

Aliyah to Israel Reinvigorates New Yorker

When I decided to make aliyah, one of my Israeli cousins was shocked and said, “How can you leave New York?”

It was the first time I got that response, but it certainly was not the last. I gave my standard answer, “Even Carrie Bradshaw went to Paris.”

A year ago, I packed up my life into 20 boxes. After a snapshot at the airport with Natan Sharansky, I boarded the Nefesh b’Nefesh group flight for Ben Gurion Airport. I got to the “White City,” the “land of milk and honey,” (and as I later found out, roaches) and started my new life—and never looked back.

It took me a while to get accustomed to Tel Aviv. Like New York, it’s a bit of an unfriendly city; it’s the only one I’ve seen in Israel that doesn’t even have a welcome sign. Think about it, as you enter Jerusalem from Highway 1, you immediately are greeted by *Bruchim Habaim* (“welcome” or “blessed be your arrival”).

Luckily, I made aliyah with a job secured, so my big challenge was to find an apartment. After a three-week search that allowed me to tour Tel Aviv’s smallest and tightest spots, I found a nook of my very own. My apartment is renovated, but is bare by American standards. No closets, stove or oven. At least I am lucky to have a fridge and an air-conditioner for those balmy Tel Aviv nights.

Slowly but surely, I started to furnish my apartment and became best friends with Ikea. I quickly learned the truth behind the joke, “The best way to make a million in Israel is to come with two.”

So what is it that has kept me here? Why I didn't pack my bags and head back to New York? It doesn't hurt that the beach is a two-minute walk from my place. And I have become quite enchanted by the cafe vibe. I started to unlock Tel Aviv's secrets.

I had walked past this one small alley for months, only to finally discover hidden cafes around a small courtyard. As I continue to enjoy my life in Israel, I continue to be on the lookout for more secret places.

The interesting people I have met from all over the world are most intriguing. The fact is, I am out more in Tel Aviv than I ever was in New York. I have friends from everywhere—Argentina, France, Germany, England, South Africa and more. It is a powerful thing to literally be *ingathered* with Jews from such diverse backgrounds and singing *Shalom Aleichem* on a Friday night to the exact same tune!

A few months after my aliyah, a colleague of mine lent me the book, *Exodus*, by Leon Uris. I had heard plenty about it, but never read it before (Shocker, right? So many books, so little time). The timing of this work of historical fiction falling into my hands could not have been better. I started to realize that my coming to Israel and helping to build the country was helping to further the Zionist dream.

As a quintessential "start-up nation," Israel affords many opportunities to build new professional infrastructures and take old ones to the next level. As someone working in social media marketing, an admitted area of weakness for Israelis, I am sharing my expertise with professionals in the for-profit and non-profit sectors. Hopefully, my contributions will impact the incredible efforts emerging from Israel for the benefit of our society and the world as a whole.

Uris vividly described areas of Tel Aviv that were around my neighborhood, and slowly, everything took on a bit of a new

significance for me. I quickly learned to appreciate the people that streets are named after ... Allenby, Masaryk, Sadeh and more.

After finishing the book, I took notice of all the decaying buildings in the oldest parts of the city. I began to gaze at them all with new eyes, realizing that this incredible place is being continuously restored and reinvigorated, keeping alive the love of Tzion from which it was borne so many years ago.

In a small way, I am part of that restoration. It feels good to be part of a new phase of Israel's history. Living in Israel means doing something bigger than just me. It's a meaning that I never had living in New York, and that's why I'm staying—to look forward to whatever might come next.

Florence Broder *is a New York transplant living la vida loca in the White City, Tel Aviv. She is passionate about Israel, travel and social media. She is currently working in social media marketing for an Israeli high-tech company.*

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