

THE PROMISED LAND

*The Rebbe's guidance for those considering
emigrating to Eretz Yisrael*

IS ALIYAH TO ISRAEL GOOD FOR THE JEWS?

5741

Prof. —

Johannesburg, South Africa

Greeting and Blessing:

This is to confirm receipt of your letter, which reached me with some delay. I regret that because of the pressure of duties, this acknowledgment has been unavoidably delayed.


With regard to the subject matter of your letter, namely, a request for clarification of my view on *aliyah*: I had hoped that in view of the fact that *aliyah* is not an academic question, but has been going on for many years, the factual results would speak for themselves, and there would be no need for expressing views and opinions. However, since you are still requesting my response to a letter of over a year ago, I will summarize my views, after some prefatory remarks.

Insofar as Lubavitch is concerned, you surely know that there is a flourishing Chabad village near Lod of immigrants from behind the Iron Curtain, and more recently a second Kfar Chabad has begun to emerge, with projects for additional hundreds of apartments. There is a Chabad settlement in Kiryat Malachi, Nachalat Har Chabad, and a Shikun Chabad in Jerusalem. There is also a rapidly expanding Kiryat Chabad in Safed (Tzfat). This organized Chabad *aliyah* is, of course, in

addition to the old Chabad *yishuvim*, in existence since the time of the founder of the Chabad movement (some 200 years ago). There have also been many individual families, not necessarily Chabad (Lubavitch), who have sought advice and have been encouraged to settle in Eretz Yisrael on their own merits.

Now, with regard to *aliyah* in general—aside from situations where there is a compelling need for emigration, as from Arab lands, the Soviet Union, etc., and excepting special cases such as reunification of families and the like—it is clear that in view of the limited resources available, there must be a set of priorities as to what kind of *aliyah* should be concentrated on. Several basic factors must be taken into account:

- 1) That the new immigrant arriving in Eretz Yisrael should be able to contribute towards the development and wellbeing of Eretz Yisrael, and certainly not be detrimental to it.
- 2) The new immigrant should be able to integrate into the economy of the land, and not add to the excessive burden already placed on it.
- 3) Even where the said conditions (1) and (2) are met, the gain of a new immigrant, or group of immigrants, should be weighed against the loss that their emigration from their present country will cause to the local Jewish community. If the person happens to be a leader in his community, and his departure would seriously affect the wellbeing of the community—spiritually, economically or politically—thereby weakening that community's support for Eretz Yisrael, then the



gain would clearly be more than offset by the loss. We have seen this happen time and again, when the leaders of a community have been persuaded to make *aliyah*, with the inevitable result that the community dwindled rapidly, physically and spiritually. In a small community, the departure of a single influential member, whether a rabbi or layman, can make all the difference.

If there was a time, decades ago, when the above considerations (to which I have consistently called attention) were considered conjectural, the long-term effects of ill-conceived *aliyah* no longer leave room for any doubts as to what kind of *aliyah* is constructive. Far too long have those who are concerned with *aliyah*, with all good intentions, considered only the immediate gain and ignored the loss in the longer run. Others, in their zeal to produce quick “achievements,” have, unwittingly or otherwise, resorted to propaganda methods, etc., which were even more inimical to all concerned—Eretz Yisrael, the Diaspora and the immigrants themselves—and this has contributed in no small measure to the inordinate levels of *yeridah*.

A classic example is the emigration from Morocco. The *aliyah* campaign was concentrated on the group of least resistance—the spiritual leaders—despite my warnings, behind the scenes, of the disastrous consequences of despoiling the local communities of their leadership. The basic argument was that “the leaders must show the way; the flock will follow.” What happened was that the leaders did, by and large, make *aliyah*, but the local communities became largely demoralized. In the end, hundreds of thousands of Moroccan Jews emigrated, not to the Land of Israel, but to France, to be exposed to forces of assimilation they had not met before. This went on despite the fact that Morocco was the most benign of Arab countries (as it still is, which is something of a miracle).

Needless to say, it is not enough to get someone to be an *oleh*; it is necessary to make sure, to the extent that this is possible, that the *oleh* will not, sooner or later, become a *yored*. Surely there is no point—and it is not merely an exercise in futility, but the squandering of limited resources—to persuade someone to make *aliyah* when he is 51% a potential *yored*, not to mention one who is 90% so. Yet it is a matter of record that all too often *aliyah* activists have ignored this basic principle, either through wishful thinking or, more deplorably, through setting up for

themselves “quotas,” to be fulfilled by all means, in order to justify and maintain their positions as successful recruiting agents.

Of course, the inordinate level of *yeridah*, especially in recent years, is not due solely to the lack of proper screening or selectivity, or the exaggerated promises and prospects offered to would-be *olim*. A very substantial number of the *yordim* are in fact native-born, which is a painful subject in itself. Here we are speaking of *olim* who have become *yordim*, or of their children who have grown up there but have also become *yordim*. The disenchantment of some *olim* is not always rooted in economics, though the situation would have been much better if there had been closer coordination between the *aliyah* department and the *klitah* (absorption) agencies. Ultimately, it is not the promise of a nicer apartment, a better job and higher standards of living that will satisfy an *oleh* from the free world, but the fact that Eretz Yisrael is uniquely different for a Jew, its uniqueness deriving from its spiritual quality, and from the fact that it is the Holy Land. If all the accent will be placed on the material aspects of life, with total disregard of the essential point, namely that true and lasting *aliyah* is inseparable from a spiritual *aliyah*, there will inevitably be *yordim* or, at the very least, disgruntled and embittered “foreigners” whose hearts and minds will be elsewhere. Such an *oleh* is not likely to recommend relatives and friends back in his country of origin to follow in his footsteps.

A case in point—which is also one of the basic factors responsible for the so-called *neshirah* (the problem of “dropouts”)—is the policy that has been practiced among those groups of *olim* where family ties and traditions have been very strong in their native countries, of separating the younger generation from their parents. Ostensibly, this was done for the purpose of hastening the process of “integration,” but in fact it has proved disastrous: in terms of juvenile delinquency on the one hand, and in terms of the parents who have been terribly hurt by it on the other.

Now, with regard to the specific question of *aliyah* from the Republic of South Africa. I regret to say that—certainly in retrospect—it has been a disaster both for Eretz Yisrael and for the S.A. Jewish community. Suffice to say that a substantial number of *olim* from S.A. are now in the USA and Canada; worse still, the majority of them comprise the most productive,

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younger element. In other words, not only has the S.A. Jewish community paid a heavy price in terms of its own viability, but Eretz Yisrael has benefited little from this *aliyah* even in the short term, not to mention the long-term loss resulting from a weakened S.A. community.

In this case, too, when the *aliyah* campaign began in S.A., I warned against creating a panic as a means of spurring *aliyah*. Aside from this being contrary to the Torah, especially when not absolutely justified by an imminent threat, it would adversely affect the good relations the S.A. government maintains towards the Jewish community, as well as towards Eretz Yisrael. I further pointed out that the RSA was one of but very few friendly governments that consistently maintained its friendly policy. I believe that to some extent I succeeded in averting a stampede, but I have not succeeded in halting the trend altogether. Certainly in the present world situation, one would have expected it to be self-evident that it is not in the interests of Eretz Yisrael to press for a mass *aliyah* from S.A., considering that the RSA is one of the only two friends Eretz Yisrael has in the whole world, and the one which—relatively speaking—is more consistent and stable than the other, namely the USA. It is something of a miracle that, despite the attempts of certain persons to create a panic among S.A. Jewry, the relationship has not suffered substantially—at a time when other countries around the world have found it expedient to turn their backs on the beleaguered Yishuv and lend their support to its mortal enemies.

In summary, it may be said that the underlying problem of *aliyah* has been the mistaken premise and inclination to “write off” the Diaspora Jews, and to use all possible means to encourage indiscriminate *aliyah*, regardless of the inevitable “fallout.” This has reached a point where even non-Jews are encouraged to settle in Eretz Yisrael (especially where there is a Jewish spouse), without their being required to undergo

geirut (conversion) according to the *halachah*—the only kind of conversion that is valid. Under this ill-conceived policy of “*aliyah* at all costs,” many a healthy and thriving Jewish community in the Diaspora has been seriously weakened, and in some cases destroyed, by being despoiled of its leaders, religious and lay, and men of means and influence, who are not only the mainstay of their communities but pillars of support for Eretz Yisrael, and whose usefulness as such diminished or ceased when their role became that of *olim*. Clearly, a great deal of the effort and resources spent on futile, or even harmful, *aliyah* would have been better spent on strengthening communities in the Diaspora, through Torah education, fighting assimilation, and so on. A healthy Jewish community in the Diaspora—Jewish not just in name—is the best asset for Eretz Yisrael, as well as a source of truly good and permanent *olim*.

I trust you will accept the above remarks in the spirit they have been made—namely not, Gd forbid, as rebuke or criticism for its own sake, nor as preachment, but in the sincere hope that this exchange of correspondence will induce some deep reflection and rethinking and, more importantly, will stimulate concrete action for the benefit of Jews, both in Eretz Yisrael and in the Diaspora.

In conclusion, I would like to reciprocate with a request of my own: not for a clarification of your position on *aliyah* in general, and on any of the points raised in this letter in particular; but—since “action is the essential thing”—a request for news as to what action you have taken, or plan to take, in connection with this matter, and with what results.

With blessing,

P.S. Inasmuch as certain sections of this letter ought to be treated with confidence, I trust you will use your discretion in sharing them only with appropriate persons for whom such material will serve a useful purpose.

“A JEW CONSIDERING EMIGRATION FROM ANY PART
OF THE WORLD TO ANY OTHER, MUST NOT TAKE
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ON LEADERS ABANDONING THEIR HOMETOWNS

By the Grace of Gd
16th of Cheshvan, 5734
[November 11, 1973]
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Mrs. —
Johannesburg, So. Africa

Blessing and Greeting:

This is to confirm receipt of your correspondence. In the meantime, you no doubt received my previous letter.

With reference to your writing about the idea of settling in Eretz Yisroel [the Land of Israel] in the near future, about which you ask my opinion—

I have often emphasized, as you may be aware, that a Jew considering emigration from any part of the world to any other, must not take a narrow view, but should consider it in broader terms. What I mean is that Jews are, of course, a minority among the nations of the world, and must therefore always think in terms of self-preservation. Wherever Jews are, they must consider themselves in a state of perpetual mobilization to protect their independence, not only insofar as they themselves are concerned, but also insofar as the Jewish people as a whole is concerned. This applies to all places, but the situation varies, for there are some places where the percentage of Jews is relatively smaller, and hence more vulnerable. And among the Jews themselves there are places where those who are active in the strengthening of Torah and Mitzvoth, the very foundation of Jewish existence, are very few, which increases their responsibility all the more, especially those who have been active and successful, whose departure would leave an irreparable void.

And as already mentioned, this is a question of survival not only for local communities, but for the Jewish people in general. Clearly, one's first responsibility is towards the community where one has been brought up, and to which one can contribute effectively.

Now, let us consider South Africa, where Jews originally came mostly from Lithuania and similar places, where Jewish life was flourishing. I do not have to tell you what the situation is in the R.S.A. in terms of true Yiddishkeit [Judaism], even in JHB [Johannesburg], which has the largest Jewish community in South Africa. Consequently, you and your husband occupy a very special place in the community, and must consider yourselves in the forefront of a far-reaching endeavor to strengthen the true religious foundations of Jewish life in your community and in the country at large.

One can well understand the motivation and desire to help Eretz Yisroel. But it is sometimes overlooked that such help can often be even more effective when those who are responsible for their posts on the local front remain at their posts. If in the past this point might have been debatable, recent events have clearly shown how important has been the help of Jews in the Diaspora, through their contacts in the world's capitals, and otherwise, although it is premature to reveal the full extent of such help. Obviously it is such Jews who are deeply concerned for the survival of the Jewish people that have provided this vital help.

I am sure there is no need to elaborate to you further on the above.

With blessing,
M. Schneerson