

Book Review: Is It Time Yet? LIVING IN THE LAND

Firsthand accounts from Bnei Torah and their families

By Yoel Berman | Published by Mosaic Press, 2023

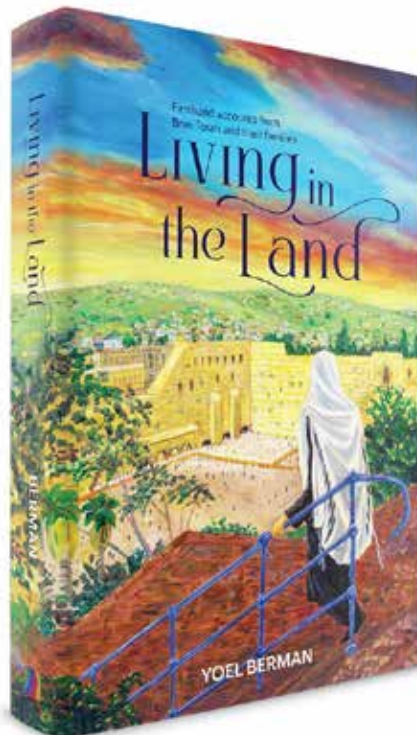
MEVASER STAFF, ISRAEL

Once again, Jews of all types have the opportunity to live in Eretz Yisroel, fulfilling the centuries-long dream of generations. But how many people even consider the option? Does making “aliya,” or moving to Eretz Yisroel cross your radar? Even as we listen to the *shiva d’nechemta* and our yearning for Eretz Yisroel is at its peak, there are countless deterrents that prevent a frum NY/NJ Jew from making Eretz Yisroel their home: “We are not Zionists,” “How will I make parnassa?,” “I don’t speak Hebrew,” “I can learn and do *mitzvos* here,” “Chinuch, chinuch, chinuch!”, “My family is here.” Often the general feeling is: “I’ll go with Moshiach, iyH”; and so *chutz l’aretz* communities continue to build and grow.

There is a well-known mechaneches who began her married life in Eretz Yisroel over thirty years ago and moved back to Monsey to raise her family and support her husband in learning, a common enough phenomenon. When asked whether she missed Eretz Yisroel, she explained her move by saying, “Look, everything is better in Monsey – besides the *ruchnius* (!)” The overwhelming difficulties of raising a family in Eretz Yisroel – parnassa, health care, chinuch, missing family and friends – all the practicalities – clearly outweighed the *ruchnius* benefits in those days, even for a woman of her stature.

Enter “Living the Land,” a new book by Yoel Berman, published by Mosaic Press. It is a compendium of first-hand accounts of people (who you may even know) who have successfully made the move. Their experiences show that times have certainly changed, and circumstances are indeed riper for frum families to make aliya. Couple that with the changing circumstances in the US, in terms of finances and leftist politics, illegal immigration, and rising antisemitism, and the idea of moving to Eretz Yisroel is becoming a reality for more and more individuals, couples and families.

The author is a well-known personality in the aliya circles having spent many years encouraging and helping bnei Torah to settle in Eretz Yisroel. He includes in this volume a well written, inspiring selection of fifty honest reports about the decision-making process, the difficulties, and ultimately the successful moves of idealist people who, in constant contact with da’as Torah, decided to live in Artzeinu Hakedosha. What is special about the collection is that it’s written entirely from the point of view of Bnei Torah just like you would



find down the block in Monsey. Yet these people have, with *siyata dishmaya*, made the leap and are now *zoche* to live in Eretz Yisroel out of a love of the land, to pursue a life-long goal, to fulfill *mitzvos* in the most *mehudardic* way.

This is not a book about politics. It’s a book about *ruchnius*. “Living in the Land” offers an added depth and dimension to Yiddishkeit that is often missing in American chinuch. One writer, son of the Nickolsburger Rebbe, discusses how he overcame the prejudices of his upbringing in Williamsburg where “all talk of Eretz Yisroel is lumped into the *traif* category of Zionism.” One interviewee questions why love of Eretz Yisroel is so glaringly absent in our NY/NJ schools. “Anyone who has gone through the *chinuch* system has been exposed to Torah, Shas, and *poskim*. Therefore, the centrality of Eretz Yisroel must surely be so very clear to them. How can they not want to live in Eretz Yisroel? People are busy with *chumros* in all sorts of things, so why is living in Eretz Yisroel left out — even if it might not be an absolute *chovah*?”

Monsey residents will relate to the struggles portrayed in this book. One participant writes, “Before making the move to Eretz Yisroel, I went to consult with a *chashuve rav* in Monsey. He told me why such a move could not work: The school system is different, the culture is different, and there are so many other challenges. I countered that I did not come to take his

advice on whether to make the move; that had already been decided. He then jumped off his chair, and said to me, “Wow! I am so jealous of you! How can I help you?”

To really appreciate the efforts put into developing and publishing this unique collection, the reader must approach it with an open heart. It forces the reader to take an honest look at their own circumstances. For example, one essay reminds us, “Moshe Rabbeinu davened five hundred and fifteen *tefillos* to merit entering Eretz Yisroel. Throughout our history, many *anashim yerei'im u'sheleimim* (righteous people) were *moser nefesh* to come to the Land and lived here *b'simchah*, despite much difficulty and hardship. *Hashem Yisbarach* has thrown open the doors of Eretz Yisroel *b'chasdo hagadol* (in His great kindness) and made living here infinitely more feasible than it has been since ancient times. Why is it that some people are not more open-minded about the opportunity to do what their ancestors would have been *moser nefesh* to do, at a time when physical comforts are widely available here?”

This is not a bland read, but a breath-taking exploration of the lives of the olim who share their experiences as they rise to the challenge. “Through living a less *gashmiyusdik* life in Eretz Yisroel,” one person writes, “you’re really *zocheh* to see the shining light of Hashem and the *ruchniyus* involved in your daily life.”

The stories are inspirational and yet down to earth. They include open discussions about finances, dealing with special needs children, adjusting to the culture (or choosing not to), and give many practical tips about living in not just in Yerushalayim, but in different communities around the land: Immanuel, Nof Hagalil, Agan Ha’ayalot, Afula, Rechovot, Ramat Beit Shemesh among others.

The glut of *gashmius* has become one of the key *nisyonos* parents face in raising their children today in the States. Many of the writers focus on the simplicity of living in Eretz Yisroel, while at the same time they report that they are certainly able to make a living. Comparing finances in Eretz Yisroel to the United States is repeatedly discussed, “as the expenses and standards of living are astronomically higher in the United States, even with a higher salary it would still be difficult to make ends meet there. Tuition, health insurance, and expected gifts and vacations add up to much more than anything here.”

The orientation of the book is unapologetically convincing. “The center of the

Torah world — including prestigious *yeshivos*, respected and widely recognized *batei din*, *rabbanim* of world-renowned stature — is now here in Eretz Yisroel. Despite that, Eretz Yisroel still needs you, as the more *frum* Americans who choose to live here, the greater will be our influence on what happens here. There is great opportunity here, and it’s you, your children, and your family who are missing out by not being here. It’s your choice to jump on the train and be a part of history in the making, or just to watch it as an outsider.”

Torah comes alive in Eretz Yisroel, and for many *erliche* people, this important factor plays a central role in choosing this life for themselves and their children. One interviewee explains how his feelings and motivation to make aliya developed. “One day, a friend suggested that I learn with him a *masechta* from *Seder Zera'im*. We started ... and after a short while...I started getting strong feelings for *Eretz Hakodesh*. I have no way of explaining this as a natural phenomenon. Everything was going well for us in Monsey: We had a nice house (albeit rented), two cars (albeit a bit old), the kids were learning in good *mosdos*, and we were thriving with the quiet and serenity of Monsey. Hakadosh Baruch Hu just put a powerful idea in my head, and I began feeling passionate about Eretz Yisroel — the Land which Hashem always has His eyes focused on... In *chutz la'aretz*, you may read about Avraham Avinu, but here, you can see where he walked and lived.”

One person sums it all up: “The bottom line is that building in the Diaspora can be like building in quicksand. Here in Eretz Yisroel, there is a feeling of building for eternity.”

“Living in the Land” is not a subtle, pussy-footing book. It will push you to consider the possibility of moving, even if it doesn’t convince you to pack your bags. If you or someone you know is making aliya or contemplating it, this book is for them. It offers encouragement and advice and is a really important book for young singles and couples, whether *chareidi* or *dati leumi*, who are thinking about aliya. They will learn about how and why to fit into the Israeli society from those who made a successful transition.

And even if moving to Eretz Yisroel isn’t on your radar, “Living in the Land” will leave you inspired and appreciative of those who are taking the step.

And perhaps, just perhaps, your time will come sooner than you imagine.