
they would forget they were strangers in  
a strange land. They would think this  
is the place from which they originated,  
and lose hope for Hashem’s spiritual  
salvation at the appointed time. There,  
an even stronger storm wind would come  
and it would remind them with a raging  
sound and an earthquake: “You are a  
Jew. Who made you into a man? Go for  
yourself to a land you do not know...”*  
**Meshech Chochmah, Vayikra 26:44**

At a protest this past spring, Jacob Frey, the Jewish mayor of Minneapolis, was speaking with a crowd of angry protestors, trying to show them how much he empathized with their pain. Suddenly, one of the leaders of the protest — looming over the mayor — put Frey on the defensive, asking him if he would commit to the spot to defunding the Minneapolis police. “Yes or no!” She then handed the microphone to Frey, who responded in a barely audible voice, “I do not support the full abolition of the police.”

With that, the crowd began to scream at the mayor, over and over again: “Go home Jacob, go home!” Defeated, Jacob Frey slowly walked away with his head down, on the walk of shame. “Go home Jacob, go home!”

There are times when G-d speaks through prophets, but there are also times when the words of those prophets are written on subway walls and tenement halls, when G-d’s message reaches us from the most unlikely places. “Go home Jacob, go home!” Watching this scene unfold in Minneapolis, we heard an echo of similar words first uttered thousands of years ago, to the original Jacob.

After living in exile for twenty years in Lavan’s house, Yaakov was confronted by an angel of G-d: “I am the G-d of Beit-El, where you anointed a monument, where you vowed to Me a vow. Now arise, leave this land and return to the land of your birthplace” (Bereishit 31:13). “Go home Jacob, go home!”

We are not running away from America, a country that has been so good to us personally and to our people. In moving to Israel, we do so with Jewish pride and strength, as a fulfillment of the words we say in Birkat Hamazon: “May He ... lead us upright to our land” — *komemiyut l’artzeinu!* We pray that the United States should remain a nation of chessed and a hospitable home for American Jewry. And yet — the events of our time seem to point in one direction: *home*.

It cannot be said enough that we are living in miraculous times; that we are blessed to witness events our great grandparents could only dream of. It is awe-inspiring to play our small role in fulfilling the great hope of the Jewish people: “Sound the great shofar for our liberty, and raise a banner to gather our exiles, and gather us together from the four corners of the earth...” May we merit to soon see all of our people return home, in joy and celebration!