

Today's israel

July 2022 / 5782

SUMMER
ISSUE



**NEFESH
B'NEFESH
COVID 19
AND THE
RETURN HOME**



ADRABA

**THE SHIRLEY
LOWY CENTER
FOR PEOPLE WITH
DISABILITIES IS AN
INTEGRAL PROGRAM
OF THE MASORTI
(CONSERVATIVE)
MOVEMENT IN ISRAEL**



Table Of CONTENTS



4

ADRABA - THE SHIRLEY LOWY CENTER FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IS AN INTEGRAL PROGRAM OF THE MASORTI (CONSERVATIVE) MOVEMENT IN ISRAEL

By Ronen Bar-Abraham, and Wendy Keter



8

COVID-19 AND THE RETURN HOME

12

TEN YEARS OF BAR AND BAT MITZVAH LOVE!

Publisher:  Paperless Factory Inc.

14879 Sunnyview Ln,
Delray Beach Fl, 33484 USA
(646) 461-1681

95 Alenby Street, Suite 17,
Tel Aviv Israel
+972-54-2152616

Graphic design: Studio Ruth Rudin
Photographers: 4ever Studio and Today's Israel Staff

Copyright © 2010-2022 All rights reserved.

Contents of the advertisements are the sole responsibility of the advertisers. The advertisements are correct as of the date of publication: January 2007. No part of this magazine may be reproduced, reprinted, translated or utilized in any form, whether by electronic, mechanical, or other means known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system without written permission from the publisher.



Dear Friends:

Based on input from my partners, Nefesh B'Nefesh and the Jewish National Fund, the new format contains fewer articles per issue with emphasis on photos.

Our first article "Adraba - The Shirley Lowy Center for people with disabilities" is an integral program of the Masorti (Conservative) Movement in Israel. This article demonstrates one aspect of our Movement which far too often has not been shared with our partners in the Diaspora. "Today's Israel" seeks to remedy that.

Our second article: from Nefesh B' Nefesh, "Covid 19 and the Return Home" offers a meaningful example as to why, during these challenging months, Nefesh B'Nefesh has received three times the number of aliyah applications compared to the pre-Covid 19 numbers for the same month.

Our third and final article in the new format from the Jewish National Fund "Ten Years of Bat Mitzvah Love." emphasizes one aspect of JNF's important work.

Your input on the new format will be appreciated, since It enables us to distribute Today's Israel more frequently ,in comparison to previous issues.

For your information, Nefesh B'Nefesh now has a new campus, located next to the Supreme Court in Jerusalem. When you are aware of any synagogues or communities considering a mission to Israel during 2022 or 2023, please alert me. We can offer meaningful services and opportunities, plus educational materials at no cost.

Our partnership with JNF also enables us to offer exciting opportunities.

It is important that we receive their contact information before the itinerary has been finalized.

Shalom from Jerusalem, hoping to welcome you soon

Rabbi Paul Freedman
 Director,
 Israel Strategic Partnerships,
 Israel Cohort, Conservative Movement
 Chairman,
 Masorti Committee on Aliyah and Klitah
 Jerusalem, Israel
 telephone: 02 6256205
 mobile: 052 604 8292
 e-mail: nina_f@netvision.net.il

"ADRABA – LET IT BE IN OUR HEARTS THAT WE SHALL SEE IN EACH OF US THE VIRTUE OF OUR FELLOWS AND NOT THEIR VICES"

By Ronen Bar-Avraham and Wendy Keter

The Masorti Movement believes that every Jew with disabilities or challenges is a full and equal member of Clal Yisrael and should be included in a minyan as is every Jew.

For the Masorti Movement, this inclusion fulfills several Jewish values: Derech Eretz (respect), K'vod Habriot (dignity for all living beings) and Tikkun Olam (repairing the world).

Adraba - The Shirley Lowy Center for people with disabilities is an integral program of the Masorti (Conservative) Movement in Israel.

This special endeavor began in the movement over 26 years ago and continues to fulfill an unmet need in Israel, especially so within many Orthodox communities, where there is a widely held belief that children with disabilities are neither obligated nor capable of performing mitzvot.

The mission of the Adraba Center is to make the full Jewish experience which includes Judaic content and text accessible for all people with disabilities – children, youth, adults and elders, as it is for any other member of the Jewish community. Education – Judaism enrichment, training, and practice for Bar or Bat Mitzvah students are seldom designed for children with several disabilities.

By providing the opportunity to become a Bar or Bat Mitzvah just like their family members and peers, this program empowers children and their families.

The Adraba Center is unique in its being the sole professional expert in this special field in Israel. This egalitarian program is the only one of its kind in Israel, and as such, provides a service and structure which would otherwise be missing from the lives of its participants. Through this program, parents from different Jewish backgrounds



Adraba - The Shirley Lowy Center for people with disabilities is an integral program of the Masorti (Conservative) Movement in Israel

learn together with their children, are introduced to Jewish rituals and many go on to incorporate these rituals into their family life. Our participants' parents tell us that the Bar and Bat Mitzvah ceremony marked the first time that anybody ever wished them a mazal tov on behalf of their child.

More than 5000 children have taken part and celebrated their Bar-Bat Mitzvah ceremony in the Masorti program throughout the years.

The program currently serves 200 children and their families per year, in 40 schools, from

the Galil in the North, to Eilat in the South. Children with physical, sensorial, intellectual, and learning disabilities, as well as those with ASD, are served by the program.

One mother, whose daughter has ASD, put it best when she wrote to us, "Our family is so proud and satisfied with the process that [she] went through, and we would like to thank you from the bottom of our hearts for all of the guidance, investment, attention to every little detail, translation of the prayers to adapted illustrations and for the unique experience that you have given to all of us."

Testimony from Wendy Keter, Adraba chairperson at Masorti Israel board

The Bar/ Bat mitzvah ceremony that I attended was at the Masorti synagogue in Herzliya this past Tuesday, May 31th.

The excitement was electrifying- families in full - parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts and uncles came to celebrate and all the parents were saying that this is a dream come true - without Adraba, their son/ daughter would never be bar/bat mitzvah.

The students have autism in various degrees and some were able to say the brachot and tefilot while others utilized the vocal application.

Rabbi Barry Shlesinger was wonderful with his guitar and Marianella Kreiman, National coordinator of the program, prepared the students for the whole full ceremony - there were no discounts here- it was a full service – tefillot, aliyot, brachot. There was family participation in every part of the service.

The classmates of the celebrants were present to cheer them on and a last year Bar Mitzvah grad gave the students a heartfelt blessing.

The school staff along with the families were kvelling with nachat. They see Adraba as an integral part of the students' education.





There was not a dry eye in the house.

Seeing the simcha of everyone is so powerful and reminds us of how we in the Masorti movement here and abroad must do everything possible to keep this program going and growing.

Adraba has developed several projects and pioneering initiatives, including the very special “BeChol Drachecha” accessible Siddur for which the Adraba Center and the Masorti Movement received awards from the Shalem Foundation (2010) and JDC-Ashalim (2018).

B'chol Drachecha Project

The B'chol D'rachecha (In All Your Ways) project is an egalitarian siddur that integrates cognitive accessibility and communication symbols – this pioneering siddur is the first of its kind in the world.

The siddur contains the familiar text of the prayers accompanied by communication symbols (for those who need them), paragraphs in simplified language, and accessibility symbols



to provide an extra level of clarification of the meaning of the text on the page. This siddur is used for study and prayer in this program under the auspices of the Adraba Center for people with Disabilities. The siddur and the app enable people with and without disabilities to pray in synagogue together as one egalitarian community.

The Bechol Drachecha project received on 2018 JDC-Ashalim award for innovative and remarkable project.

Ronen Bar-Abraham, Director, Adraba – Shirley Lowy center for people with disabilities, Masorti Movement in Israel.

Wendy Keter, Chair, Adraba Center, Masorti Movement in Israel.

COVID-19 AND THE RETURN HOME

Every year, Nefesh B’Nefesh welcomes home thousands of North American Olim, guiding them through the Aliyah process and assisting them to integrate into Israeli society. Despite the pandemic, 2021 broke all records for Aliyah in the organization’s history.



Co-Founder of Nefesh B’Nefesh Rabbi Fass and Minister of Aliyah and Integration Pnina Tamano-Shata welcome Olim at Ben Gurion Airport. Photo: Shahar Azran

In February of 2020, Nefesh B'Nefesh was gearing up for its annual Mega Aliyah event in New Jersey. The event, attended by thousands of potential Olim, is a whirlwind of information and meetings set to get the ball rolling for many North Americans' Aliyah. With the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic merely days before, the organization cancelled the event and went into overdrive, pivoting all topics and sessions into well-planned online webinars and discussions, providing the information needed in an ever-changing world.

Looking back, nobody would have believed that the onset of the pandemic would be the catalyst that would inspire conversation and encourage the Aliyah of so many to Israel.

Founded in 2002, Nefesh B'Nefesh (NBN) in partnership with Israel's Ministry of Aliyah and Integration, The Jewish Agency for Israel, Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael and JNF-USA, facilitates the process of making Aliyah from North America by minimizing the financial, professional, logistical and social obstacles. By providing comprehensive long-term support and social services to new Olim from these countries, Nefesh B'Nefesh softens their absorption into Israeli society and ensures that each Aliyah story is a success. Of the 70,000 new immigrants the organization has assisted to date, over 90% have remained in Israel.

Since March of 2020, over 20,000 Aliyah applications have been opened by potential North American Olim looking to make Israel their home – in comparison to an average year

where approximately 5,000 applications are opened. Despite the seemingly high numbers of applications, the proof is in the Olim. The number of new immigrants that was expected by the end of 2021 was 42% higher than the organization's yearly average. So, in essence, people weren't just filling in hypothetical applications, they were making real decisions for their future.

Major changes in people's lives often tend to push them toward decisions they may not have been ready for nor might have been open to beforehand. Despite the obvious hardships and turmoil, the Covid-19 pandemic has been a real opportunity for many people to rethink what was important to them and realize where they see themselves and their lives unfolding.

Rabbi Yehoshua Fass, Co-Founder and Executive Director of Nefesh B'Nefesh, characterizes this phenomenon as a result of how individuals were reassessing their lives in wake of the pandemic. "For many Jews who have been contemplating Aliyah, being home with their families has given them an opportunity to focus on individual dreams and priorities," he said. "People have been able to stay close to family members without being in the same physical space, they have felt part of a wider community without stepping foot in a synagogue or community center, and many have been able to adapt to working remotely without compromising on productivity. We are seeing how these changes, while fundamentally challenging, are allowing more and more people to consider Aliyah today."

Additionally, Nefesh B’Nefesh partnered with the Masorti Movement, which has played a significant role in assisting with the Aliyah process, especially during the years of the pandemic. Rabbi Paul Freedman, Chairman of the Committee on Aliyah and Klita of the Masorti Movement, commented that “The partnership between Masorti and Nefesh B’Nefesh has proven invaluable in our efforts to support new and potential Olim. Together we have established a Nefesh B’Nefesh – Masorti full-time Desk Manager, who manages and aids Conservative Olim, as well as Olim of other movements, throughout the Aliyah process. And, while the number of Aliyah applications has increased exponentially in recent years, the alliance between these organizations has ensured our ability to deal directly with each individual and/or family. Our partnership represents one example of the many acts of support we have, and continue to receive, from Nefesh B’Nefesh.”

According to Nefesh B’Nefesh, close to 500 individuals reported that they planned to keep their job and work remotely while making Aliyah in 2021. This was an almost 100 percent increase on the recorded number for 2020, and unsurprisingly, higher than the total number of Olim who listed remote work for their employment plan in all of 2019 and 2020 combined.

If you had told San Diagon Lilian Liebman a year ago that she would be working for a New York-based company from her Tel Aviv living room, she probably wouldn’t have believed you. “I always planned on making Aliyah,”

said Lilian, who made Aliyah in July of 2021. “I had finished my computer science degree in California and was interning for a company in New York. When I was offered a permanent job, and I was able to keep working remotely, I realized the time had come. It really pushed me forward. I had no more excuses. It honestly made my decision to come that much easier.”

In addition, the pandemic created growth in many high-tech companies which resulted in a hiring spree in the sector in Israel. Many Israel based companies are in need of English-speaking employees, and engineers and software developers are in high demand. Potential Olim with experience in these fields are looking to Israel more than ever before as their possibility for employment is growing exponentially.

The pandemic also presented a unique opportunity for the organization. The expansion and normalization of online programming allowed Nefesh B’Nefesh to reach more people than ever before. Since the beginning of the pandemic NBN hosted 268 online events, reaching more than 17,000 unique households, equating to approximately 27,000 people. “The enormous benefit of our online pivot was not only the ability to reach smaller communities, which in the past were more logistically challenging to get to, but also tailor-making online events which would suit the needs of more targeted demographics, that at larger conferences might not have occurred,” explained Sarah Kantor, Head of Marketing at Nefesh B’Nefesh. “People had increased access to endless information at any



Families of new olim arrive at Ben Gurion Airport.

given time, which only made their decisions easier," she added.

By the end of 2021 Nefesh B'Nefesh welcomed 4,478 Olim, bringing the total number of Olim who made Aliyah during the pandemic

to almost 8,000. Since the beginning of 2021, 6,500 Aliyah applications were opened, more than the total opened in 2019. North American Aliyah is on the rise and is showing very few signs of slowing down.

TEN YEARS OF BAR AND BAT MITZVAH LOVE!

Jewish National Fund-USA affiliate ADI Negev-Nahalat Eran is a 25-acre, state-of-the-art rehabilitative village in Israel's Negev Desert that offers unparalleled care for people with severe disabilities, empowering residents and outpatients to reach their potential for communication and development while providing thousands of jobs to area residents.

JNF missions are back to Israel, visiting places in Israel that are not mainstream tourist destinations, They are the secret “treasures” that are mostly known by our local affiliates from Northern Israel and the Galilee and all the way to the South and into the Negev desert.

But what about the hidden treasures within ourselves?

There are many things in life that we treasure: we treasure our families and our communities; we treasure our health and our wellbeing; we treasure our successes and our accomplishments; and we treasure our gifts and our opportunities.

None of these are hidden treasures; they are revealed for us – and for all – to see.

Hidden treasure is the preciousness buried

deep within, the gems and jewels one finds when one least expects them and in the least likely of places.

More often than not, hidden treasure is more valuable than any conspicuous treasure.

In 2011, Pia Bildirici of Istanbul, Turkey became Bat Mitzvah.

At that time, Pia chose to imbue her special day with a loftier purpose by pledging all monetary gifts received for the benefit of our children and residents with profound physical and intellectual developmental disabilities. Additionally, the Bildirici family presented each guest at Pia's Bat Mitzvah celebration with a small Chamsa gift, made by ADI residents and purchased through the Ability Boutique.

Over the years, the Bildirici family stayed in



touch with ADI, receiving periodic updates about general activity, progress, and the goings on at ADI.

Fast forward 10 years. Pia contacted ADI to let us know that she is now in NYC studying at FIT Fashion Institute of Technology towards a degree in Advertising Marketing Communication, and though she is “super busy,” she really wants to continue helping the children of ADI and become a goodwill ambassador, doing whatever she can to benefit her friends from ADI.

Eager for a personal connection, Pia came up with the idea of using ZOOM technology to read stories to some of our Anglo children who understand English. Story time was so much fun that non-English speakers joined

in as well, so Pia incorporated a few Hebrew words and used appropriated props to make the read-along a smashing success.

But Pia wanted to do more. Pia decided that she wanted to raise funds to finance ADI’s hydrotherapy program, an integral and significant part of ongoing treatments for ADI residents, daycare students and outpatients.

Pia’s parents planted the seeds of care over ten years ago, as they educated Pia to be a kind, sensitive child. It is no wonder she has grown to be such thoughtful and compassionate adult.

We are so proud of you Pia. It is people like you who demonstrate the power of the present and the potential for the future.

Thanks and appreciation

To Avi Marcovitz, with me from the beginning,
for his unfailing support.

To Ruth Rudin, our Graphic Designer, whose
skills ensure a professional format.

And to my Eshet Hayil, Nina, without whom this
and much of my work would not have happened
She makes every day a joy for me.

Rabbi Paul

Today's Israel

www.todaysisrael.com