

DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY



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Those of us fortunate to live in and visit *Eretz Yisrael* are able to see our values etched into the foundations of this Holy Land. As we approach Chanukah, we are reminded of the importance of looking to past generations to guide our future. Every time I travel to Gush Etzion on highway 60 and pass Yishuv Elazar, a community named for Elazar HaMaccabi who was killed there; or find myself on route 443 and pass Modi'in and Mevo Modi'in, the areas where the central *Maccabi* resistance took place, I am grateful for this reminder. There is nothing quite like seeing Chanukah *menorot* lit in these cities each year.

As the fourth son of Mattityahu, Elazar HaMaccabi fought to save the spiritual life of *Am Yisrael* and died fighting the Greeks. While today the *Maccabim* are recognized as heroes, it is important to remember the difficulties and resistance they faced in trying to ensure the continuity of *Klal Yisrael*. Since their passing, the *Maccabim* have become a symbol of Jewish pride and strength, inspiring generations for over 2,000 years.

This past week I attended the *azkarah* of 1st Lieutenant Uriel Peretz who was born on ב' בכסלו תשל"ז (November 24, 1976), and killed in battle on ז' בכסלו ה'תשנ"ח (November 25, 1998) in an ambush in the Wadi Krosh area during the Lebanon war. Uriel and I both learned in Yeshivat



Or Etzion, a Yeshiva high school. And even though I graduated a year before Uriel and studied in the *yeshivat Toranit* program while he studied in the military track, I am among those who are *zoche* to have known him in his younger years, and make an effort to attend his *azkarah* every year.

This year's *azkarah* brought a significantly large crowd - one that has grown with every passing year. Each year, Yeshivat Or Etzion sends a group of Military Academy high school 11th graders to take place in the *azkarah*, wearing a special badge (see picture). While waiting for the *azkarah* to begin, I began chatting with some men I recognized and quickly realized we had all graduated from Yeshivat Or Etzion. Perhaps what was most chilling was the way in which we identified our graduating classes. One said, "I was in Uriel

Peretz's grade." I said, "I was in Shachar

Minis' grade." And so the pattern continued - each of us naming classmates who died valiantly protecting *Am Yisrael* during their army service. But before I had time to process what had unfolded before me, Miriam Peretz got up to speak.

For those who do not know Miriam Peretz, aside from being a neighbor of mine in Givat Ze'ev, she is an Israeli educator, public speaker, and the mother of Uriel, Eliraz, Hadas, Avichai, Eliasaf and Bat-El. Tragically, after the loss of Uriel in 1998,

Miriam's husband Eliezer died of 'a broken heart.' Just five years later, Miriam's second son Major Eliraz Peretz was killed in an exchange of fire in the Gaza strip on י"א בניסן (March 26, 2010). Miriam has become a symbol of hope, compassion and faith, and was awarded the Israel Prize in 2018. I encourage you all to read her book *Shirat Miriam* which is available in both Hebrew and English. You can order a copy online via Gefen Publishing or in bookstores around the country.

Miriam began her speech by sharing stories of Uriel, who dreamed of becoming the first Moroccan chief of staff in the IDF. While he commanded a Golani Brigade Special Forces unit, Uriel was killed before he achieved his dream. However, as Miriam addressed the crowd of more than 200 people, she noted that more people attended this year's *azkarah* than the year following Uriel's passing. Looking around at those gathered, Miriam shared how comforted she felt seeing how many people came to pay their respects to Uriel, most of whom did not know him in his lifetime. Over the last 24 years Uriel's sacrifice has continued to be publicized, touching countless lives in the years since his passing.

Miriam provided me with a new perspective on the conversations I had with my fellow Yeshivat Or Etzion alumni earlier in the day. As members of *Am Yisrael* we are fortunate to have a rich history filled with people who lived and died protecting *Am Yisrael* and *Torat Yisrael* throughout the generations. While heartbreaking, we have each remained connected to our classmates who died protecting *Am Yisrael* and identify ourselves by the heroes we were *zoche* to

study beside.

Every Chanukah I think of Uriel. He was born in Kislev and was killed in Kislev, leaving his light forever burning in our hearts. Just like the *Maccabim*, who continue to illuminate our lives thousands of years after their passing, we have an opportunity to learn from heroes like Uriel as we forge ahead in our collective mission as an "Or la-goyim." May we be *zoche* to recognize the light within each and every Jew in their lifetime and uphold the values of those who have passed.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat,



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nisht on shabbos...



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