
Emissary

FROM BOTH SIDES NOW: An American Israeli Odyssey by Jay Shapiro. Tel Aviv, Dvir Katzman, 240 pp. \$5.00

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SOCIOLOGISTS, political scientists and professional Zionists have churned out books analysing *aliya* and immigrants from almost every possible angle. Sometimes, however, one of those immigrants sits down, writes his own story, and puts everything into focus.

Jay Shapiro's story-telling talent, his good memory and extraordinary sense of humour provide the ingredients for an unusual tale, and a commentary on life in America and Israel. For those in the West who still believe that Israel is reserved for the downtrodden, or that to be a Zionist in America is more important than *aliya* to Israel, I highly recommend this book. It tells how and why a family with two children, a four-storey, 10-room house in Philadelphia, troops of friends and family, and a decade of valuable experience in the aerospace industry, "picks up" and leaves for Israel.

Shapiro tells us about his adventures as an immigrant in 1969 in chapters titled "The First Daze," "Lies My Shaliach Told Me," and

"The Obstacle Course." He recounts also his subsequent four-year stint as an *aliyah* emissary back in the U.S.A., first in Philadelphia and then New York City.

Shapiro's passion for Israel is enhanced by his uncanny ability to beat the bureaucracy at its own game, to laugh at absurdities in Israeli life, and to develop clever game plans to overcome them and even change some of them. In this regard, his book should be required reading for new and potential *olim*.

Armed with this wealth of practical experience, and a wish to share it, Shapiro is turned loose on the unsuspecting Jewish community of Philadelphia. Taking leave of his engineering job at Israel Aircraft Industries, he turned out to be, according to judgment of clients and colleagues, one of the best *shlichim* ever sent to North America. As an ex-Philadelphian, and an Israeli, he spoke everybody's language. As an Orthodox Jew who had made it in the secular world, a realist who had not sold out on his own Zionist dreams, and a person whose politics were eclectic, he understood American Jews better than they understood themselves.

He has written it down for us in this book along with his feelings about the experience. The result is fascinating reading. And he's told the story, too, of many of us from the West, who followed or preceded him. □