

# DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY



**RABBI AVI BERMAN**

Executive Director, OU Israel



As part of my role as the Director of OU Israel, I regularly fly to the East Coast to participate in OU events throughout the year. While any time away from my family is difficult, I am continuously grateful for the experiences I am able to have which allow me to witness the beauty of *Am Yisrael* wherever I go. I am currently writing to you all from New York where I'll be for the remainder of the week. What is clear to me is that no matter the distance, Jews always find ways to connect with and learn from one another. I'd like to share some of the highlights I've experienced over the last few days. Perhaps they will prove meaningful to you as well.

**Kosherfest:** As members of *Klal Yisrael*, our *mitzvot* have the power to unite us. This past week, more than 6,000 industry professionals and 325 exhibitors of kosher-certified products and services joined together at *Kosherfest*, the world's largest kosher-certified products trade show that brings together businesses large and small - from chain supermarkets, to corner groceries, to food service establishments, to caterers and more.

As the largest global Kashrut agency, OU Kashrut attends Kosherfest every year. For our second year in a row, Rabbi Ezra Friedman, Director of The Gustave and Carol Jacobs Center for Kashrut Education, and I represented OU Israel at the event. Our goal was to connect OU-certified Israeli

importers and manufacturers with those in the US, such as Elad Charazi, the Purchasing Director of Yochananof and Yossi Strum from Rotem Mitro. Our discussions centered around expanding OU Kashrut certification in *Eretz Yisrael* and determining how best to import US products. As I found myself running between dozens of meetings set up for us throughout the event, I took a moment to appreciate the thousands of people who have dedicated themselves to upholding the *mitzvah* of *kashrut*, gathering together to determine how best to serve the needs of *Klal Yisrael* on a global scale.



I'll use this opportunity to thank OU Kashrut's CEO, Rabbi Menachem Genack, Rabbi Moshe Elefant, COO of OU Kashrut and Phyllis Koegel, Marketing Director for providing a space for so many Jews to gather and support one another. Evident by the meetings that took place, OU certification provides more than just the certification for vendors. Rather, OU certified vendors become part of the global OU Kashrut

network and are given the tools to be successful in their respective roles within the food industry - from promotion, to networking, to strategizing.

**Bnot Sherut in Chutz La'aretz:** Among the many elements that make Israel's National Service model unique, is that young women take time away from their studies to give back to *Am Yisrael* - even going beyond the borders of *Eretz Yisrael*. This year, over 115 young women are helping Jewish communities around the world as an extended year of their National Service. I had the *zechut* to spend this past *Shabbat* with 85 of the North American *Bnot Sherut* who gathered from their posts in Jewish communities spanning the US, Canada and Mexico, at the Young Israel of Teaneck.

We were joined by Reuven Pinsky, General Director of the National Civic Service and members of his staff, including Orit Lev Ran, who runs all programming for overseas *Bnot Sherut*. When I addressed the group of young women on Friday night, I felt compelled to acknowledge the opportunity *Bnot Sherut* in *chutz la'aretz* are given, to directly impact the development of North American Jewry.

I explained that while every person brings their own talents to their respective National Service positions, by simply growing up in *Eretz Yisrael*, they have a wealth of knowledge and experience to offer our brethren in the Diaspora. We can easily take for granted that...

Our children are taught about the *chagim* when they first enter *gan*...

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before, during and after *Shabbat*...

Our Egged buses have signs pasted to the front row seats, "*Mipnei Seiva Takum*," reminding passengers of the *mitzvah* to stand before our elders and scholars...

The stories in *Tanach* come alive throughout the country as we gaze out of our windows during our daily travels...

Perhaps what is most palpable when our *Bnot Sherut* leave the embrace of *Eretz Yisrael* is the Jewish pride we are raised with that can be lost in *chutz la'aretz*. Molded by these experiences, our *Bnot Sherut* are imparting their love for this Holy Land, while connecting Jews of all backgrounds to one another.

### **Guzo - The Journey to the Land of Israel:**

We have so much to learn from one another's journeys. During my trip I reconnected with my dear friend Aviv Abebe who served as the Director of our OU Israel Youth Center in Rehovot for many years. Just a few years ago, Aviv and his wife moved to New Jersey on *shlichut* to serve as educators at Ben Porat Yosef (BPY) *yeshiva* day school in Paramus, and at the Ahavath Torah Synagogue in Englewood. When Aviv heard about OU Israel's Guzo game, he asked that I bring as many as possible to the US on my next visit. Originally from Ethiopia, Aviv was particularly moved by the game and was eager to

share it with his family and students. For those who have yet to experience the game for yourselves, get a glimpse into the rich history of Ethiopian Jews. Find out more here:

<https://www.ouisrael.org/games/>



In the coming days I will be attending the OU International Senior Staff Conference, where I will learn more about the programs my colleagues are running around the world. Stay tuned for more on that next week! In the meantime, while I continue to soak in the moments of meaning I'm experiencing here in New York, I cannot wait to return to our Homeland *b'karov*. May we continue to find opportunities to connect to one another and appreciate the *brachot* that surround us here in *Eretz Yisrael*.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring *Shabbat*,

Rabbi Avi Berman  
Executive Director, OU Israel  
[aberman@ouisrael.org](mailto:aberman@ouisrael.org)

The OU Israel family sends deepfelt condolences to Sara Kriss and family on the passing of her husband

**Avraham Kriss z"l**

A member and volunteer of the OU Israel Center for many years

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