



DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

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Since October 7th, OU Israel has led over forty missions from North America to Israel. These are incredible groups of men and women, including rabbis, community leaders, and *baalei batim* who want to connect and help Israel in any way they can.

I gain so much from these missions. Firstly, I meet such wonderful people. People who care deeply about Israel and about the Jewish People. The time with them is quality time. I get to see what they are concerned about, how much they care, and after these intense trips are over, I always feel like I have made friends for life. It's so valuable to me. Another thing that I gain is perspective. Visitors often notice things that we do not see because we live here.

We had a mission, including OU Executive Vice President & COO Rabbi Dr. Josh Joseph, that came for *Yom HaZikaron* and *Yom HaAtzmaut* in order to experience these days, which were so special and meaningful this year. Leading this mission meant taking *Yom*

HaZikaron and *Yom HaAtzmaut*, days that are intensely personal for me, and sharing them with others, which is not so easy. It was a *zechut* to help them see the heroism and the sacrifice that our soldiers and leaders have made; that is worth more than anything.

During the missions, we sit with the participants throughout their visits to discuss how the trip is going and to process what they are seeing and experiencing. We decided to hold one of these discussions right before leaving for a *Yom HaZikaron tekes* at Givat HaTachmoshet with the Michael Levin Base. We had just come back from Otziel, hearing Menachem Kalmanson talk about what he and his brother Elchanan HY"D did in Be'eri. Our group had also talked to security personnel of different communities down south, fully understanding the weight of the atrocities suffered by *Klal Yisrael* on that day.

There were obviously a lot of emotions to unpack and process. One of the incredible women in the group is a daughter of Holocaust survivors. She told me something that has lifted me up ever since. She shared that she has been to Israel over many decades and although she just arrived for this particular trip a few days prior, she noticed something she hadn't seen in a long time. When she began to make trips to Israel, she said, she used to feel a spirit in the air of *Eretz Yisrael* - a sense of belonging, a sense of connection, of passion and purpose. However, she claimed, she did not feel it these last couple of decades until this trip. This is her first trip



OU Israel mourns the passing of
our long-time faculty member

Rabbi Ephraim Sprecher zt"l

We wish *nechama* to his family
and many, many students

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since October 7th. And now, she not only feels this familiar spirit among the Jewish People again, but many times as much. Everyone feels unified, passionate, and connected to each other in a way that they haven't in decades. She said that she always felt that that spirit would guide the Jewish People and ensure their success. But when it was lost, she was worried. Now, she is hopeful once again, with the confidence that *Klal Yisrael* will win.

To hear this was very powerful. It gave me a perspective I hadn't seen before. Coming from a woman with Holocaust survivor parents, who had every right to be pessimistic about the future of the Jewish People, her optimism and hope hit me so much deeper. It meant so much to me and everyone else in the group as well. It really set the tone for the rest of the trip. Everyone was thinking about that spirit and sensing that our goal was to keep adding wood to that fire of spirit.

That's what we did on *Yom HaZikaron* and *Yom HaAtzmaut*. We stood on Har Herzl and we hugged so many families who lost loved ones. We saw the pride that the parents had for their children who heroically gave their lives for the Jewish People, even while they were experiencing unbelievable pain. I heard from so many of them how they understood that it is a step in the redemption process of the Jewish People. This is the spirit that has come back to our people as of late.

Jen Airley spoke at OU Israel's *tekes maavar* before our *Leil Yom HaAtzmaut* musical *Tefila* led by Rabbi Shlomo Katz, *Mara D'Atra* of Kehilat Shirat David. Jen spoke about how on *Yom HaZikaron* she went with her family to plant trees, because that's what her son, Binyamin HY"D, did. She told the massive crowd how she chose to plant a grapevine



instead, because she wanted to show that she knew that the Jewish People will never leave this Land and that, with the help of G-d, we will move forward and plant our roots deeper and deeper in *Eretz Yisrael*. Afterwards, the festive *davening* with Rabbi Shlomo Katz was uplifting and inspiring, bringing us all to this spirit of *simcha* and hope for the future.

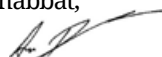
I was unsure how *Yom HaZikaron* and *Yom HaAtzmaut* would feel being busy with the mission. Yet, I realized that it was more impactful than I anticipated. On *Yom*

HaAtzmaut day, we ran a big carnival, together with Moshav Nechalim near Petach Tikvah, for the evacuees from Kiryat Shmona. The mission participants sat down with those who had been uprooted from their homes, hearing about the challenges that they have had, but also had fun at the carnival with them, bringing smiles and laughter to people who have not had it easy, to say the least, these last seven months. They also heard from David Silberman, who lost his son Uriel HY”D in battle in Gaza, and his story was so meaningful to hear on *Yom HaAtzmaut*. Meanwhile, the children of Nechalim that were there were eating cookies named “Uriel Cookies” because they were made with Uriel’s cookie recipe. We ended the day with a barbeque for soldiers of the Oketz unit. It was a really special *Yom HaAtzmaut*.

We shouldn’t take for granted that special spirit that *Am Yisrael* has. Sometimes it takes a woman from Florida, experienced and wise, to help us notice that spirit that is alive and among us. We should cherish it and continue to create meaningful times here in *Medinat Yisrael*. We should focus on the positive and appreciate the spirit of connectedness and love we are all experiencing right now. Let’s keep adding wood to that fire. Speaking of which, I want to wish you a very meaningful *Lag BaOmer*. Let’s enjoy our bonfires with our families and friends, and think about

those who can’t be with us right now. Let us pray that our hostages and brave *chayalim* come back very, very soon healthy and safe.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat,




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Mazal Tov to

**Eitan Kotler and his proud parents
Ariel & Ranit on his Bar Mitzvah**

**Rabbi Avi & Pnina Berman
& the OU Israel Family**