Rabbi Aron and Miriam White

Aliyah Diaries

The great Ernest Hemingway once wrote that change occurs "gradually, and then suddenly."

For us, this really captures the journey of our aliyah. We began the process almost a year before we actually arrived, and gradually chipped away at everything we had to do. There are so many aspects that have to come together to make aliyah happen – bureaucracy, trying to find a place to live, packing up a lift, saying goodbye to family and friends and so much more. And of course, when COVID-19 hit, everything was delayed by months. But then, after this year-long process, we then made aliyah so suddenly!

We got on the plane, experienced the incredible moment of touching down in our new home, and then special government helpers escorted us off the plane and personally whisked us through the airport. Only three hours after touching down, we were already processed and had arrived in our apartment (the government pays for the taxi from the airport). One disclaimer – we had the somewhat special situation of being the only people on our flight making aliyah, so it doesn't always go so quick!

In the weeks and months since then, we have been able to get to know Yerushalayim, the city we now merit to call home. Walking the streets really gives new meaning to the words we say three times a day – בונה ירושלים, "who builds Yerushalayim," which is written in the present. The cranes, diggers and workmen spread throughout the city are living fulfilments of this blessing – we can see Yerushalayim being built every day, with new parks, light-rail lines and homes being built every day.

In the Talmud, there is a captivating story of Choni, who encounters a man planting a carob tree. Choni asks him how long it takes for the carob to bear fruit, and the man informs him it takes 70 years. Choni is taken aback. Why plant a tree that will not provide fruit for decades? The man answers that he is planting the fruits for his children, not for himself. Choni then falls asleep for 70 years, and when he wakes up he sees a man gathering carobs from the tree. He asks the man if he is the one who planted the tree, and the man replies that he is the grandson of the man who planted it. Whether the story is literal or not, it conveys a powerful message. One person's work is often enjoyed by those who come decades later.

Making aliyah in 2020, we feel like that grandchild eating from the tree planted by his grandfather. 70 years ago, Israel was a nascent society, trying to absorb Holocaust survivors and Jewish refugees. Many of the cities we know so well, like Beit Shemesh, Efrat and Modiin, didn't even exist then. The entire Israel had maybe a handful of *yeshivot*, and at that point, one couldn't visit the Kotel and the Old City of Yerushalayim. When we arrive in the Land in 2020, we experience a totally different country – a thriving and bustling country of over nine million citizens. Within walking distance from our apartment, we have dozens of shuls, schools, shops and parks. And more is being built all the time. From Torah institutions to start-up companies, there are so many areas in which Israel is expanding every day. This has all been planted over the past seven decades, by Jews from Israel and from around the world, and we are the beneficiaries.

This realization is humbling but inspiring. It is our job to not only enjoy the fruits of their labors but to plant new seeds too. Through our collective efforts, we all are trying to continue to build and support Israel, so our children and grandchildren can enjoy those fruits. As we celebrate the New Year for Trees, we feel blessed to be able to plant ourselves – and trees – in the Land of Israel today.

Rabbi Aron and Miriam White made Aliyah in October 2020. Miriam previously taught at Yeshiva University High School for Girls (Central). Rabbi Aron is completing his semicha from Yeshiva University, and recently began working as the Coordinator for Tzurba Community and Torah Projects for RZA–Mizrachi. They first met at Mizrachi's Shalhevet educator training program in Jerusalem.