



Left to right, from top:  
 COME HOME Stay Safe are ads from The Bring Them Home project. (Josh Wander)  
 OLIM TO YOSH Facebook group. (Screenshot)  
 KOCHAV YISRAEL Facebook group. (Screenshot)  
 PARTNERSINALIYAH.ORG website. (Screenshot)  
 AD FOR an NBN aliyah event. (Nefesh b'Nefesh)

# Trending: Grassroots support for prospective olim

• RIVKAH LAMBERT ADLER

*‘So many people are trying to run out of America, but I often ask if they are running [away from] something bad or toward something amazing’*

COVID-19, riots in America and a sharp increase in global antisemitism are a potent cocktail, causing a spike in aliyah requests. Nefesh b'Nefesh (NBN) spokesperson Yael Katsman confirms that, noting, “We are seeing an incredible increase in aliyah interest, with May 2020 exceeding any other month in the organization’s history.” According to statistics Katsman shared, aliyah inquiries were up 127% last month compared to May 2019 and there was a 96% increase in the number of aliyah applications opened in May 2020. In response to this uptick, a trend is surfacing. An array of grassroots initiatives, launched by Jews already living in Israel, are encouraging and assisting fellow Jews to make aliyah.

**Aliyah support**  
 Leah Chaimov was born in the former USSR and made aliyah from the US. Last month, she created the Aliyah

Support WhatsApp group. Within weeks, her group size maxed out, so Chaimov opened parallel groups in Telegram and on Facebook. She estimates that she and her team are “working with over 300 people,” among all the Aliyah Support groups. The Aliyah Support groups “answer questions regarding general aspects living in Israel, about schools, communities, housing, etc.” For Russian speakers, they offer something more. “Being born in the former USSR adds an additional step in [the aliyah] process. We try to explain the process to families that moved from Russia to America at a later age. Many don’t speak English well enough to understand the NBN website. They turn to us for assistance in understanding what is required of them.” Although open just a month, Aliyah Support already offered “a Zoom meeting with assistance of [an] NBN representative and workers from an absorption center,” she said. An additional meeting is being planned for other olim to share “general personal experience from their life in

Israel, to give the people in America the opportunity to connect with people that can relate to people of the same background. Being that many of us come from the same community, we can assist olim to the best of our knowledge.” Regarding the surge of interest in aliyah, coupled with crucial government offices being closed, Chaimov said, “With COVID-19 and current riots, many people are in panic mode. They are scared and express their frustrations with not being able to contact anyone in the offices. The people in the Aliyah Support groups provide some type of relief of stress and guidance for people in their aliyah process. Having someone to turn to for advice and support means a lot in this time of distress.”

**Bring Them Home**  
 Jerusalem resident Josh Wander is the Founder of the Bring Them Home Project (bringthemhome.org.il). He explained that his project focuses on “education and information for religious Jews on the Torah perspective on living in the Biblical Land of Israel today.” The Bring Them Home video series “shares the viewpoints of respected rabbanim and educators in both America and Israel. We provide a range of practical halachic (related to Jewish law) and hashkafic (related to worldview) resources,” designed to help prospective olim explore whether aliyah is an option for them.

Wander, who is targeting his efforts toward Jews from the yeshiva world, estimates, “Thousands of Jews have watched our video series.” Bring Them Home recently launched an ad campaign in the US, using what Wander calls “shock ads,” intended to startle people into realizing that it’s time to consider making aliyah. Wander says about his team’s motivation, “We are on a mission from God.”

**Kochav Yisrael**  
 This past January, David Eskenazi of Ma’aleh Adumim was motivated by a “vision of what is possible” to found the Kochav Yisrael Facebook group. “We’ve known for years about the ‘global bubble’ or at least ‘US bubble.’ I knew that there was the possibility of an urgent need to leave countries in *chui* (outside of Israel), so why not build the infrastructure now?” Kochav Yisrael exists, in Eskenazi’s words, “to connect individual Jews from around the globe. Together we will help ease the process of aliyah and support Jews in the Diaspora, while simultaneously building up our communities in the land of Israel. We aim to create a global network that will strengthen Am Yisrael through the power of volunteers and the generosity of donors.” Eskenazi’s organization feels the impact of global events. “Jews in America are reaching out to us now due to these circumstances. A woman living in Staten Island, NY, a wife and mother of five, messaged us the

following, ‘All I know is that we need to get out of this crazy country. It’s not normal what is happening here.’” Eskenazi sums up, “The Rabbanim and community leaders in *chui* need to light up their communities and understand that now is the time to come.”

**Olim to Yosh**  
 Gidon Ariel lives in Ma’aleh Hever near Hebron. He and Avraham Davidovich of the nearby Moshav Maon recently established the Olim to Yosh group on Facebook. (“Yosh” is a Hebrew acronym for the Judea and Samaria region.) Ariel calls their group “an ad hoc coalition of English-speaking residents from many yishuvim who believe in strength in numbers and who want to help grow Yosh as a destination for olim from English-speaking countries.” According to Ariel, “Olim to Yosh is aimed at consolidating English-speaking residents of the lesser-known communities in Judea and Samaria.” Their goal is to “move the needle toward making the communities attractive to potential English-speaking olim through marketing and [dealing with] bureaucracy, on a regional and local basis.” Their efforts are so freshly minted that they are still in the planning stages. However, Ariel notes that, “already many potential olim have joined the group.” “The English-speaking community in our ‘off the beaten path’ towns has reached a critical mass that enables us – and therefore obligates us – to present our



BRINGTHEMHOME.ORG.IL website. (Screenshot)

wonderful communities to people who would appreciate finding out about them as an option.”

Acknowledging the role of current events in the creation of so many grassroots initiatives, Ariel comments, “I don’t think that our organization or many others would have been established were it not for these impetuses.”

#### Partners in aliyah

Partners in Aliyah comprises a pair of WhatsApp groups and a complimentary website.

Approximately 18 months ago, NY resident Rochel Weiman created the first Partners in Aliyah WhatsApp group. In its earliest incarnation, the group shared personal videos of people who made aliyah or who were in the process of researching aliyah. Weiman says those videos “were so touching and real.”

The videos created a desire for olim and prospective olim to connect and discuss different stages of the aliyah process. Today, the original WhatsApp group is maxed out at 256 members and a second group is close to filling as well. Each group operates independently as a “proactive and supportive network, helping to navigate the aliyah process.” One of its hallmarks is its focus on building connections between Jews already living in Israel and those who are still outside the Land.

Weiman also created an additional service ([www.kavconnect.com/partnersingeula](http://www.kavconnect.com/partnersingeula)) that matches prospective olim with a family already in Israel, providing personalized mentorship throughout the aliyah process.

The Partners in Aliyah WhatsApp groups birthed an even larger vision – creating a Partners in Aliyah website ([partnersinaliyah.org](http://partnersinaliyah.org)) to serve as “a resource hub for everything aliyah, including communities, Hebrew, education, housing, documents needed for aliyah, finances, jobs, healthcare and more.” Weiman shares.

The PartnersinAliyah.org website was created by Efrat-based Dave Brenner, owner of Tech Gadol.

“My company donated and customized our proprietary community site platform to fit the specific needs of the aliyah movement. We’ve created a full-fledged Web platform that is going to serve as a hub for aliyah support,” Brenner explained.

The site, launched in early June, allows prospective olim to make meaningful connections with those already in Israel. “Each user who registers will have a dedicated and searchable profile page with a chat blog,” he noted.

We are working on networking forums for job boards as well as partnering with sponsors who provide aliyah-based services. Our community chat forums allow people to view real-time information directly from residents regarding jobs, communities and more.

Brenner says, “If you wanted to compare us to existing platforms, we aim to be the LinkedIn or the eBay of aliyah. We’re the glue that’s going to bring

everyone’s efforts together. We do not aim to replace anyone else. Rather, we aim to serve as a central hub, to make everyone else more effective.”

Brenner has “been working day and night on this project since its inception and we’re looking for volunteers to help us with logistics, coordination and marketing. Building world-class software takes money. We are accepting donations and are also formulating a plan to allow for sponsors on the site.”

NATALIE SOPINSKY lives in Sussiya among the Hebron Hills and serves on the executive team for Partners In Aliyah. Addressing herself to what this array of grassroots efforts adds to official work being done by NBN and the Jewish Agency, she says, “We are real people. Without any pressure, we are naturally befriending these newcomers. I think that’s needed. We are just regular people. This isn’t a job to us.

“Honestly, the situation in the US is frightening to me. I think fear motivates me. I want my brothers and sisters over here and out of harm’s way. I want them to know they are not alone and here they will be with family. The world is changing and they need to be here among their own. No more dress rehearsals. No more ‘try outs.’ The time has come.”

Zey Fuld of Beit Shemesh is something of an aliyah super-volunteer, working with multiple organizations,

including Partners in Aliyah. “I’m very passionate about helping Jews make aliyah, so I’m helping whoever needs the help.

“So many people are trying to run out of America, but I often ask them if they are running out of something bad or running toward something amazing. I try to help them understand what Israel has to offer.”

#### An important caveat

Dorron Kline, CEO of Telfed, the organization that deals with the absorption of olim from South Africa and Australia, issued a cautionary statement, “We encourage our olim to utilize social media for support and suggestions. Each group has a different focus, so the more the merrier.

“However, when it comes to specific questions that relate to olim status, benefits and rights, we recommend to contact our professional *klita* advisor. We have encountered cases where unprofessional and incorrect advice has caused much hardship for olim.”

Katsman of NBN echoes Kline’s caution.

“While we commend the efforts of all individuals and initiatives seeking to help promote and assist in aliyah, it is imperative to bear in mind that assistance and information is official and fully accurate only when provided by government agencies and their authorized and certified partners in aliyah.” ■

## Anglo-friendly synagogues respond to the aliyah trend

#### SAFED

Chabad of Central Tzfas and the Tzemach Tzedek Shul ([anash.org/chabad-of-tzfas-launches-project-for-american-immigrants](http://anash.org/chabad-of-tzfas-launches-project-for-american-immigrants)) have served English-speaking residents of Safed for decades.

Recognizing the need to respond to what they identify as “an outpouring of interest in moving to Israel,” Chabad established a special help line for olim and those who are considering making aliyah to Safed.

Through the newly established help line, the Tzemach Tzedek Shul is offering assistance with practical matters such as finding suitable housing, networking for job placement, assisting parents to find appropriate school and Torah-learning options for their

children, help with navigating various government agencies with which olim typically interact, and offering access to social services for those with special needs.

*The New Immigrant Help Line can be reached at 058-323-7195 (in Israel), (917) 830-3364 (from North America) or at torahstrength@gmail.com.*

#### EFRAT

Recently, Rabbi Shlomo Katz of Kehilat Shirat David in Efrat ([shiratdavid.com](http://shiratdavid.com)) has been openly pleading with North American Jews to make aliyah. Over 100 prospective olim have responded to his call, looking for guidance and support.

Shimon Detwiler, executive director of the Shlomo Katz Project, explained how Shirat

David is handling this surge of interest in aliyah.

“As we encourage and anticipate the increase of Jews coming home to live in Eretz Yisrael post-COVID travel restrictions, we plan to continue to be a source of spiritual *chizuk*, strength and support. Additionally, we have started to build direct connections with organizations to help those reaching out to us seeking guidance and support through their process of return.

“We believe that if we focus on our strength, [which is] spiritual guidance and encouragement, and refer potential olim to established and supportive organizations for technical support, we will realize the best possible outcomes for those reaching out to us.” – R.L.A.