

► FEATURE

by RACHMIEL DAYKIN

SMALL TOWNS, BIG OPPORTUNITIES

Impressions from
an out-of-town
kehillos tour
of **IMMANUEL,**
AFULA,
HAR YONA
and **CARMIEL**

Photos by Sruli Glausiusz



The Immanuel tour
was directed by Eliezer
Biller, community
askan and developer.

Har Yona-Belz and Toldos
Avraham Yitzchak apartments
and *mosdos chinuch*,
including a Litvish *cheder*.

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Carmiel –
Matan Nachliel
shul.



Givat HaMoreh –
Kollel in the Ohel
Moshe shul.

When *chareidi* Jews from English-speaking countries settle in Eretz Yisrael, they tend to do so in the areas familiar to them, where there are relatively high concentrations of like-minded people speaking their native language. This has given rise to a “pale of settlement,” as it were, where one finds many English-speakers and sometimes even bubble-like American communities. This pale of settlement, for lack of a better name, has Yerushalayim at its center, and stretches out to Ramat Beit Shemesh, Kiryat Ye’arim (Telshe Stone), Modi’in Ilit and Beitar Ilit, each of which is within a half-hour drive from Yerushalayim. People who live there may visit Tzfas and Meron, weddings and other events may take them to Bnei Brak, but by and large, the community of English-speaking *olim* has been keeping to its familiar turf — Yerushalayim and its satellite *chareidi* towns.

However, housing prices went up drastically over the past two decades, and many people can no longer afford to buy a house or apartment within the Yerushalayim orbit. Will this force many English-speaking *olim* to give up on their dream of settling in Eretz Yisrael?

Since the high prices are a challenge to Israeli *chareidim* as well, a tour was recently conducted by a group of Anglos (as English-speakers living in Eretz Yisrael are sometimes referred to), each serving as representatives for larger groups, to see how Israelis are coping. The latter, of course, are here in Eretz Yisrael to stay. Maybe what works for them can work for Anglos, too.



MOVING OUT OF TOWN

It has become increasingly common for young Israeli *chareidim* to move further out to places where the housing is considerably cheaper, where they establish new communities or contribute to the growth of existing ones. This was the question that this tour sought to answer: Is it feasible for Anglo *olim* to join these communities as well?

From his own experience, tour participant Yoel Berman knew that the answer to this question was a resounding YES! Originally from Los Angeles, he lived with his family for several years in a fledgling *kehillah* in Afula, where there were other *chutznikim* (another Israeli term, connoting people from outside of Israel — *chutz laAretz*) involved as well. When he moved back to Yerushalayim to live near his aging grandfather (“If not for that, I would’ve stayed”), he felt it was time to raise awareness of these *kehillas* among the Anglo community so that more people would be able to consider settling in Eretz Yisrael for the long term. He named this initiative “Avira D’Eretz Yisroel” (first featured in *Hamodia* on July 12, 2018/29 Tammuz 5778, page 20, entitled “Someone’s Listening”).

As part of this initiative, Mr. Berman made contact with several Anglos who had already joined such communities and were willing to assist others by providing information about them from the “inside.” Since hearing cannot be compared to seeing, he recently coordinated with a few of the local Anglos at four out-of-town locations to host a team of representatives of Anglo *olim*. The declared goal: Give a firsthand overview of their *kehillas*, the housing and education options, and their opinions on the prospects for additional English-speaking *chareidi* families interested in joining.

Some of these locals had already contributed information about their communities to lifeintheland.com, a collaborative informational website about life in Eretz Yisrael from an Anglo *chareidi* perspective — also initiated by Mr. Berman — and were now happy to do a “live” presentation.

One participant was Avraham Shusteris, a 35-year-old *oleh* and father of four from Monsey living in Ramat Beit Shemesh, where he works as an accountant. Mr. Shusteris is a partner in Naava Kodesh, an organization dedicated to helping direct potential *olim* from the U.S. Torah community, partly by connecting them with *olim* from the same hometowns or from similar professional backgrounds.

Possibly due to the coronavirus and other current events, the organization has recently seen a surge in calls and emails from people interested in finding out more about *aliyah* options. Some were interested in an out-of-town *kehillah*, so he felt it was important to be closely acquainted with such *kehillas*.

Agudas Kedushas Tzion, a *chareidi* organization that works to bring the Torah perspectives of Eretz Yisrael to the forefront, was represented in the tour by activist Elisha Bruck, 29, who made *aliyah* from Boro Park, lives in Ramat Beit Shemesh, and works as a *Rebbi* in Yeshiva Shaarei



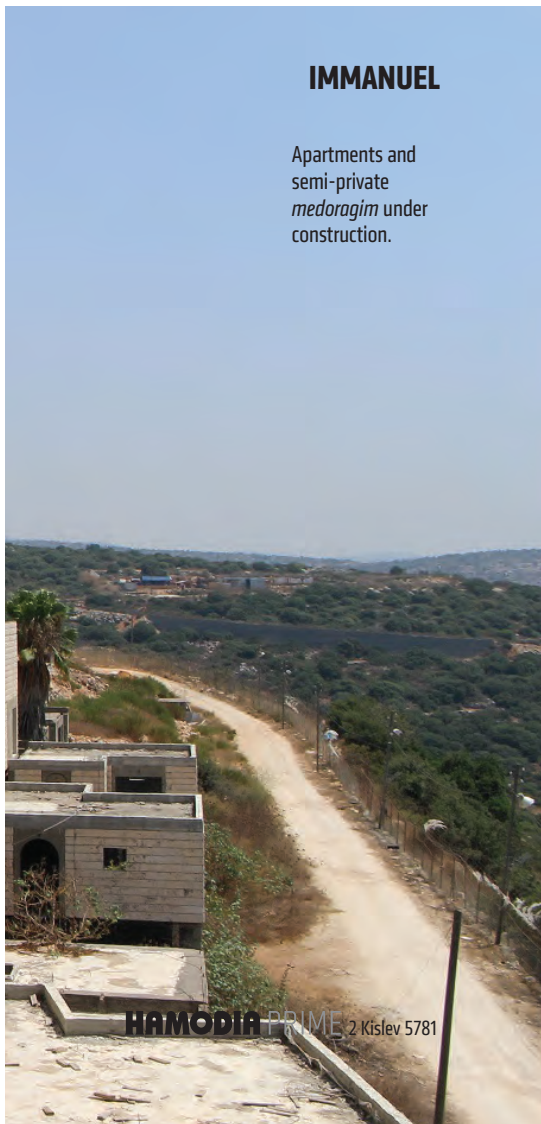
Yoel Berman



Avraham Shusteris

IMMANUEL

Apartments and semi-private *medoragim* under construction.





Elisha Bruck

Mevaseret Tzion. The organization is involved in various aspects of *yishuv Eretz Yisrael*.

Two of the organization's Rabbanim, Harav Yoel Schwartz and Harav Yitzchak Brand, have written booklets on the advantages, both spiritual and material, of settling the more-affordable communities that are further away from the main *chareidi* population centers. Though these booklets were written about 30 years ago, and may have applied to places that have now become *chareidi* population centers in their own right, their messages of creating new *chareidi kehillos* at affordable prices apply now to the new frontiers, including those communities visited on the tour.

IMMANUEL

The group's first stop was the city of Immanuel, nestled in the beautiful mountains of the Shomron.

For the first 30 years of its existence, Immanuel did not experience much growth, but just over the past few years its population jumped from 600 to 1,100 families. The rapid growth is continuing, as is evidenced by the construction of dozens of apartments, with many more in various stages of planning.

The Immanuel tour was conducted by Eliezer Biller, a local *askan* originally from Montreal and Flatbush; and by Daniel



Epstein, formerly from the Washington, D.C., area and a longtime member of the 30-family Litvish *kehillah* in Immanuel, which includes several English speakers. Epstein, 42, is the father of nine children and works as a technical writer.

The group visited the local *cheder*, where they got an overview of the city's *chinuch* options. The classic *chareidi cheder* is run by Slonimer Chasidim, and that is where the Litvishe parents and many others send their children, though the Litvishe are attempting to put together a new *cheder* more of their own style. There is a solid Sephardic *cheder* and a Chabad school, too, which caters to a wide range.

The group then peeked into the nearby Litvishe shul and *kollel*. Over a hundred heads of household are in *kollel* in Immanuel; the others work in a variety of professions. Some are employed in the nearby industrial zones.

The tour continued with a visit to a sample house, the first in a row of spacious duplexes under construction, all with gorgeous views of the surrounding mountains. From there they went to the city council building where they heard a more detailed presentation by Mr. Biller, who is 30 years old, father of seven, and works on construction projects in Bnei Brak and Beit Shemesh, in addition to Immanuel. A former *talmid* of Yeshivas Chasan Sofer, Brooklyn, he came to Eretz Yisrael at age 17 and remained there.

Immanuel Regional Council head Rabbi Eliyahu Gafni spoke briefly with *Hamodia*, noting the

affordable prices of apartments in town and the possibility of *ulpan* classes in Petach Tikva, roughly a half-hour drive away.

AFULA

The second stop was in the city of Afula's Givat HaMoreh neighborhood, a classic example of the phenomenon known in Israel — for better or worse, depending on whom you ask — as *hitchardut*, meaning a neighborhood that takes on a *chareidi* character as more and more *chareidim* move in. Givat HaMoreh fits the bill as a *mitchareid* neighborhood, but the secular Jews that live alongside them are by and large traditional and have a positive attitude toward their more observant neighbors. A significant percentage of the 350 *frum* families of Givat HaMoreh are English speakers.

The group first visited Rabbi Menachem Gold, a founder of several local *mosdos* and a member of the Afula city council, and heard how enthusiastic he is about the potential he envisions for *chutznikim* in Afula.

"I think this is a fantastic option for *olim*. Yerushalayim, Beit Shemesh — these are big cities, whereas Afula is quiet, peaceful, the cost of living is not as high, and there's employment in the area. Haifa is 35 minutes away by train; there's hi-tech in Migdal HaEmek and elsewhere. Bnei Brak is an hour away and Yerushalayim 90 minutes away via Highway 6."

As for how English-speaking families can successfully integrate into a predominantly Israeli *kehillah*, Rabbi Gold commented that "the main thing is to just do it already. Each family that comes makes it easier for the next one. There are enough English speakers in Afula that people are not coming into a vacuum. Whatever problems arise, we can accommodate them. If it's a question of children mastering Hebrew and managing in school, it takes time but everyone does it in the end. As they say, 'necessity is the mother of invention.' If parents need guidance, or kids need remedial help, we can provide it."

The group then continued to the home of Binyamin Stamler, a native of England, and heard from him how welcoming and friendly the community is, as well as how affordable the housing is. He recalled that in his own search for a community he had originally ruled out Givat HaMoreh, based on the limited information he had. However, after being convinced that it was worth further research, he realized that his perception was not accurate. He is quite happy that he ended up moving here. A typical view from the houses on Stamler's block includes the majestic Har Tavor, mentioned in chapter 4 of *sefer Shoftim*.

They then continued on to the *cheder*, where the school day was just ending. Due to coronavirus concerns, they were only allowed onto the grounds after the children were dismissed. They did get a chance to see the types of kids as they were leaving — it seemed they were from a variety of backgrounds.

They then met with Binyamin Herskovits from Canada just outside the *safrus* room he built in his backyard,



Rabbi Menachem Gold

where he has a nice view of the Lower Galilee mountains, and heard from him how his children have successfully integrated into the local *mosdos*.

Continuing on to the central shul, Ohel Moshe, they saw the two *kollelim* and spoke with *kehillah* members Yehuda Orzel, 29 and a father of three, an *avreich* originally from Manchester; and Shmuel Ribiat, 32 and a father of five, a teacher and part-time tour guide originally from Baltimore, about the *kehillah* and its potential for absorb-

ing more *chutznikim*. Orzel had come to the *kehillah* when he was still keeping two days of Yom Tov and his wife could barely speak Hebrew. His primary intent was just to stretch his stay in Eretz Yisrael as a *kollel avreich* by finding more-affordable rent. Over time they came to appreciate the community and decided to settle here.

"Although it seems clear that the *kehillah* will remain a predominantly Israeli one, there is definitely room for us *chutznikim* who want to join and be a part," says Orzel. He added that "although the majority of the men here are learning in *kollel*, the working men are fully integrated and just as much a part of the *kehillah*."

Ribiat at first sounded excited about the prospects for *chutznikim* in the *kehillah*, but when asked if he would recommend it to potential *olim*, he didn't sound nearly as enthusiastic. When asked to reconcile his change of tone, he explained: "I don't want people coming here thinking everything is picture-perfect; that they'll come here and everything will just work out. Just like anywhere else in the world — and even more so for an immigrant in Eretz Yisrael — things may get rough in *parnasah* and other areas, and one has to come with resolve and determination to weather the difficulties and make it work. If one comes with such an attitude, not just waiting for things to fall into place, but ready to proactively pursue what needs to be done to make it work, only then would I be able to recommend such a move," he said.

NOF HAGALIL

The third stop was the exclusively *chareidi* neighbor-



AFULA

Har Yona – view from
Rechov Pinchas Miller

NOF HAGALIL

hood of Har Yona Gimel in the city of Nof HaGalil (formerly Natzeret Ilit) in the Lower Galilee. This neighborhood of newly constructed apartments is situated at the edge of the city, away from the noise but close enough for the shopping. It overlooks scenic views all around.

The group got an overview of the community from Shmuel Rand, 30, a son of American *olim* and father of four who learns in a *kollel* in Afula. The first *frum* families, mostly Litvish or Sephardic, moved here in the summer of 2015. Of this community, about half are in *kollel* and half are working. In 2018, many Chassidic families joined, including from Belz, Toldos Avraham Yitzchak and Breslov.

As an inclusive community, Mr. Rand sees much potential for the absorption of *chutznikim* in the local *kehillah*. “The community atmosphere is very special and everyone helps each other here. The locals have a strong desire to have the community grow and, with *siyatta diShmaya*, we see tremendous success. Everyone who comes here with will and patience enjoys the place despite all the development challenges of a new neighborhood,” he said.

Following the tour, *Hamodia* spoke with Mayor of Nof Hagalil Ronen Plot, who has made a name for himself in Israel for, in his own words, “using every forum possible to invite and encourage Jews of the *chareidi* community to settle in his city.”

“We have resolved that 5781 will be a year of *aliyah*, *aliyah* to Israel in general, and *aliyah* to Nof Hagalil in particular,” said Mayor Plot. “Nof Hagalil has proven its ability to absorb new immigrants, and we are very interested in receiving immigrants from America, England, France or from anywhere. We are now taking in *olim* from among the Bnei Menashe and Ethiopia, and we have a section of the city — Har Yonah Gimel — where I’m sure any *chareidi* Jew can find a place for himself.

“We take in new immigrants and see to it that they have what they need, in *ulpan* and housing — with personal treatment. Next month, we will be opening up *ulpan* classes. Right now there are three, but if we need 20, we’ll supply 20. And if there is sufficient number, we can set up *ulpan* classes tailor-made for the *chareidi tzibbur*. Anyone interested is welcome to call up

the director of immigration absorption in Nof Hagalil, Sweta Yakubovitch, who speaks English, in addition to Hebrew and Russian. Her cell number is 972-54-5288-208.”

CARMIEL

The fourth and last stop was the city of Carmiel. As a relatively newly built city, it stood out for its beauty. The group got a driving tour of the various housing styles from real estate broker Tamar Sobel, an American member of the city’s *chareidi kehillah*. From apartment buildings to spacious private houses, Carmiel has many options.

The group heard from her how the Americans there are integrated with the Israelis in one *kehillah*, and also how there is an atmosphere of out-of-town simplicity.

The group met Rabbi Menachem Berzon, an American Israeli who is a *Rebbi* in the Chofetz Chaim Talmud Torah and was previously a *Rebbi* in the *cheder*. The *cheder* is in the style of a typical Israeli *cheder*, with a limited *limudei chol* program, and a student body that comes primarily from *kollel* families. The Chofetz Chaim school was founded to cater to a wider range of families interested in a *cheder* with both a strong *limudei kodesh* and a substantial *limudei chol* curriculum. There are Anglo families in both *mosdos*, and children from both get along with each other. For the girls, the one Bais Yaakov with *chareidi hanhalah* serves everyone from *chareidi* to *dati-leumi*. All *chareidi* institutions, including both *chadarim*, were founded by the Rav of Carmiel, Harav Avraham Margalit, a *talmid* of Harav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, *zt”l*, and are under his auspices.

They then got a more in-depth overview of the city from an American Rabbi of one of the local shuls, Rabbi Ephraim Schwartz. He pointed out how the 300 *chareidi* families, who make up only a small percentage of the city’s over 50,000 residents, live peacefully with the others, to the extent that secular residents are comfortable with having a deputy mayor who is *chareidi*.

Rabbi Schwartz clarified: “Carmiel is a primarily Israeli city and not geared for Americans, although that doesn’t stop them from coming. The many *olim* who come have to be ready for the challenge of learning the language and integrating into society. The schools,



Shmuel Rand

though, have gotten used to the influx of *olim* and assist them with integration.”

“Being a large community and city, there are no iron-clad codes and standards. Each person is encouraged to grow and learn at their own pace. And it is a generally non-judgmental city where most shuls and schools contain people from all backgrounds and standards,” said Rabbi Schwartz.

The *frum* community in Carmiel also includes a young and growing *kehillah* of about 80 Israeli *chareidi* families centered on a branch of Yeshivas Orchos Torah of Bnei Brak, called Rina Shel Torah. About half are alumni of the yeshivah. It is a typical Israeli *chareidi kehillah*, and they have also just opened their own Bnei Brak-style *cheder*, starting with the first grade.

Carmiel’s director of demographic development, Micha’el Ginker, told *Hamodia* that Carmiel is preparing for a wave of *aliyah*, partly from North America, and that he is willing to receive inquiries from people and direct them to the proper address within the immigrant absorption department. Ginker speaks English and his phone number is 972-54-662-6874.

Carmiel city spokesman Eli Sadeh told *Hamodia*: “Carmiel is a multicultural city where Jews of all walks of life have found a home. There is a home here for *chareidi* Jews, both Ashkenazi and Sephardi. Throughout the years, we’ve been active in the process of absorbing new immigrants and, today, immigrants from over 70 countries live in Carmiel. Our immigrant absorption department is one of the best in the country. Every



Rabbi Ephraim Schwartz

immigrant in Carmiel is escorted through the process of acclimation, personally and professionally.”

TAKING IT ALL IN

There was a limit to how many places can be seen in one day, but in reality, there are several more communities that might be quite relevant for Anglo *chareidim*. This tour was just to get a taste of some of the options, and to increase awareness that relevant communities do exist.

As tour participant Sruli Glausiusz, 26, an *avreich* in Mir Yerushalayim who grew up in London, said: “Great to see that there are other options besides the popular cities that people know about. There is such diversity between the different places that there is really a place for everyone.”

“Each of the cities we visited had a different flavor or style, but what they had in common is that they offered very affordable housing, greenery, fresh air, beautiful views, and a tight-knit, dedicated *kehillah*. They offered a more wholesome existence focusing more on family, *kollel*, and community. There are less conveniences and less distractions in these communities, and they each require a higher level of integration into the Israeli system,” said Mr. Shusteris.

Many participants noted the importance of getting many perspectives of a community, praising the fact that this tour introduced them to numerous local residents in each of the four cities visited. “Getting a broader picture is key to understanding how things really work in the various *kehillas*, and properly assessing which *kehillah* would make a good fit,” they said. ■

CARMIEL

