



DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

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There is a large part of the Torah Tidbits readership who can remember aerograms. These were international letters which folded into their own envelope shape to save on weight. When I moved to Israel in 1985, we would send letters like these to our grandparents in America. It would take about three weeks' to get to them, after which they would read it, write us a letter, and then it would take another three weeks to get to us. We knew and expected this long delay, and so our letters would be much more substantive than, "Hi Bubby and Zaidy, how are you?", since the answer to such a question would likely be out of date by the time it got to us several weeks later.

Times have really changed. Fast forward forty years, and now when we send a text, a WhatsApp, or an email, and the person on the other side doesn't answer within a couple minutes, we wonder if they're ok! It's a generation of instant replies, quick answers, and not a whole lot of patience. This has created a real challenge, especially in the realm of our religious life. For example, there is no doubt that *davening* requires patience. Not just in saying the words and answering the *chazan*, but also because the results of our *davening* are not always seen immediately.

It took almost 2,000 years of our forefathers and fathers saying "*teka beshofar gadol lecherutein, vesa neis lekabetz geluyoteinu*," "sound the great shofar for our liberty, and raise a banner to gather our exiles," before

their children's children were able to see the results of those hopes and prayers with the ingathering of the exiles slowly but surely taking place now. Many generations prayed for a day for the sick to be healed in "*Refaeinu Hashem*," and while of course there are still sick people, the strides made in the field of medicine have been tremendous. The Jewish people for thousands of years have asked for economic success in "*Barech Aleinu*," and the Start-Up Nation is thriving in so many ways today, and our agriculture sector is booming. They asked for the return of Yerushalayim in "*Veliyerushalayim*," and we see the city continually growing before our eyes.

But as the technological world we live in today continues to progress and reach into almost every aspect of our lives, it becomes that much more difficult to teach the value to the next generation of slow *davening*, in taking the time to connect to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, and to allow there to be space between the request and the response.

That is what makes Yom Kippur in particular such a powerful challenge today. Because Yom Kippur is not quick, and it's not easy. We spend basically all day in *shul*. The answers to our prayers are not always immediately apparent to us. And yet, the connection and inspiration that happens because of Yom Kippur is so, so important. How do we accomplish it ourselves and teach it to others?

Firstly, music is a powerful tool to connect generations. The melodies of Yom Kippur have a real *koach* to them, and when we

can prepare the youth to open themselves up to these songs and *niggunim*, it can be so uplifting and take them so high. The music of Yom Kippur has the power to remind us of earlier times, knowing that these melodies are what our parents, our grandparents, and our great-grandparents sung in their *shuls* on Yom Kippur, making us feel so connected with our history.

While I grew up *davening* Nusach Ashkenaz, I have noticed a dramatic difference in this regard between Ashkenazi Selichot and Sefardi Slichot. Ashkenazi Selichot can sound mournful and sad, making many people feel as if they are standing in front of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* to say sorry for every single thing that they did wrong. Whereas Sefardi Selichot is full of singing with a lively and happy melody.

I enjoy the Ashkenazi tunes for what they are. But many today connect to the Sefardi tunes. And I believe that is why so many of the Selichot at the Kotel use the Sefardi melodies. And let me tell you, the Kotel is packed every night of Selichot not just by Sefardim, but by Jews of all stripes and backgrounds - tens of thousands every single night. And it's because people know that this is such a powerful way to connect to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, to feel part of the *Klal*, to absorb the *avira* of Yerushalayim, in order to appreciate the greatness that we have here in Yerushalayim.

This is another way to help the youths of the generation connect to *davening* - giving them the ability to show up, to join the community, and to see firsthand the passion and prayer of those who want to get closer to Hashem.

It is therefore such a beautiful thing that every year we run the David & Lil Shafran



Selichot event, where we take hundreds of teenagers from across the country - from 18 different cities - to the Kotel for Selichot. This year, thank God, we had 600 teenagers at the event, coming from up north in Kiryat Shmona and Nehariya, to down south in Kiryat Malachi and Kiryat Gat, and even Dimona, to the OU Teen Center's annual Selichot in loving memory of David and Lil Shafran z"l.

After we all gathered together in Yerushalayim, we gave them a lovely OU Israel break-the-fast dinner. At the Great Synagogue, they heard from Sara Shafran, a granddaughter of David and Lil Shafran. Sara told their story, who they were. She talked about her grandfather David, who was a Holocaust survivor and had become successful in business after the Shoah. When he was already very weak and sick, he made an important decision to bring his family to Israel from Vancouver, Canada, in order to make sure they would love and connect to

the Land of Israel. This happened shortly before he passed away. Sara told the story about how when he was very sick, there were children making loud noises outside his room. When his daughter, Anita - Sara's mother - asked him how she can make his rest more comfortable, he answered her that there is nothing more beautiful to him than the sounds of those children playing. How he remembered that during the Holocaust, the children had to be quiet to prevent the Nazis from finding them, and that hearing Jewish children playing and making noise without fear, was the most wonderful thing to him. So, Sara said to our large group of teenagers, her grandfather would be overjoyed to hear their noise and their singing at the Kotel.

David's story was a powerful message of what the human spirit is really capable of. This undoubtedly had such a big impact on those teenagers to hear that message, when so many of them came from low socioeconomic communities. Rav Shmuel Eliyahu, Chief Rabbi of Tzfat, came and uplifted the crowd with inspiring words, and got them all up and dancing! They also heard from Chaim Pelzner, the director of our teen centers, as well as myself.

Then, all of the teens walked together to the Kotel, joining something like 70,000 Jews from all over the world on the night of *mot-zei Tzom Gedaliah* to say Selichot. What an amazing night.

So when I think about how to take these Selichot and *davening* and bring it to the next generation, the answer becomes obvious. First, by taking the tunes and melodies of past generations into the present and future. Second, by joining together with others, by feeling part of something greater. It's the rush

to the Kotel and the excitement in your heart and mind of, "Wow! I can't believe I am part of this!"

I know that the *tefillot* that we did with the over 600 teenagers from across the country, who came all the way to Yerushalayim to the Kotel to *daven* for a better year for themselves and the Jewish people, were heard by *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, and that we will see their effect very soon. May their inspiration and their passion give us all a year full of *besorot tovot*, a year full of goodness, success, and of understanding. May the neshamot of David and Lil Shafra z"l have an *aliyah*, and may these teenagers that are coming every single week to our teen centers continue to make us proud. May they draw from the uplifting experience they had in the city of Yerushalayim, for their entire lives. May they bring endless happiness to all the staff and advisors that have been involved in bringing these teenagers to Yerushalayim.

Wishing you all a *gmara chatima* tova and an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat,



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