

DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY



RABBI AVI BERMAN

Executive Director, OU Israel



Whenever I experience OU Israel from a new vantage point I am filled with a tremendous sense of gratitude.

Working at OU Israel over the last 16 years beside a team that continues to dedicate itself to filling the needs within Am Yisrael, I can easily become accustomed to the impact that each program brings and take for granted the power of each initiative...

Every time I walk into the OU Israel building on Rosh Chodesh, I'll see 100 or so women filling the halls for one of the many L'Ayla Rosh Chodesh seminars...

After every NCSY Shabbaton, like the one that was recently led by Rabbi Yosef Ginsberg and Rabbi Michael Kahn in Even Shmuel, I'll see photos of teens whose faces are shining with inspiration and passion... Whenever I walk into the Zula, I'll find dedicated staff members attending to the various needs of whichever teen stands before them...

Every Yom Ha'atzmaut and Yom Yerushalayim I know that I will join Am Yisrael as we dance and sing during the Tefilah Chagigit, and leave uplifted and fulfilled.

Each of these experiences, among so many others, are enough to inspire my team and me to remain dedicated in

our mission to fortifying *Am Yisrael in Eretz Yisrael*. In my role as the Executive Director of OU Israel I am often asked to attend programs and I am grateful for these invitations because I thoroughly enjoy seeing the impact of OU Israel. When in attendance, my attention is usually focused on making sure each program meets the goals the team set out to achieve, and at times, addressing attendees directly in a speech or dedicated session.

But every so often I get the opportunity to attend an OU Israel event as a participant, fully immersing myself in the experience beside my brothers and sisters. I'd like to share two such opportunities that I recently had: the Yachad Israel Family Shabbaton and the *Yom Yerushalayim Tefilah Chagigit*.

For *Shabbat Parshat Bechukotai*, my family and I were invited to attend the Yachad Israel Family Shabbaton that took place at the Kinar Galilee Hotel on the Kinneret. It had been some time since I was able to attend a Yachad *Shabbaton* and I was very much looking forward to the experience. But there was something particularly

meaningful about this year's event. My wife's brother, Chaim Yishai, is an extraordinary *neshama*. He survived a car accident when he was just nine-years-old that left him with some unique challenges.



My life continues to be enhanced by Chaim Yishai and I remain grateful for the *zechus* that my family and I have to know him, love him and care for him.

But like so many exceptional people, Chaim Yishai's life comes with many challenges. Up until now, I never thought to bring him with me to Yachad Israel events because its programs are typically geared toward Anglos. But this year, my wife suggested I find out if there would be any benefit to bringing him. After speaking with Rabbi Rami Strosberg, the Director of Yachad Israel, he confirmed that there would be some Israeli participants and families, and encouraged us to bring Chaim Yishai. We told Chaim Yishai about the program and he excitedly agreed to come.

Within hours of our arrival, it was clear to me that my family and I would gain a tremendous amount from the program that Yachad Israel organized. With sessions tracked for participants, families and siblings spanning three different ages, and dynamic programs such as a talent show, pizza making, boat riding, improv and other fun activities, the *Shabbaton* was thoughtfully planned to benefit all who attended. As my wife and I joined sessions led by professionals addressing a variety of topics for those caring for loved ones with special needs, I found myself intrigued by the questions and discussions that took place, fortified by the new knowledge I gained and encouraged by the guidance provided.

I'll take this moment to wish a tremendous *ya'asher koach* to the Yachad Israel team led by Rabbi Rami Strosberg and Yoel Serman, as well as Rabbi Avrohom Adler, the International Director of Yachad who flew in for the



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Shabbaton. It was a Shabbat that my family and I will cherish.

This past Sunday I had yet another opportunity to benefit from an event that was meticulously planned by the OU Israel team: the musical *Yom Yerushalayim Tefilah Chagigit* led by Rabbi Noam Koenigsberg. Standing on the Haas Promenade overlooking *Har Habayit*, we sang *shirah* and *hoda'ah* to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* from the depths of our hearts, as we gazed upon the place where *Bayit Rishon* and *Bayit Sheini* once stood.

Together we took part in cherishing our history, standing in the very place many believe Avraham Avinu and Yitzchak Avinu stood when making their way to the *akeidah*, as they journeyed from Chevron. Together we raised our voices and shed tears as we *davened* for the building of *Bayit Shlishi*.

The *Yom Yerushalayim Tefilah Chagigit* was a collaborative effort that I know touched all who attended. I wish another heartfelt *ya'asher koach* to Moshe Lion, Mayor of Yerushalayim, Arieh King, Deputy Mayor of Yerushalayim, the Israel municipality and

the Israeli Police Department who helped OU Israel provide a meaningful and safe event for attendees. Thank you Matti Goldstein, Rabbi Sam Shor, Zemira Ozarowski, David

Katz and everyone else involved for your part in making the day as special as it was.

My recent experiences at OU Israel events have given me a renewed appreciation for the creativity, passion and dedication of my team. If you are interested in getting more involved, visit <https://www.ouisrael.org/events/> to learn about our upcoming programs. For those who will be in Yerushalayim on Shavuot, join us for a full night of dynamic Torah learning at the OU Israel Center. I will be opening the evening's program at 11:00 p.m.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat,



credit: Elnatan Goldstein

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