



ALIYAH: Have We Stopped Dreaming?

This year we celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the birth of the modern State of Israel. The reappearance of an independent Jewish nation after a 2,000-year-long *galut* (exile)—one that witnessed the ingathering of more than one-third of the Jewish people, the revival of an ancient language and the ever-growing fulfillment of “*Ki miTzion tetzei Torah*”—is nothing short of miraculous. It is therefore distressing that American Orthodoxy seems to not be wholeheartedly embracing the dream to return home.

In our daily lives, we often say that we are dreaming of our return to Eretz Yisrael (“*Shir hama’alot, beshuv Hashem et shivat Tzion hayinu kecholimim*,” from the introductory psalm to Birkat Hamazon said on Shabbat and *yom tov*), but do we really mean it? Are we doing enough to place *aliyah* on the top of the American Orthodox agenda?

We, of course, look with pride and admiration at the many thousands of Americans who have made *aliyah* over the years, but if we are true to ourselves we must acknowledge that we have failed to elevate *aliyah* to the level of a yearning; we have failed to

instill in our people a personal striving to fulfill that which many of our grandparents, great-grandparents and the generations before them dreamed about. For the first time in two millennia, we have the unprecedented opportunity to fulfill this dream.

Interestingly, many American Jews long to be buried in Israel and purchase expensive plots in prime locations in the Holy Land. But what about longing to *live* in Israel? One advertisement for internment in Israel actually states, “Today, the opportunity for which previous generations prayed and yearned is now available to all, and is easily attainable.” How ironic! This

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should be the headline for an article about *aliyah*. The words we recite in the *berachah* just before Keriyat Shema come to mind—we pray to be taken “*komemiut leArtzeinu*,” upright to our Land. We beseech God to let us go

to Eretz Yisrael in a vertical, not a horizontal, position!

It is repeatedly stressed in our Torah and liturgy that the destiny of the Jewish people is to build a model Jewish society, based on Torah values, in the Land of Israel. *Shir Hama’alot*, for example, refers to the “dream” of returning to Israel: “*Shuvah Hashem et shviteinu ka’afikim baNegev*, return our captivity like flash floods in the Negev.” In fact, Birkat Hamazon itself is based on our connection to the Land. In *parashat Ekev*, it states, “*Veachaltah vesavata uverachta et Hashem Elokecha . . . al haAretz asher natan lach*, You shall eat and be satisfied and bless the Lord, your God, on the good Land that He has given you.” It is clear that Birkat Hamazon is essentially a blessing on the Land of Israel. *Parashat Ekev* also includes the second paragraph of the Shema, beginning with the words “*Vehaya im shemoa*.” This paragraph reminds us that if we keep God’s commandments we will be rewarded with prosperity in the Land. But if we do not, God forbid, we will be banished from *ha’Aretz hatovah*, the good Land. The concept contained in these verses, that our prosperity in the Land of Israel is linked to our behavior, is fundamental. The passage was therefore incorpo-

Mr. Abelow lives in Efrat with his family. He made aliyah from Baltimore in 1980.

rated into the Shema, is recited twice daily and is written in every mezuzah and pair of tefillin. Similarly, in *parashat Devarim*, the verse states, "All of the commandments which I command you this day you shall observe to do *in order that* you should live and multiply and come and possess the Land that the Lord promised to your forefathers." Again and again, the Torah speaks of consequences in terms of our physical connection with the Land of Israel. What could be clearer?

Unfortunately, we are masters at rationalizing why the mitzvah to live in Israel is different from any other mitzvah and therefore not incumbent upon us. There are good reasons—emotional, practical and financial—why one may be unable to move to Israel. Our families are in the States. There are elderly parents whose needs must be considered. Our businesses are here. We have just built a multi-million dollar shul, school or JCC. The Israeli government is corrupt.

The Orthodox Union (OU), though always supportive of *aliyah*, is now starting to play more of a role in encouraging it. This November, the OU will host its first-ever Israel Job & Aliyah Fair, in conjunction with the OU Biennial National Convention. The two-part fair, which will take place in both New York and Israel, will offer employment opportunities, practical job and resume advice and meetings with potential employers. "For the first time the OU Convention in Israel will serve as a job forum for those interested in making *aliyah*," said OU President Stephen J. Savitsky. Participants will also have the opportunity to meet with representatives of communities with significant English-speaking populations. The job fair will be open to both those who are considering *aliyah* and to Anglo *olim* who are looking for employment or a career change.

Mitzvot are not always easy but they are *mitzvot* nonetheless, and we do everything we can to live in accordance with their dictates. We are scrupulous in our adherence to the laws of *kashrut*—the high cost does not deter us from building kitchens with two sinks and two dishwashers and buying two sets of dishes. We purchase a large sukkah and the finest *etrog*. But when it comes to *aliyah*, we find all sorts of ways to conclude that it is simply not a halachic imperative. This unfortunate mindset leads us to ask ourselves the wrong question. Instead of asking, "Is it practical for me to be thinking of *aliyah*?" the question we should be asking is, "What must I be doing to work towards fulfilling this mitzvah, to see the dream come to fruition?" Many Jews simply fail to live their lives with the ambition of living in Israel—which is God's goal for Am Yisrael and should be the ultimate driving force of our people. The longing just isn't there.

The challenge for this generation is to revitalize the message of yearning to live in Israel in meaningful and powerful ways. Too many Jews don't realize that America is just another temporary stop for the Jewish people on the way home. ■

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