

Book Review: *Living in the Land*

A book to both grace your coffee table and elevate your mind, heart, and soul

HADAS R.

A valuable book has made its appearance: *Living in the Land*, Mosaica Press 2023, by Yoel Berman. In the book, 50 *frum olim* describe the joys, challenges, and opportunities of making the move to Eretz Yisrael, as well as the resources and strategies that made for success. And it comes with a strikingly beautiful cover by the gifted *frum* artist Yehoshua Wiseman. Yoel Berman filled a great need with this incredible book.

Why Focus on Chareidi Aliyah?

We need a book that focuses solely on *chareidi aliyah* and the settlement of Eretz Yisrael. And *chareidim* from outside of Eretz Yisrael, despite not being “Zionists,” comprise a huge percentage of *aliyah*. You run into them everywhere in Eretz Yisrael. *Chareidim* really need guidance devoted to their specific needs — needs which vary from group to group, family to family, and individual to individual. With most *aliyah* organizations geared toward the secular or traditional segments, *chareidi* needs and interests traditionally got shoved to the side — though that never stopped *chareidi aliyah*. In fact, the *chareidi aliyah* continues to increase.

Despite lots of propaganda to the contrary, *chareidim* (though they weren’t called that then) built the foundation for Jewish settlement in Eretz Yisrael. With humbling self-sacrifice, they settled the Land, built up and expanded Jewish settlement — even sacrificing their lives for this goal. And *chareidim* continue to contribute to Jewish growth in every way.

I remember when Ramat Eshkol was a depressingly secular Israeli neighborhood. Within 20 years, it transformed into a vibrant *chareidi* community, encompassing a thriving English-speaking community. The face of Yerushalayim also changed with the growth of Torah-observant communities in all sectors. I remember Yerushalayim over 30 years ago and feel awe at how it has been transformed, with *frum* people vastly outnumbering the secular, and secular ads and stores shrinking while you can see things like a huge sign advertising for “Savta Sara’s Cholent”!

Location, Location, Location

One of the valuable aspects of this book lies in its portrayal of different communities within Eretz Yisrael. Finding the right community (and most importantly, the right

schools for your children!) remains the most essential ingredient in a successful *aliyah*. Even those who performed pilot trips before moving here sometimes still needed to move once (or thrice) more before they found “their” place here. So the book is worth it just for that.

A Tapestry of Journeys

For the people interviewed for this book, a profoundly religious outlook influenced both their decision to come and their attitude once here. *Chareidim* focus on living in Eretz Yisrael and the pure *mitzvah* of it as written in the Torah — something a Jew should do regardless of who’s in charge. This has always been the view of simple Jews, Rabbanim, and *tzaddikim* since Biblical times. So the thread uniting the variety of personalities and experiences

lies in their spiritual development leading to their *aliyah*. Some people always felt it, while others developed it later via Torah learning and speaking with *talmidei chachamim*.

Living in Eretz Yisrael remains a profoundly spiritual experience. In fact, anyone interested in *yishuv Eretz Yisrael* for religious reasons (really, the only reason), even if not *chareidi*, can benefit from and find like-minded Jews in this book. Even when all sorts of inconveniences and aggravations get religious *olim* down, the spiritual aspect gets them back up again.

The book covers many topics: *parnassah*, schools, security, religious life, general life — and all different kinds of struggles, including how these *olim* resolved their various problems. It also covers so many different types of *chareidim* settling in Eretz Yisrael: professionals and *kollel avreichim*, housewives, people who came with children, before

children, or as grandparents, and even a *frum* woman with a powerful (and spiritual) inclination for farming.

There are Anglo *olim* who end up living in very Anglo communities and those who end up in Israeli communities with few English-speakers. We hear from *olim* who settled all over the country.

The book includes a resource section to help any *frum* Jew who wishes to make *aliyah*.

Also, this book is not chapter after chapter of clones. In other words, it’s not the same story over and over again, using different names and locations. Each chapter presents a whole world, many very different than the others. Sure, there are similarities in their *hashkafah* and spiritual attitude, but some of the *olim* really struggled with their background and adjustment before and after coming. The book presents the rainbow of the *chareidi* world.

Does This Book Contain ‘Aliyah Bullying’? (Nope.)

Whether you are actively seeking emotional, spiritual, and practical resources to make *aliyah* or whether you’re waiting for Moshiach to take you to Eretz Yisrael, the stories and inner journeys described within are just straight-out interesting to read. Furthermore, I understand some people shy away from the topic, reluctant to suffer anymore “*aliyah* bullying.” This book doesn’t do that.

You receive an inside look at the inner journey and religious awakening (including of FFBs) regarding *aliyah*. Some of the *olim* initially struggled with figuring out the right path, exploring the *psak* of Rav Moshe Feinstein and many other great Rabbanim, contrasting and comparing different Torah opinions to figure out how they should proceed.

There’s a lot of encouragement, a friendly “Come and join us!” attitude, combined with honest observations and comparisons of both American and Israeli society, with a solid *frum* outlook encompassing it all. (And yes, the book primarily features American *olim*, but *olim* from other English-speaking countries also make an appearance.)

You can read more about this author, the book, and actual chapters from the book, online at avira-deretz-yisroel.org.

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