

# DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY



## Rabbi Avi Berman Executive Director, OU Israel

While preparing for Pesach is an undertaking, there's something very special about entering into Pesach with most of the hard work behind us and the ability to focus on enjoying the Chag with our families and friends. In contrast to Sukkot, where you need to look for a Sukkah when going out or Chanukah when you need to be home by a certain time to light candles, there's a certain feeling of "Ah, we made it, now we can relax" when we enter Pesach.

Most years, I have very full Chol Hamoed days, taking incredible OU Israel friends who come to Israel from around the world all over the country, connecting them to Eretz Yisrael and OU Israel programs and OU Kosher factories. While I love these busy days because they give us the chance to bond, they are hectic - from scheduling to traffic to making sure the children (often mine and theirs) are enjoying.

Then, last year's Pesach was like no other any of us have experienced, at home with so many people alone for the holiday.

An advertisement for Efrat. On the left is a photograph of a young girl with brown hair, wearing a pink shirt, holding a purple balloon. To the right of the photo is a dark blue rectangular box with white and yellow text. The text reads: "Save a Life - Gain yours" in white, "1 of 78,531" in yellow, "EFRAT" in large yellow letters, and "www.efrat.org.il 02-5454500" in white at the bottom.

Baruch Hashem, thanks in large part to the Covid-19 vaccine, the Ministry of Health decided to lessen the restrictions this year. While we needed to follow the guidelines, Birkat Kohanim at the Kotel was full, national parks were bustling, and the roads were once again full of traffic.

Due to my recent surgery, my doctors wanted me to stay home to continue recuperating. At first it was very strange knowing the country was abuzz with Chol Hamoed activities, but I was home once again for Pesach. Yet, over the Chag something very special occurred - I began to appreciate the ability to simply experience and enjoy the Chag with my family. We learned Torah, played games, and prepared for the many guests that we were, Baruch Hashem, able to host following MOH guidelines. It was truly a Bracha to have so many visitors - relatives, people from my OU family, Vancouverites, and childhood friends.

This reminded me of a dear friend of mine and yours, Phil Chernofsky, who told me that on Sukkot he tried not to leave home in order to stay in his Sukkah as much as possible. This Pesach, not rushing or sitting in traffic made me appreciate his sentiment, and I feel that my health situation and being home caused me to appreciate the deeper meaning of Pesach, leading into the period of Sefirat HaOmer.

As you know, Sefirat HaOmer has many meaningful days - Yom HaShoah, Yom HaZikaron, and Yom HaAtzmaut (which I will write about next week). As the grandson of a proud American soldier who liberated the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria, this time period has me reflecting on the bravery of our ancestors during the Holocaust and the miracle of the State of Israel protected by our own army.

I vividly recall the look on my grandfather's face when he saw me in my IDF soldier's uniform. He shared that seeing a Jewish soldier, standing with a gun and training to fight and defend the Jewish State and Jews around the world gave him chills. His touching words when he told me that I was bringing him tremendous pride still warm my heart decades later.

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## “Walking through Har Herzl brings chills to my heart”

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There is a beautiful story of Rav Shlomo Zalman Orbach zt”l. Someone asked him about traveling to pray at Kivrei Tzadikim (graves of the righteous). He responded: why must you travel when Har Herzl is right here in Yerushalayim. It is filled with the graves of so many brave IDF soldiers who paid the ultimate price. These soldiers have parents, grandparents, siblings, children, and friends who were left with a deep hole in their hearts. Walking through Har Herzl brings chills to my heart. Chills that indicate we have a sense of responsibility. With HaKadosh Baruch

Hu, and the IDF as His Shaliach, we pray that we never again be sent like sheep to be slaughtered.

Growing up in Israel, I unfortunately lost many friends who lost their lives defending the State of Israel - classmates, neighbors, friends, chavrusas. So many of them died before they had a chance to marry and have children. Year after year, I go to Har Herzl to visit them on Yom HaZikaron. I tell them that thanks to them I was able to raise a family here in Israel, and my family is their family because if it was not for their selfless dedication I would not have been able to build my family.



Avi,  
Executive Director, OU Israel



The entire OU Israel family  
mourns the passing of our  
dear friend & loyal volunteer

**Tzipora Pronman** a'h

May her husband Yonatan  
and her family find comfort  
in her legacy of kindness.  
May her neshama continue  
to have an aliya to the  
heights of shamayim

המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר  
אבלי ציון וירושלים