



FOLLOWING THE DREAM OF OUR PARENTS

As I (Avi) bowed down to kiss the ground of Eretz Yisrael for the first time, with gum melted in the concrete to my left and a cigarette butt to my right, the dream began.

It was in February of 1992, I was in 4th grade, and I was preparing for my first family trip to Israel. We were going to visit my brother and sister who were both learning Torah in Israel for the year. It was the year following the Persian Gulf war, a year when my parents worried about their son as he sat in his room in *Yeshivat HaKotel* wearing a gas mask during scud missile attacks. In hindsight, it could be that my parents' decision to make this family trip was due to the concerns of the year before, and realizing that life is too short.

I was only in 4th grade, and I was already going to Israel! This was a

thought that was hard to fathom. I was almost certain that my first time to visit Israel would have been for my gap year in Yeshiva, yet somehow, I merited visiting Israel at such a young age.

As the plane landed, my parents continued to remind me of what I was about to achieve. Setting foot on our *Eretz Hakedosha*, something our grandparents could only have dreamed of, you will now fulfill. Walking down the aircraft steps onto the tarmac of Ben Gurion, my father said, "Avi, let's kiss the holy ground of Israel," and without hesitation I got down on all fours and kissed the holy ground. Baruch Hashem this has been a continuous practice of mine ever since.

The dream has been nagging at me for the last 30 years and finally the plan is to make it a reality.

Aliyah holds a very special place in our family. My father, Rabbi Shaya Kilimnick *zt'l*, served as a rabbi for 50 years. He inspired the communities of Little Rock, Arkansas for seven years and the Beth Sholom community in Rochester New York for 43 years. There was not a Shabbos that went by when he did not stress the importance of Eretz Yisrael. He was lovesick for his homeland, and he knew what his *tafkid* was as a rabbi: It was to pound into the heart and soul of every congregant the need to have Israel in mind 24/7. During the intifada in 2001, my father decided that our shul would sing Hatikvah at the conclusion of Shabbos morning davening to show solidarity with Israel. It is now 20 years, and we continue to sing. To my father's credit, many of the children who grew up in our shul have decided to make Aliyah. Almost every family in Congregation Beth

Sholom has a parent, child, sibling, or close relative who lives in Israel. I am fortunate to have worked side by side with my father for nine years, and in following his path I have tried my best to continue his legacy, to share the beauty of Israel with all those who step foot in our shul.

Besides for the nature of our shul, *Eretz Yisrael* also holds a very sacred place to my parents. Rabbi Shaya *zt'l* and Rebbeitzin Nechie Kilimnick met in Eretz Yisrael soon after the Six-Day War. They both decided to spend a few months in Israel like so many others after the miraculous victory of 1967. My parents spent their first date walking the majestic streets of Yerushalayim and spending time at the Kotel. There is no better beginning than the one they were bestowed, and through their *hakaras hatov* to HaKadosh Baruch Hu, they tried to bring as many Jews as possible to experience the serenity of a Shabbos in Yerushalayim, a trip up Masada, a year learning in Israel, and helping others build a family in Eretz Yisrael. My parents understood the centrality of Israel in everything that they were able to accomplish over their 50 years of leadership.

For the last 11 years, I have been able to walk just a little bit in my father's shoes. I have seen the impact of what a rabbi can accomplish if his heart is set on the goal. I have been blessed to be his student and I try to emulate his love for the land. As a rabbi, you often begin to think that you are destined to be the Moshe, to see Israel from a distance, when everyone else is making their way into the land. My father was the Moshe Rabbeinu in my life. No matter how many times he was able to visit, he did not fulfill what he always wanted, he never made Aliyah.

I remind myself that it is important for a community rabbi to realize that you don't have to be a Moshe, you can be a Yehoshua. The decision to make Aliyah is liberating, it serves as a real feeling of *cheirus*. Not because you are letting go of the responsibility to tend to your flock, but because a rabbi can feel without any doubt that this is the best form of leadership you can ever give to your flock.

With the world working on constant communication in the sphere of remote contact, a former *rav* of a shul can continue his *hashpa'ah* (influence), he can show firsthand what Israel has to offer. I would like to believe that there is no end to what can be accomplished when a community rabbi decides to make Aliyah.

Yet, the reality is that it is very hard to leave. We just returned from our pilot trip; We had no idea how difficult it would be. Besides for the rude awakening that living in Israel is very different than visiting, there was also the moment when you realize that you have to say goodbye to a community that you love, to a shul that you grew up in, taught Torah in, and celebrated *simchas* in. There are real relationships that will be missed, and to not see each other in person every week is a hard pill to swallow. To shed a little *dan likaf zechus* on the *cheit hameraglim*, the problem with sending 12 spies by themselves is that you feel lonely when the people that are close to you are not with you in Eretz Yisrael. If only the *meraglim* would have brought with them a nice Rabbinic mission, a shul tour, the entire report would have been different.

All joking aside, this is the most difficult part about making Aliyah.

It is saying goodbye to the Jews you love; this is a sacrifice that cannot be overlooked. The only comfort is to know that you plan to work together to make the dream of Aliyah possible for everyone. Just like the *mikdash me'at* will find its way back to Eretz Yisrael, so to, all Jews will eventually find their way back as well.

Every passing year, our people are blessed to see more and more Jews take that next step and make the move. Just a few years ago, as a Shana Bet student in *Sha'alvim*, I remember staying in Israel for Pesach and having almost no one to visit and nowhere to go. Now, I have more friends in Israel than in America, and I have a sister and brother who have made Aliyah as well.

I (Esti) have never been a stranger in Israel; my entire father's family has lived in Israel since they had to migrate from Afghanistan in 1950. I have been waiting to come back home for years, and *be'ezrat Hashem* I will soon be surrounded by my sister, aunts, uncles, and many cousins, with my parents soon to follow.

Aliyah is a decision that comes with so many questions. For someone who has always lived a very simple and comfortable lifestyle, Aliyah creates challenges that one may never have had to consider before. The luxury of being familiar with one's surroundings is in jeopardy. Besides all the preparations every *oleh* must endure, there is also a healthy shift in perspective and expectation that one should attempt to make. This perspective could represent a level of *hisbatlus*, surrendering of one's self worth, seeking a higher regard for humility, or finding the child within. Whichever angle one may choose, we

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