

DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

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In this week's Parsha, we talk about the wonders of *Eretz Zavat Chalav U'dvash*. For those of us who are parents raising families in Israel, we have countless opportunities and a responsibility to help our children appreciate what it means to live in this miraculous Land by bringing *Torah* and *halacha* to life. *Eretz Yisrael* is filled with so many miracles (in the production of food alone) that we can always find age-appropriate activities to help our children experience how fortunate we are to be living in this Holy Land. Torah Tidbits is one of the many ways we and our children can connect to *Torat Eretz Yisrael*. This week, Parshat Shelach, marks 30 years since the first edition of Torah Tidbits. Thank you to the staff and volunteers who have ensured its weekly publication, enabling OU Israel to spread *Torat Eretz Yisrael* to Jews all across Israel, and around the world.

Even though my wife and I have been married for almost 25 years, we only recently found ourselves planning a *Bat Mitzvah* for the very first time, for our seventh child and first daughter. Tzofia Chana is named after my Bubby who was very dear to me. My Bubby and Zeidy moved to Israel in 1989 and became a significant part of our lives. My wife and I cherished opportunities for my children to spend time with their Bubby, spending Friday nights together for many years before she passed away. When planning her *Bat Mitzvah*, my wife and I wanted to find a way to create a meaningful

experience for both Tzofia and her friends. To be completely honest, even though we had been thinking about it since our last son's *Bar Mitzvah*, which was three years ago, we were stumped. But then Tzofia came up with an idea that turned out to be beautiful in a number of ways. For years Tzofia has heard about my experiences working with *OU Kashrut* and she asked to see the factories first hand and learn about the many *halachot* we uphold to provide *Am Yisrael* with *kosher* food.

I reached out to my cousins Moish and Suri Lebowitz (avid *Torah Tidbits* readers), and Moish suggested we come visit the *refet* (dairy farm) near his home. He organized an educational tour led by Oded, the manager of the *refet*. With Oded's guidance, Tzofia and I were treated to an in-depth review of what it means to run a *refet* according to *halacha* throughout all the stages of a cow's life, including staying mindful of *tza'ar ba'alei chayim* during the week and on *Shabbat*. Oded also explained how dairy is produced across Israel. We enjoyed our visit tremendously and felt a renewed sense of gratitude for the care in which we must approach all aspects of food production as members of *Klal Yisrael*.

Seeing Tzofia's excitement reminded me of the disadvantages of living in urban cities where we often find ourselves disconnected from nature. How many of us hesitate when making a *bracha* on a banana or an almond because we don't know how it is grown? How deeply do we connect to our *tefillot* when we say, "משיב הרוח ומוריד הגשם"? How easily can we

grasp the *hilchot Shabbat* of *kotzer* (harvesting) or *dosh* (threshing)? Experiencing nature can help us not only fully comprehend the reasons behind the *halachot* we live by, but also appreciate the chessed of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* in giving us a world that sustains and satiates us.

We decided that this dynamic experience was one that we should share with Tzofia's friends and planned a *Bat Mitzvah* trip for her classmates and youth group friends. Keeping in mind Tzofia's interest in seeing the factories that the OU certifies, we also arranged for the group to end the *Bat Mitzvah* with an ice cream party at the Ben and Jerry's factory. In the weeks leading up to her *Bat Mitzvah*, Tzofia and I learned the *halachot* of חליבה בשבת (milking cows on *Shabbat*). We reflected upon the ways in which *halacha* has evolved from the times of the *Gemara* to the factories of today that adhere to strict guidelines to enable the production of *mehadrin* dairy products.

The day finally arrived, and on *isru chag* of *Shavuot*, Tzofia's classmates and friends joined us at the *refet* to learn about the world of dairy farming from Oded. I felt tremendous pride hearing Tzofia share the *halachot* the two of us learned as she detailed how we raise cows as *Torah*-abiding Jews and how we produce *mehadrin* dairy products. Just like her Bubby, she engaged the girls in experiential learning and shared her excitement with them. From there, we took the group to the Ben and Jerry's factory, where the management team was very generous in allowing us to finish off the day with delicious ice cream.

Throughout the day I stopped to take in the faces of the girls which reflected excitement and intrigue. Our experiences gave us just

one small taste of what it means to live in the *Eretz Zavat Chalav U'dvash*. Bringing this idea to life, Oded shared that the Israeli cow produces more milk every year than cows anywhere else in the world! I doubt Tzofia and her friends will see a carton of milk, a container of cream cheese or yogurt, or even

eat a carton of Ben and Jerry's the same way.

We returned home with a deep feeling of *HaKarat HaTov* for the farmers around *Eretz Yisrael* who spend their days ensuring that *Am Yisrael* has kosher food to eat, while adher-

ing to *halacha* and treating the animals who produce our food with care and respect. We also were able to recognize the hard work that goes into the world of *kashrut* and will remain grateful for the efforts of *rabbanim* who help us maintain the highest level of *halachic* standards as technology evolves. Of course, above all, we felt tremendous gratitude to the *Borei Olam* for giving each of us the *zechut* of living in a land of miracles.

I'll take this opportunity to wish Tzofia Chana a *mazal tov* and look forward to continuing our learning together. May we all continue to uncover new layers of *Torah*, find new ways of relating to our learning and take advantage of the opportunities throughout *Eretz Yisrael* to further our appreciation for the miraculous work of the *Borei Olam*.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat,



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