

THE JEWISH STAR

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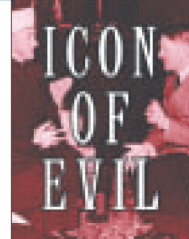
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An emotional homecoming



Elliot and Chana Alony of Woodmere, together with their three children, Tehilla, 7, Yisrael, 5 and Menachem, 2, made aliyah on Monday's chartered Nefesh B'Nefesh flight, together with 217 other immigrants. Inset, Frances Greenberg, 88, returns to the country that turned her away 61 years ago, when she arrived as a refugee aboard the Exodus ship in 1947.

Local families among newest Israelis

Nefesh B'Nefesh and hi-tech processing smooth the way for a big move

BY MAYER FERTIG

(Aboard Nefesh B'Nefesh Flight 3022)- Frances Greenberg's previous attempt at aliyah was unsuccessful. In 1947 she was a passenger aboard the Exodus, the refugee ship famed for being turned away from Palestine by British warships.

Greenberg returned to Hamburg, Germany, where she met her husband, Isak. They immigrated to the United States and raised a son and daughter in Pittsburgh. Isak passed away a year ago — Sunday was his first yahrzeit — and on Tuesday morning, 61 years to the week since the Exodus was stopped, she finally made aliyah.

This time around is "quite a bit different" than her first try, the 88-year-old said wryly, in an interview about a half hour before landing.

"When we were on the Exodus, we never saw Palestine. We only saw Har HaCarmel from far away," she explained.

Her first visit to Israel in 1950 with her daughter, D'vorah, was paid for with the first thousand dollars she and Isak saved from their dry cleaning and tailoring business.

Greenberg is moving to an assisted living facility in Ra'anana, about 20 minutes from her daughter and three of her six grandchildren. Her son and three other grandchildren are in Philadelphia.

"That's the hardest part — to leave the grandchildren," Greenberg said. "Especially little Shoshi. She's only 10 and she'll miss her Savta."

Goodbyes are always difficult.

"That part never gets easier to watch," said Rabbi Joshua Fass, co-founder of Nefesh B'Nefesh, in a ceremo-

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Shabbat

Candlelighting: 7:58 p.m. ■ Shabbat ends: 9:03 p.m.
Torah reading: Parshat Matot



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LOCAL FAMILIES AMONG NEWEST ISRAELIS

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ny at Kennedy Airport shortly before the flight boarded.

As the chartered El Al Boeing 777 taxied to takeoff two hours later, Fass bid his passengers a good flight.

"We wish you an incredible journey home," he said.

Nefesh B'Nefesh has helped 15,000 Jews from North America and the United Kingdom make aliyah in the last six years, including 220 on the Tuesday flight, the 33rd Nefesh B'Nefesh charter since the organization's inception six years ago.

"Some people are on the five year plan, the 10 year plan, the Moshiah plan — we're on the construction plan," joked Dr. Robert Kaufman, a dentist from Woodmere. He and his wife, Jill, decided last year that now was the time to make aliyah, after they had second thoughts about knocking down and rebuilding their home.

"Often you move when you're unhappy but we really loved Woodmere," he said.

"It would be so much easier if we didn't like it, or if they all came with us," Jill added.

Robert lived in Israel as a child; his mother, a single parent, made aliyah when he was seven before returning to the States a number of years later. The Kaufmans' move makes real a dream they've held onto since the birth of their oldest child, Benji, 11 years ago.

Kaufman is joining the ranks of the commuter olim as he continues to work nine days each month at his dental practice in Queens. The Kaufmans and their five children — there's also Helaina, 9, Nechama, 8, Emily, 5 and Natan, 3 — now live in Efrat, which fulfilled their desire for an Anglo community. The children formerly attended HALB and HAFTR.

For Eli and Chana Alony, also of Woodmere, home will now be Maale Adumim, which fit their requirement of "a place that wasn't 80 percent American," said Eli.

"If you're moving, become part of the culture," he explained. One part of the Israeli culture they are eager to soak up and share with their kids is that "work is a means to an end."

Chana is a physical therapist; Eli is an attorney who works in real estate development. Like Robert Kaufman, he plans to commute back to New York for work, at least for the next few months.

"It gives me a little bit of a cushion, and time to find a job" in Israel, he said.

The Alonys almost moved to Atlanta until "we realized if we were prepared to leave everything behind — family, friends — we should at least consider going home."

So they went on a pilot trip, which both called "a disaster" and "their worst trip ever," and still decided to make the move.

They had agreed that until they got on the plane to return to New York, they wouldn't discuss with each other which way they were leaning.

"She thought I was a no, for sure," Eli recalled. "I knew she was a yes, but I could tell that she was upset that I was a no." It turned out that he was also a "yes," and their decision was made.

They chose Maale Adumim, in part, Eli said, "because the hesder world is where we want our kids to be."

Their daughter, Tehilla, 7, attended Bnos Bais Yaakov; their son, Yisroel, 6, was enrolled in Yeshiva of South Shore. Their third child, Menachem, is two and a half.

"America has a dynamic that doesn't exist in Israel," he said. In America, "there's no more middle ground." Rather, he believes, it is widely assumed that "Torah lies in the black hat world ... while in Israel you can keep the same Torah values and ideals and not wear a black hat. Am I right? Time will tell."

The Alonys are most apprehensive about learning the language and seeing their children integrate smoothly into Israeli society.

Avi and Lori Lipman of Far Rockaway both have businesses in the Five Towns; she owned Lori's Dance Studio; he still operates Mr. Music, on Central Avenue, formerly Sounds of Simcha Music Studios. Their three sons, Yudi, 9, Yosi, 8 and Ovadyah, 5, all attended Yeshiva Darchei Torah. Lori, who was born in Israel, has always wanted to return. Avi is looking forward to living in a place where "there is a tremendous amount of kedusha [holiness]. In Israel, he said, "it's almost palpable."

Still, like the other olim from this area on the Tuesday flight, Lipman will commute to work and plans to be back in his store this Thursday.

For the Alony, Kaufman and Lipman families, and all of their fellow émigrés on the Tuesday flight, one of the many challenges ahead will be navigating their way through Israel's infamous bureaucracy. All of the families benefited from a number of key relationships Nefesh B'Nefesh has forged with government agencies, and some high-tech tools the organization uses to minimize hassles.

As soon as the "fasten seatbelts" sign became unlit after takeoff, passports were collected for processing directly by Nefesh B'Nefesh, and employees of Israel's Ministry of the Interior, equipped with tablet computers, began making their way up and down the aisles, taking the new Israelis through the final steps of becoming citizens.

"By the time we're over London we'll be done with all the processing," said Avi Levine of Nefesh B'Nefesh. "Our whole purpose is to make it as easy as possible for the olim to move on to the next step" in their aliyah.

Information collected during the flight was handed over to the Interior Ministry directly upon landing, allowing the new immigrants to obtain their all-important teudat zehut, the combined equivalent of a government photo ID and a social security number.

A teudat zehut is required to open a bank account in Israel, which is a pre-



Robert and Jill Kaufman of Woodmere together with their five children, disembark in Israel on Tuesday. Inset, a young couple takes their first steps as Israelis.

requisite of arranging the delivery of a lift. In the past, the waiting time for a teudat zehut was several weeks, at a minimum. Thanks to the streamlined Nefesh B'Nefesh process, the documents will be handed out by Sunday, said Rabbi Fass, and with considerably fewer mistakes than in the past.

The in-flight processing helps olim avoid "four to five weeks of waiting time and eight to 10 hours of waiting in line," he estimated.

As the plane touched down at Ben Gurion Airport, an enthusiastic cheer went up from the back of the plane — louder and longer than the smattering of applause heard on a regular passenger flight to Israel.

The new olim — including 50 singles, 23 of whom are proceeding directly to induction into the Israel Defense Forces — received a red carpet welcome at Terminal 1, as hundreds of cheering family members, soldiers and dignitaries clapped and sang along to live music played by a keyboard player and trumpeter.

"We thank you for a little bit of nechama, of comfort," Rabbi Fass told the new olim. "Last week was an excruciating week for Am Yisrael as we held



our breath with the Regev and Goldwasser families, and we sang V'shavu Banim L'Gvulam with tears. Now, we sing V'shavu Banim with tears of joy."

The emotional ceremony opened with words from the master of ceremonies, Danny Oberman, Nefesh B'Nefesh's director of operations, and closed

with the singing of Hatikvah.

"Let me be the first to say 'welcome home,'" Oberman said.

To view more pictures of Monday's flight and welcoming ceremony, go to www.thejewishstar.wordpress.com.