



ALIYON BOOK REVIEW

A STORY OF UNFULFILLED DREAMS

Edited by Eliezer D. Jaffe
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Reviewed By Dr. Owen Bernstein

It is not difficult to identify with the family, cultural styles, aspirations, hopes, dreams and modifying reality of Eliezer Jaffe in his slim, true-to-life book *Letters to Yitz*. In a narrative which spans some 30 years, we follow the Jaffe family, Henry and Sarah, the father and mother of the author, who came to the United States, settled in Cleveland, opened a business and instilled in their five children a sense of Jewishness, and a belief in the centrality of Israel.

We follow Yitz (Arthur-Yizchak) as he yearns for, plans for, prepares for, and goes for, aliyah, only to find in 1949 when he is on the verge of leaving for Israel, that marriage, family respon-

Dr. Owen Bernstein is a Vice-President of NAAM and chug chairman of the Brooklyn 50+ Chug.

sibility, and economics divert his intent. Although the hope of Yitz for aliyah was never realized, his younger brother Eliezer in 1960, after receiving a doctorate in Social Work, does settle in Israel, marry, and raise a family of four children in Jerusalem. It is Eliezer, the correspondent with Yitz who compiles and presents the letters, incidents and 'maasim' which make this book touching, humanistic and relevant. Although separated geographically during a thirty year period, we learn through these two brothers and their families about the feeling of wanting to—but not making aliyah, and the feeling of fulfillment which comes from taking the step of building a new life in Israel.

We experience through Eliezer the inseparable binding of Jewish survival and Israel. We endure the cultural adjustment one goes through to become "Israeli." We agonize through Israel's wars, take pride in Israel's achievements, wonder at our unwarranted expectation of the perfect Jewish State

as we read about Eliezer's tribulations when he becomes director of the Jerusalem Department of Welfare and gets caught in a net of establishment bureaucracy and politics.

It is Yitz, predictably, who defines the problem of those considering aliyah, when he writes . . . "the problem of us modern Zionists, we have roots in both worlds. I envy people who don't have this conflict. . . ."

Tragically, Yitz never does reside in the apartment he buys in Jerusalem, because shortly after he writes the letter in which the above quote appears, he is senselessly robbed and murdered in Cleveland; his dream unfulfilled.

In his attempt to deal with Jewish organizations in the United States, sociology in Israel, family, personal and occupational history, Eliezer tries to cover many subjects, and although aliyah is the objective of Yitz, the theme is diminished somewhat by the excessive elaboration of Eliezer's social work affairs and Yitz's business and communal involvement. The detail does, however, contribute to the intimacy of the story.

After the death of Yitz, Eliezer prepares a posthumous letter which ends the book. He writes, "I think that the place for a young Jew to be today is here in Israel, and the longer one puts it off, the harder it is to come here. None of us knows how long we have to live, your death made that lesson clear. . . . they (diaspora Jews) let their lives float away from them until they are so deeply anchored in making a living and running local institutions, and trying to enrich local Jewish life that, in the end, they are thoroughly embedded in diaspora living. . . . for most Jews, aliyah is an embarrassing word. But . . . the only place for a Jew in this century is in the State of Israel." He goes on to say, ". . . we have to ask ourselves where on this earth do we want to end our days, build our homes, raise our young, and close our eyes at that last moment? Under Israeli skies, or on foreign soil?"

"Letters to Yitz" may be purchased through NAAM by sending \$5.00 to NAAM, "Letters to Yitz," 515 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10022.