Experiencing life's ups and downs far away from family

Every year around the anniversary of my *aliyah* to Israel, I write a column summarizing the past year of my life. I've written about studying Hebrew in *ulpan*, working, serving in the Israeli army, beginning study on my master's degree, and getting married. For a long time, it seemed that each year would always be better than the last. Sadly, I can't say this is true of the past year.

In the past I've written a great deal about the positive and meaningful experiences that reminded me of why I moved to Israel in the first place. There seems to be a prevalent stereotype that life in Israel is far more difficult than in countries like America; I've done my best to dispel that misconception. While Israel may lack a few creature comforts compared to many Western countries, it makes up for that lack "in spades" with culture and meaning – not to mention that right now it also has one of the most thriving economies in the world.

However, I'd be lying if I said that my life in Israel has had only "ups" and no "downs." During this past year, I've had two wake-up calls that finally helped me to realize that my life in Israel wouldn't always be about moving from one positive experience to another. This year I have had to deal with the loss of my grandmother and also with my divorce.

Regarding the former, one question I had asked myself before making *aliyah* was whether I would be able to fly back to the United States for the funeral of a loved one such as my grandmother. While my parents were here on a visit, I observed my father say goodbye to my grandmother on the phone in the final moments of her life. Finally, it became clear to me that it was necessary to return to the United States for her funeral. I needed to bid a proper farewell to my grandmother, and there was no better way than to attend her funeral in New York.

A few months later, it became clear that my (now ex-) wife and I would be going our separate ways. When making *aliyah*, I realized that the hardest part would be leaving my parents and siblings behind in the United States. Spending time with them would no longer be a simple matter of hopping on a subway to Manhattan's Upper West Side, or taking a bus from the Port Authority Bus Terminal to Providence. They would no longer always be there to share good times and bad times with me.

This separation became more tolerable when I married. Not only did I now have family in Israel, but with marriage came hopes of building a life with another person, starting a family of my own and eventually, perhaps, persuading my family in America to join me in Israel on a more permanent basis.

When my family learned of my impending divorce, for the first time since I made *aliyah* some of them urged me to move back to the United States. I'd be lying if I said I didn't consider doing so. I had not left Rhode Island or New York because I hated living there. In fact, at the time I made *ali yah* I was very happy and felt that I had everything going for me. Nonetheless, I left home because Israel was where I wanted to live. Did I ever consider moving back to the United State to be closer to my family? Most definitely. However, I realized that my old life, the one I loved and often missed, would no longer be there waiting for me. And even if it were, I am no longer the same person that I was when I left four years ago.

I miss my family desperately; but Israel is where I belong right now. I know my life will have its ups and downs no matter where I live. The difference is that here in Israel, I feel every day that I am part of something greater than myself.

Running away from my problems would not solve them. But everything that happens to me in Israel, for better or for worse, will continue to make me a stronger person and a better Jew.

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