

Nefesh b'Nefesh is 'really dedicated to getting you on that plane' to Israel



PHOTO: ATARA BECK
New olim Leah and David Laker enjoy the view in Tiberias at Lake Kinneret.

By Atara Beck
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TORONTO — Two thousand Jews from North America and the United Kingdom are expected to move to Israel this summer through Nefesh B'Nefesh (NBN), the organization widely acknowledged as having revitalized aliyah from English-speaking countries in recent years.

Thornhill family doctor Allan Moll is among those who, on July 21, boarded one of NBN's 13 charter and group aliyah flights. He and his wife Marcela and their four children are settling in Yad Binyamin, a centrally located religious settlement, and Allan will commute between Israel and the GTA, where he'll continue his medical practice on a part-time basis for the time being.

Aliyah has been a lifelong dream for Moll.

"One of the biggest motivating factors is there's a great need for physicians, but the pay isn't wonderful," he said. "Truth is, until you're there, it's hard to judge [the professional situation]. My hope is to work there."

He credits NBN with helping organize the move.

"Any questions you have on practical issues, you phone them. Second, there's a yahoo group, you can pose questions and read answers on any related topic. For example, should I buy my furniture here or there? What movers do you recommend? You'll get about 15 answers. It's also a wonderful way to net-

work. You start to meet people.

"Among the Jewish population [outside Israel], including the religious community, there's a complete lack of emphasis on the mitzvah of living in Israel, even though our entire religion revolves around the Land of Israel," he added. "Everyone has his or her own personal circumstances, and not everyone can do it now. But there's a difference between saying, 'I would really like to do something but my circumstances don't permit it at this point,' and the attitude that we really don't have to go. From the Yom Kippur services to the [Passover] seder, everything is about Jerusalem and the Land of Israel. It screams out at you. But we have it so good in the Diaspora. I hope the attitude towards aliyah improves and not as a result of necessity.

"As much as people try to do what they can from here to support Israel, the thing that matters most is being there," he said. "At the end of the day, living there, participating in the elections and contributing to society there is what really matters. The impact of North Americans who go there is changing the landscape of Israel. NBN has been tremendous. Thank God for them."

According to David and Leah Laker, another Thornhill couple that made aliyah through NBN a year ago, the organization continues to be very helpful.

"They follow up with you, checking on how you're settling in and whether there are any problems with work or with



PHOTO: DAVID LAKER
Emotions were high as Olim (Immigrants to Israel) arrive at Ben Gurion Airport earlier this month on the first of five flights this summer. These flights are organized by Nefesh B'Nefesh, which will bring about 2,000 North American Jews to Israel.

school," David Laker said. "We highly recommend it. We had a serious problem that came up shortly before we left Canada and only NBN found a way to cut through the bureaucracy."

"They're really dedicated to getting you on that plane," Leah Laker declared.

A former elementary school principal, Leah explained that their biggest hurdle was education for their then 14-year-old son Joshua. "Education is the slippery slope, the most difficult challenge, for kids from the earlier grades through high school," she said.

Nonetheless, the entire family has settled in nicely in Modi'in, also centrally located as well as the fourth-largest city in Israel today.

"Ask, ask, ask," is what David recommends to any potential immigrant. "NBN has a checklist."

He also would urge anyone making aliyah to have a good lawyer and accountant well

as your representative. Things are different and you may not think of certain details such as the fact that if you're renting, the apartment usually doesn't include appliances. It takes about a year to learn the fine points. Everything is a little adventure. You need family or a buddy.

"Social adjustment is a huge factor for successful aliyah," he added. "Ulpan is very helpful. It's a great way to meet people

from different countries. We had an awful lot of fun. It also ties in the history and the culture.

"We think it's good for Jewish youth to live in Israel and grow up there," he continued. "They'll be tied to the land and mature a lot faster. Israel is a very child-centred society. The families are generally larger, even among the secular population. It's very gratifying to see that. It's the future."

