

# The Dream of Returning in Gush Etzion



In small villages on the outskirts of Lima, Peru, a group of people, unconnected to any formal Jewish community, started living their lives as Jews. For decades, they studied all they could about the Bible, the Holy Scriptures, and Jewish Law. At one point, thirsty to hear more of the rich tradition of the Jewish people, they reached out to Rabbis and scholars in Israel. It was thrilling to discover the existence of these Peruvians and of their devoted observance, because, up until then, their existence was unknown to the Jewish community here in Israel or anywhere in the world! The most appropriate culmination of their Jewish lives was to make Aliyah and move to Israel, becoming an integral part of the Jewish community.

In the year 2003, forty such Peruvian families began their new lives in Gush Etzion and since then they have been having a difficult time absorbing into life in Israel. They had to adjust to a new life, struggling to embrace new traditions and culture. There was a new language and set of skills to learn in order to succeed in the workplace and become self-sufficient members of the communities which welcomed them with open arms. The majority of adults became maintenance workers, manual laborers and domestic cleaners, and many live below the poverty line. Parents, exhausted physically and emotionally by their struggle to survive, often cannot be there for their children at home. And the natural ability of children to learn more quickly has created a dangerous gulf between the generations.

Today, there are 250 people of Peruvian origin living in the Alon Shvut, Karmeit Tzur and Nokdim

communities in Gush Etzion. Of these, approximately 170 are children, ranging from infancy to pre-army. Of the eighty school-age children, half are categorized as at-risk, and are in need of practical, social, emotional, and behavioral support and intervention. The Regional Council of Gush Etzion Social Welfare Department along with the Ministry of Welfare provide for some of these families' basic needs. But the financial aid is inadequate and even these grants are under threat, due to political cutbacks to Judea and Samaria.

The Gush Etzion Department of Social Welfare runs an after-school Center which offers a haven of stability to the most vulnerable, acutely at-risk children. It is filled to capacity and has a growing waiting list. Open five days a week in the afternoons, it is located in a run-down mobile home in Alon Shvut. Here, the children receive a hot nutritious meal—for some, the only one of the day, homework help, tutoring, occupational, physical and speech therapy, animal, art and music therapy, and a supervised recreational environment. The facility also offers guidance workshops and tutoring for the parents, to help improve their domestic situation and their basic life-skills.

The department is desperately trying to secure donations to fund a new building, which will enable them to further their services and avail themselves to more families. CFOIC Heartland is being asked to help with ongoing costs: equipment and supplies, educational programs, transportation to activities, and even sessions with psychologists when the need arises.

This Center is a nurturing lifeline for the Peruvian community in Gush Etzion. The early intervention approach of the staff focuses on preventing challenging situations from developing into crises. These families are realizing their dream of living Jewish lives in the land of G-d's people. Let us not allow that dream to shrivel up and die amid frustration and pain. Let us help ease the process of their absorption and allow these new immigrants the opportunity to become content, proud, contributing members of their communities.

**TOTAL FUNDS REQUIRED: ..... \$2,975**

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