

Preparing for More Than the Move

You can be excited about the life you're choosing and worried about what it will cost.
There's room for both in the suitcase.

Six sessions on identity, relationships, language, work and belonging - before the shipping company asks for the final inventory and 'one last thing' becomes another cubic metre.

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BEFORE YOU START

Before you start

You already have a list. Documents, lift, housing, kupah, schools, bank. Possibly a second list explaining where you put the first list.

This is for the preparation that makes neither one: what happens when you move an entire life, including the parts that do not go in a box.

Aliyah can be meaningful, wanted, urgent, complicated, or all of those at once. Some people arrive with a powerful sense of homecoming. Some arrive because staying put stopped feeling safe. Plenty feel both, on alternate days. You do not need the correct emotional response to qualify for support.

The point is to make room for the whole decision. What are you moving toward? What are you leaving? What will help you build a life that fits, including during the stretch when the first version is distinctly awkward?

Six sessions, twenty minutes each, or less if that is what you have got. Skip questions. Use a voice note. Talk them through with someone. There is no prize for completing every prompt.

WORTH SAYING AT THE OUTSET

This does not assess whether you should go, and it will not tell you how it will feel. It gives difficult possibilities a name in advance, so that if they turn up they are something you can recognise rather than automatic proof you made a mistake.

If a question opens more than you want to hold today, pause. Look around, feel the floor, make tea, text someone. You do not have to revisit anything painful to get use out of this.

ONE - WHAT YOU ACTUALLY EXPECT

One - What you actually expect

Picture an ordinary Tuesday a year after Aliyah. Not the arrival hall. Not the first Shabbat. Tuesday, with laundry.

Expectations are useful when you can see them. Less useful when they sit quietly in the background insisting that by now you should have friends, functional Hebrew and a favourite electrician on speed dial.

What does that Tuesday look like? Where are you, what fills the day, who knows how you are doing?

What is drawing you toward Aliyah? Which parts feel freely chosen, and which feel shaped by pressure, safety, family or necessity?

What are you quietly worried about? You do not have to make the worry sound reasonable first.

Finish this: I expect that by _____ I will _____. Where did that expectation come from?

Turn an expectation into a direction

Say the expectation is 'I will have a group of friends by the end of year one.' The direction underneath might be 'I want relationships where I can be myself.' A step within your influence could be returning to the same small group a few times and inviting one person for coffee.

One direction that matters to me:

BEFORE ALIYAH

One step within my influence:

Hope does not need dismantling. It needs somewhere to stand when reality changes the schedule.

TWO - THE CONVERSATION IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD

Two - The conversation in your household

People can agree on a destination and disagree entirely about what the move means. One sees opportunity. Another sees a career interrupted. A third is primarily concerned about whether the dog will ever forgive anyone for the flight.

If more than one of you is going, enthusiasm may not be evenly distributed. That is not automatically a problem. It becomes one when nobody can say it.

The person who wanted it less may have given up more, and when it is hard they may worry that saying so will sound like 'I told you so.' That silence can later show up as a relationship problem that is partly about the move.

Answer separately first. Share what you choose. Listen before replying. A useful response is 'what would help?' A less useful one is a presentation proving the move is objectively excellent.

What am I hoping to gain, and what am I giving up that the others in my household may not have registered?

What practical support would protect my independence - income, access to accounts, work options, transport, time of my own, childcare or other support?

How will we share the admin, caregiving and emotional work of the move?

How can I say I am struggling without it being heard as a demand to reverse the whole decision?

A CONVERSATION YOU CAN BORROW

'I still want us to do this. I also need us to talk about what it costs me. Could you listen first, and then we can work out what support is possible?'

Agree a regular check-in and a way to pause a discussion that is going nowhere. A pause needs a return time, otherwise it can become a very polite way of never discussing it again.

TWO - THE CONVERSATION IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD

About children and dependants

Children adjust differently from adults and from each other, and quick language learning does not tell you how they feel. Keep asking about friends, worries, school and what they miss.

For healthcare, legal or other sensitive conversations, use an adult interpreter or professional language support when possible rather than making a child the default interpreter. A child may help with ordinary language sometimes; they should not have to carry the responsibility for getting an adult's important information exactly right.

The same principle applies to other dependants: do not assume the person who speaks the best Hebrew should automatically become the household administrator.

SAFETY

If honest disagreement in your household could lead to threats, punishment or violence, do not use a joint exercise to test it. Seek confidential specialist support separately, and consider whether your devices or this workbook could be seen.

One household arrangement worth deciding before the move:

THREE - WHAT YOU'RE LEAVING

Three - What you're leaving

A good decision can involve real loss. You do not have to downgrade the decision to acknowledge the cost.

You might miss a person, a street, a language, a role, a Jewish community, a work identity, or the version of yourself who knew how everything worked.

Often the most painful losses sound trivial out loud: being known by the person at the corner shop, walking into a room without explaining your history, making a joke without a translation budget.

When a move is chosen, grief *can* be mistaken for ingratitude - by other people or by you. That can make it harder to name. Some losses also have no clean ending: people and places still exist, but your access to them changes.

What will I miss that a video call will not fix?

Which routines, places, communities or roles have helped me feel like myself?

Is there someone I feel guilty about leaving? What is actually my responsibility, and what is not?

What would I like to carry forward, even in a different form?

Choose a way to stay connected

A standing call. A familiar meal. An object that matters. A proper goodbye to a place. A plan for holidays or family events. If a relationship is unsafe or harmful, staying connected is not an obligation.

I can miss what I am leaving and still want what I am going toward. I can also be uncertain. None of that has to settle the whole decision today.

FOUR - STILL COMPETENT, IN A LESS FAMILIAR WORLD

Four - Still competent, in a less familiar world

At home you can resolve a bank problem, explain a complicated idea and be funny in the same afternoon. In a new language, buying the correct lightbulb may take most of that afternoon.

Your abilities have not disappeared. The shortcuts that let you use them have: language, local knowledge, recognised qualifications, and people who already know what you are good at.

When something goes badly, the mind often turns a task problem into a verdict: 'I cannot do anything here.' Before accepting the verdict, identify the actual obstacle.

Name two ordinary tasks that are likely to get harder. What help would each one need?

When I feel inexperienced in public, what conclusion do I tend to make about myself?

Return to the task

If the thought is 'I'm useless,' you do not have to replace it with a motivational slogan. Notice that your mind has jumped from *this task is hard* to *I am the problem*, then ask: what is the next concrete thing I need - a translated sentence, someone to come with me, more time, a second attempt, or rest?

One low-stakes task I could practise:

The help I will use:

One high-stakes task where I will arrange language or practical support:

Needing help in an unfamiliar system is information about the task. It is not a complete description of you.

FIVE - A MAP WITHOUT A DEADLINE

Five - A map without a deadline

Adjustment does not follow a reliable calendar, and stage-by-stage diagrams are usually tidier than real life. Some people struggle immediately. Some feel the cost later, once urgent tasks settle. Some are mostly fine and then have a rough two weeks years in.

These are possibilities to plan for, not stages to pass through.

Getting the basics working

Housing, income, healthcare, paperwork, language. Practical help matters. Work out what can be delegated and what genuinely has to happen first.

Feeling the daily effort

The unfamiliar gets tiring once novelty fades. Reduce unnecessary demands and restore small routines rather than reading fatigue as lack of commitment.

Noticing what it cost

Loss and uncertainty may surface when there is finally room. Naming them can help; persistent or worsening distress deserves assessment rather than endless patience.

Building a life that fits

Familiarity grows through repeated contact with people and places. That might be a neighbourhood cafe, a class, a professional group, a volunteering role, a synagogue or community event if that fits you, or something entirely secular.

Which of these am I least prepared for? What would make it more manageable?

What would count as progress besides fluent Hebrew and a full social calendar?

When will I review how it is going, and with whom?

A NOTE ON YOUR REVIEW DATE

It is a chance to ask what needs changing. It is not an expiry date on your right to find this difficult. Equally, enduring something indefinitely is not proof that it is good for you.

SIX - BUILD THE SUPPORT BEFORE YOU NEED IT

Six - Build the support before you need it

Support is far easier to use when the details live somewhere other than your exhausted memory. 'Someone will help' is a hope. A name and a working number is a plan.

Who could listen without immediately trying to improve my attitude? How will we stay in contact?

Who could help with a form, difficult call, transport, childcare, a health appointment or bureaucracy? Include paid or community help.

One recurring place where I might meet people. Check accessibility, language, cost - and whether I actually want to be there.

What currently keeps me steady? Pick one thing and decide how it survives the move in a smaller form.

☐ If I currently see a therapist or other clinical provider, I have asked whether they can legally and practically continue working with me across borders, or helped plan a transition.

☐ If I take medication, I have discussed supply, documentation and Israeli availability with my prescriber.

☐ I know how to register for healthcare and where to find mental health support in a language I can use.

☐ Essential documents and emergency contacts are somewhere I can reach them.

SIX - BUILD THE SUPPORT BEFORE YOU NEED IT

If you are pregnant or will have a baby soon after arrival

A new baby and Aliyah together are worth planning for specifically: an unfamiliar health system, support people far away, disrupted routines, and appointments in a language you are still learning.

Before you go, find out how maternity care and tipat halav work, whether support in your preferred language exists locally, and who could come to an appointment or help after the birth. Postnatal depression and anxiety are common and treatable; they can be easier to miss when the people around you do not know your baseline.

One support arrangement I will make this week:

First step:

The best plan is one you can use on a bad day. If it requires energy, confidence and three forgotten passwords, simplify it.

WHEN THE PLAN NEEDS MORE SUPPORT

When the plan needs more support

You do not have to wait a set number of months or reach a crisis to ask for help. Talk to a doctor or qualified mental health professional when distress persists, worsens, or starts affecting sleep, eating, work, relationships or ordinary self-care. New or persistent physical symptoms deserve medical attention too.

If you already know you have been struggling, arrange support before you go. A change of country alters some conditions. It is not a treatment plan.

The signs that would prompt me to ask for help:

The person or service I will contact, and a backup if unavailable:

If you are facing threats, violence or coercion in a relationship or household, seek specialist confidential help and consider whether your device or written plan could be monitored.

Making room for fear, grief or uncertainty does not mean accepting harm, dropping a boundary, or staying somewhere unsafe. The point is to give yourself enough room to choose a workable next step.

What you take with you

You don't have to leave feeling certain. Certainty certainly is not something El Al requires for boarding.

What you should have is a more honest picture: your reasons, the losses that deserve attention, the conversations still to have, and a few arrangements that will make the first stretch less lonely.

The sentence I want to leave for my future self:

The next concrete thing I will do:

RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING

Resources and further reading

These exercises are informed by psychological flexibility, practical problem-solving and trauma-informed principles. They are educational and are not a substitute for individual assessment or therapy.

- World Health Organization. Doing What Matters in Times of Stress: An Illustrated Guide (2020).
- SAMHSA. Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach (2014).
- Israel Ministry of Health. Mental Health First Aid Centers.
- ERAN. Emotional first aid - check current language options and hours.
- KeepOlim / Tikva Mental Health Program - subsidized therapy for Olim, free weekly therapy for Lone Soldiers, and a 24/7 support line at 074-775-1433.

When choosing a therapist or other mental health provider, fit matters. You are allowed to ask about approach, experience, language and fees; speak with more than one person; and decide that a provider is not the right match. An introductory call is not a commitment.

About the author. Myriam Chebat, MSW, RSW, is a clinical social worker registered in Israel and Quebec, Canada, with over 14 years of clinical and psychosocial experience across clinical, humanitarian and international settings. She made Aliyah herself and works with adults online across Israel and in person in Haifa.

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