



Go Home Jacob

When we married 16 years ago, we were on the “five-year aliyah plan.” Rebecca would get her doctorate and Elie would finish law school, because it was realistic for an American to practice corporate law in Israel. We had our plan!

But as we soon learned, life was more complicated than our plan. Elie wasn’t satisfied with corporate law and began exploring assistant rabbi positions. Before we knew it, we were pursuing a different dream, and living a deeply meaningful life as a community Rabbi and Rebbetzin. Between long-term projects, lifecycle crises, and the day-to-day intensity of work and family life, the aliyah dream slowly moved to the backburner of our consciousness.

When we shared our aliyah plans with the Livingston community, we were astounded by the reaction. The vast majority of the congregation reacted in the same way: “We wish we were going too!” Rav Ya’akov Moshe Charlap writes that “the nature of a Jew is opposed to exile, and is constantly seeking ways to leave exile and return to the root of his nature” (*Mei Marom*, Volume 6, Chapter 57).

Still, why *now*? Why give up meaningful jobs that we both love and are deeply grateful for to make aliyah this summer? The answer is multilayered.

With children already in high school, we feel the clock is ticking. In a few years, our older children will be graduating high school and leaving home. Though we are far from old, our window for making aliyah together as a family is closing.

On a deeper level, turning 40 this year strikes us as an opportune time to take the leap. The Mishna in Pirkei Avot teaches that “with the age of 40 comes understanding.” *Bnei Yisrael* achieved a new level of understanding of life as they entered the Land after 40 years of wandering in exile – a transformation we hope to experience ourselves.

At the same time, our decision to make aliyah is based on more than purely personal considerations. In the last two years alone, we’ve seen a spate of antisemitic attacks in America, from extremists on both the left and the right. Never before has our community felt so vulnerable, and so afraid to speak its mind. Rav Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, in an oft-quoted passage, explains that we are experiencing a pattern of events that has repeated itself throughout our exile:

“For the thousands of years that swept over the diminutive nation, so weak and helpless, it was the way of Divine Providence that they would rest for close to a hundred or two hundred years. Afterwards, a storm wind would emerge and give rise to many waves; it would destroy, decimate... and it would remind them with a raging sound and an earthquake: “You are a Jew. Who made you into a man? Go for yourself to a Land you do not know...” (Meshech Chochma, Vayikra 26:44).

At a protest this past spring, Jacob Frey, the Jewish mayor of Minneapolis, was speaking with a crowd of angry protestors. The crowd began to scream at the mayor, over and over again: “Go home Jacob, go home!” Defeated, Jacob Frey slowly walked away with his head down. “Go home Jacob, go home!”

There are times when G-d speaks through Prophets, but there are also times when the words of those Prophets are written on subway walls and tenement halls, when G-d’s message reaches us from the most unlikely places. “Go home Jacob, go home!” Watching this scene unfold in Minneapolis, we heard an echo of similar words uttered thousands of years ago, to the original Jacob.

After living in exile for 20 years in Lavan’s house, Ya’akov was confronted by an angel of G-d: “I am the G-d of Beit-El, where you anointed a monument, where you vowed to Me a vow. Now arise, leave this land and return to the Land of your birthplace” (Bereishit 31:13). “Go home Jacob, go home!”

It cannot be said enough that we are living in miraculous times; that we are blessed to witness events our great grandparents could only dream of. It is awe-inspiring to play our small role in fulfilling the great hope of the Jewish people: “Sound the great shofar for our liberty, and raise a banner to gather our exiles, and gather us together from the four corners of the earth...” May we merit to soon see all of our people return home, in joy and celebration!

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