

DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

RABBI AVI BERMAN

Executive Director, OU Israel



After a whirlwind trip to the United States I am overjoyed to be writing this week's column from Israel. This past week I attended the Senior

Staff - OU International Conference, which took place at the TWA Hotel at New York's JFK Airport, with a focus on management.

Together with 75 other senior staff members from around the world we turned our attention to ways in which we can each foster creativity, team building and culture within our respective areas of the organization, and globally. We were tasked with finding solutions to management challenges and identifying areas of need and opportunity within the organization. While OU Israel often collaborates with the global team, the seminars and training protocols allowed us to share in new experiences and appreciate one another in new ways.

But in truth, my time away was both meaningful and painful. As *olim*, we can appreciate how far Eretz Yisrael can feel whenever tragedy strikes within the borders of our Holy Land. On Tuesday morning we received news about the *piguah* in Ariel. Tamir Avihai, a father of six, Michael Ledigin, a father of two, and Mordechai Ashkenazi, a father of three and grandfather of two, were murdered near Ariel.

The news was personally devastating to one of our OU Israel Youth Center

staff members for the Sderot branch - Shirel Avihai, the daughter of Tamir HY"D.

As is the nature of *Am Yisrael*, whenever tragedy strikes our brethren, the beat of our national heart can be felt around the world. Within minutes, those injured or killed become instantly known to *Klal Yisrael* on a global scale as we stop to *daven* for the welfare of all those impacted. Upon seeing the news at breakfast, our Executive Vice Presidents Rabbi Moshe Hauer and Rabbi Dr. Josh Joseph immediately led us in *pirkei Tehillim*; for the *refuah shelama* of those injured, the *aliyat neshama* of those who were so tragically taken from us, and *nechama* for their loved ones.

My heart ached to be in Israel with Shirel and her family during their time of grief but I took comfort in the fact that they wouldn't be alone. As is our national response to tragedy, Shirel and her family were accompanied by *Klal Yisrael* - foreign and familiar - who attended the *levaya* and *shiva*, while *tefillot* emanating from around the world surrounded each of the holy *neshamot* and their families, embracing them in comfort.

Upon my return to Eretz Yisrael, I attended the *shiva* of the Avihai family together with Chaim Pelzner, representing the OU Israel staff and OU worldwide. Shirel was next to her husband with her sweet year and nine month old daughter. I brought with me a letter from OU President



Moishe Bane, Rabbi Moshe Hauer and Rabbi Dr. Josh Joseph for Shirel that brought tears to her eyes. As I expected, the *shiva* house was packed. Just as I walked in, I saw members of *Knesset* leave. I saw the Mayor of the *Shomron*, my friend Yossi Dagan, offer words of comfort. When leaving, *olim* from *Modiin* and *Beit Shemesh* passed me on the street and asked for directions to the *Avi-hai shiva* so they could fulfill the *mitzvah* of *nichum aveilim*.

The pain of a Jew being murdered - especially in Israel - is shared by *Klal Yisrael* around the world. Throughout the remainder of the week, Jews traveled from one *shiva* house to the next, offering comfort, strength and support. Beginning my week in the United States where I witnessed leaders of American Jewry stop to join in the global mourning of our people, and ending it in Eretz Yisrael where I sat beside my brothers and sisters as we grieved together, one thought remained throughout. Despite our differences we continue to fulfill the words of our Sages, "*K'ish echad b'lev echad*" - we are like one man with one heart.

May we continue to connect to each other, find meaning in our common destiny and strength to fulfill our shared responsibility to care for one another.

May the families of Tamir, Michael and Mordechai find comfort.

Wishing *Klal Yisrael* many *Smachot*.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat,



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