



Israel Senior Life

News and Issues affecting
Israel's seniors

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Welcome to the premier issue of Israel Senior Life! We hope that this e-zine will give you a window onto life for seniors in Israel today. Every month we will send you the latest news, together with profiles of veteran Israelis, reviews, articles and poetry written by or about seniors. To submit your article - send to info@ezratavot.org

Rethinking
by Larry Lefkowitz

My grandfather
read the yiddish newspaper,
the letters and photographs brown
in my memory.
I thought him hopelessly
old-fashioned, European.
Now, at 67
I am studying Yiddish.
Act of self-enlightment
Or atonement?

Larry's stories, poems and humor have appeared in publications in Israel, the U.S. and Britain.

Knesset approves New Ministry for Pensioners' Affairs

On July 25th, Israel's Knesset on Wednesday approved a bill for the creation of a new Pensioners' Ministry headed by MK Rafi Eitan, the head of the Gil Pensioners' Party. MK Eitan, who was a minister without portfolio in the Prime Minister's Office, will serve as Minister for Pensioner Affairs and Jerusalem Affairs.

MK Eitan said that without an independent ministry, his department could not achieve its desired goals, such as a public advisory committee for pensioner affairs and a public information center to deal with pensioners' requests. "For a year we have been trying to lay the infrastructure and we can't because of bureaucracy," he said. MK Eldad of the National Union charged that the establishment of the new ministry was just to create jobs for Olmert's supporters in order to strengthen the shaky coalition.

Do you think Israel should have a Ministry of Pensioner Affairs? How effective do you think it will be?
[Post your opinion on Ezrat Avot's new Israel Senior Life blog!](#)

"How I Made It to the Bench" by Leon Moss

I sat on a bench in the street today! Five years ago when we moved from Jerusalem to Kfar Saba I was looking for a hardware store when I noticed the benches on the street corners. I saw that most of the seats were occupied by elderly men. I'll never do that, I promised myself. I'll never sit on a bench on the street and watch the people passing by.

Today I did it. I understand why I sat there. I became unemployed a month ago. The company closed down - I had nothing to do with it. I had been the company writer, hammering out technical specifications, proposals for work, marketing material, whatever needed writing. My unofficial title was "Official Writer". It wasn't a surprise. The work scene had been steadily declining with the hi-tech drift over the past months and I watched in silence as more and more of the staff were fired. I was kept on until the end, in case a new request for a proposal came in - the big one that would stave off the end. It never arrived. 0

So I find myself two months short of 69 with nothing to do. I have a pension, true, but it is calculated on the number of years worked in this country. Interest rates on our savings are low and all in all what comes

in is about enough to see us through the first two weeks of each month, if we live quietly and breathe shallow. My nights are restless and sleep is frequently interrupted as the problem surfaces. Then I manage to turn my thoughts to some pleasant incident and I drop off again, only to wake an hour later. In front of the TV set in the early evening hours I am the champion sleeper, unable to keep my eyes open.

My stay on the bench was pure necessity. I had taken the car down to the industrial area of the town for a service and decided to walk back and collect it. I saw the unoccupied bench about half way in the two mile walk and decided to stop awhile – not to rest, but to gather my thoughts, put some order into my mind, think things out, run through my list of contacts one more time. So I sat down and immediately dropped into a deep reverie. I never noticed when the other two occupants arrived. But when a passing cabbie hit his horn in frustration and broke through the fog, I found myself one of three gray-haired men sitting on the bench.

So far my days have been pretty full. On Tuesday I drove to Jerusalem to my insurance broker and had him go through all the papers, do a few of the sums and find out what I need to do in order to pull my pension onto its feet. It was a stimulating exercise in which I participated with enthusiasm.

Yesterday I took a deep breath and walked across town to the National Insurance Institute to find out about the government old-age pension. I never took it at age 65 – who needs it when one is gainfully employed and pulling in a good salary? I wondered if I had forfeited it forever. The reception area of the Institute is like a tourist's view into hell. Hordes of old and disabled people look as though they've been milling around for decades. Voices are raised. The clerks have little patience and elbows are used indiscriminately. I stated my request to the man at the help desk and he punched keys on a machine and handed me a slip of paper, already yelling at the guy behind me. I looked at it and read "3rd floor, Room 302 and you are number 44 in line". From there it was easy. The clerk was pleasant and actually smiled at me during the brief interview. I left with a list of papers and forms I need to have filled in by my previous employer.

In the meantime I am glued to my computer and the list of job advertisers and employment agencies on the Internet. There are many of them and it has taken me a while to understand exactly what is required and how I need to go about looking for a job. Of course everyone is an equal opportunity employer until the dreaded question of age comes up. Pushing sixty-nine is heavy going.

That I am worried about money or the lack thereof is clear and I understand it perfectly. But now that seems to be the secondary problem. Age has suddenly surfaced. Of course it was always there – everyone knows how old they are. Some manage to live below their age and others choose not to – it's part of one's personality. What I'm finding now is that I am having old age thrust upon me when I don't want it, when I'm not ready for it and when I'm least expecting it. It's almost as though my age is taking advantage of my being unemployed and hopping on for the bumpy ride.

The whole subject is a new stage in my life. With a good deal of careful consideration and faith in my abilities, I am sure that I will succeed in finding my way through this new maze as I have in the other stages of life. And what better place to do my thinking but on the bench at the corner of Weizmann and Rothschild? So if you see me there, know that I'm busy solving the problems of my future.

It's a relief to know that I don't sit on public benches for the same reason as those other old men.

The writer is a "retired-but-working" engineer living with his wife in Kfar Saba. Work consists mostly of writing and the late career change will be documented in another article.

Golden Aliya by Heather Shinder

Why do people make aliya? Young adults may envision establishing careers and raising children here, but seniors anticipate a different kind of homecoming, armed with their life experience, precious possessions and coming to a Jewish State that didn't even exist when they were young. Ezrat Avot spoke with several senior olim for a first-hand look at the issues faced by "Golden Olim."

Fearless at 86, Rita Weiss

"I always felt that Israel was my second home," explains Rita Weiss, an Auschwitz survivor who made aliya from New Jersey. She chose to make aliya a year ago at the age of 87 to be close to her daughters and grandchildren after her husband passed away. Rita retains great faith in Hashem and finds solace that she is finally living in the Jewish homeland.

Despite an injured back, she walks up and down Emek Refaim Street every morning and

attends aerobics classes and Torah shiurim at the OU Israel Center weekly .

While one daughter is fearful of terror attacks on Israeli buses, Rita continues to ride the bus, "I wouldn't have grandchildren, nieces and nephews here if we were all afraid...I feel more secure living here alone than I would in America " .

Not Just a "Telephone Bubby", Naomi Sussman

"These past years have been some of the happiest of my life," proclaims Naomi Sussman. After diligent research and a 4-month pilot trip, Naomi made aliya nearly five years ago to be close to her daughter and grandchildren in Ramat Beit Shemesh.

A big challenge was figuring out what to do with her possessions in America . "I'm a packrat," she admits, "I realized that I had to give away many of my belongings because if I wanted to take everything with me, or wait to sell it all, I would never make aliya"

After donating almost everything to a needy newlywed couple and a poor family, Naomi finds pleasure in the simplicity of her belongings. But her greatest joy comes from her family, "I'm not just the bubby on the telephone anymore... We have a very close relationship now," affirms Naomi with a smile .

Difficult but Worth the Schlep, Alfred and Rose Cohen

"Be prepared for a change in lifestyle," warns Alfred Cohen, 88, "But though it's been difficult, it is the best move we've ever made," referring to his aliya with wife Rose, 92, a decade ago. They moved from New Jersey to the Katamon neighborhood in Yerushalayim, to a cozy apartment found by their two daughters who live here, one in Efrat and the other in Ra'anana, (a third daughter remains in the US.

"I'm an ulpan dropout!" the vivacious Rose admits. However they've both found that they can easily get by in Yerushalayim in English. Their two complaints are the heat and the Israeli medical system. "I've waited in lines here for hours," Rose explains, referring to medical treatment she has received in Yerushalayim. Despite the drawbacks, she maintains that "to perform a mitzva outside of Israel just isn't the same"

Among the resources they have found most helpful are their children, their books, their air conditioner for the summer heat and their housekeeper Jane, who cares for all their needs.

To make Golden aliya a smooth and rewarding transition, Ezrat Avot recommends considering the following points :

- Language:** Many retired immigrants choose to attend an ulpan either to begin learning, or to improve their Hebrew. Others find that even a minimal level of Hebrew is sufficient, especially if you are planning to live in areas such as Beit Shemesh or Yerushalayim, with a large English-speaking population .

- Housing:** Some real estate agencies such as Anglo Saxon and ReMax cater particularly to Anglos coming to Israel. The internet can also be a great resource: www.flathunting.com is an English website offering Yerushalayim daily real-estate listings. Aliya organizations such as Nefesh b'Nefesh and AACI can help find different types of retirement housing or assisted living facilities .

- Pensions:** Eligibility for US Social Security or British pensions are not affected by aliyah – you can arrange to receive payments in Israel. Immigrants who make aliya after the age of 60 are not entitled to a standard Israeli pension through the Bituach Leumi (National Insurance Institute, nor are they required to pay premiums. However they may be eligible for a "Special Old-Age Allowance". It is also possible to receive "Avtachat

Hachnasa” (income supplement), if one’s income does not exceed a set percentage of the average wage, however the seniors who seek help from Ezrat Avot can unfortunately attest that the Israeli pension alone is insufficient to financially survive .

- **Health Care:** Every Israeli citizen is entitled to mandatory health care coverage from one of the four kupot cholim (health funds) – Maccabi, Meuhedet, Clalit, Leumi. Therefore every kupa must accept the application of a new immigrant, even with pre-existing medical conditions. Private health care is also becoming more popular and dental care is mainly private.

- **Transportation:** Many golden olim “throw in the car keys” when they make aliya, wary of driving in Israel. This may play a factor in the decision to settle near children. Public transportation is cheap for retirees and convenient within most cities, but insufficiently accessible to the physically-challenged. A number of organizations offer wheelchair-accessible transportation but the fees can be expensive, particularly in outlying communities. Cities such as Beit Shemesh and Netanya have a convenient fixed fare for cab rides within the city boundaries, unlike larger cities such as Jerusalem and Tel Aviv

Heather Shinder made aliya from Montreal in 2005.

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