



DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

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Two things shook me deeply this Purim. The first was when my brother-in-law, a paramedic, came to my house to give me *mishloach manot* and shared with me that he had been among the first responders at the ballistic missile strike in Beit Shemesh. He described the horror of what he saw that day, the desperate efforts to save lives, and the terrible moments of having to pronounce so many dead. As he spoke, I understood that this was not just another painful news story. This was a scene of devastation that had torn through the heart of a neighborhood.

The second was the phone call I received from OU Israel's Director of Teen Centers, Chaim Pelzner, who told me that the ballistic missile had directly struck the neighborhood in Beit Shemesh where our OU Israel Teen Center has been operating for the past twenty-six years. This was not some distant place to us. This was our neighborhood. These were our families. Many of our teens had lost loved ones, and the entire community had been shaken to its core.

After hearing both my brother-in-law's account and Chaim's painful update, I knew that I had to go. The day after Purim, I traveled together with Chaim, Beit Shemesh Teen Center Director Miriam Kauffman, and Director of Social Media Nina Broder to the HaNasi neighborhood in Beit Shemesh. Our purpose was to meet the families, to hear their stories, to sit with them in their pain, and to see how we could help however we could.

By the time we arrived, Pikud HaOref, Homefront Command, was already on the ground doing their work, and crews had begun the painful process of clearing the rubble. The destruction was staggering. Walking through the streets, not a single home appeared to have been spared. Cars had been hurled tens of meters through the air. Entire houses were reduced to piles of concrete and twisted metal. One hears about the power of these missiles, but until you stand in the middle of the destruction and see it with your own eyes, it is almost impossible to grasp the magnitude of devastation that a single missile can cause.

In the midst of that devastation, what stood out just as powerfully was the response of the community. Boys from Yeshivat Ashreinu, together with my dear friend and Rosh HaYeshiva, Rabbi Gotch Yudin, were already there, carefully moving through the rubble, helping families sort through what remained of their homes and trying to salvage whatever they could. Members of the incredible Anglo community in Beit Shemesh were doing everything they could to help as well. People were bringing food, offering places to stay, helping



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**OU Israel
sends heartfelt condolences to
Elke Kupietzky and family
on the passing of her husband,
their father, grandfather
and great-grandfather**

**Nachman Kupietzky z"l
long time member of OU Israel**

המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים

organize volunteers, and simply showing up to stand with their neighbors in their moment of loss. In the middle of such destruction, you could see something else just as clearly: a community refusing to leave its families alone, a city coming together to support the people who call it home.

The families, meanwhile, were sitting shiva. Shiva notices were posted on every electric pole along the street and taped to the entrances of neighboring homes where families were receiving visitors, since their own homes had been destroyed and they had nowhere else to sit. Simply walking down that street and seeing those signs everywhere you looked was a heart-rending experience.

Yet, as we sat with families, we encountered stories of extraordinary faith and resilience. In one home, a mother held up a single torn Torah page that her son had found sitting on top of the debris. Because the missile struck a synagogue, many holy *sefarim* and *siddurim* had been thrown and scattered everywhere in the explosion. When her son returned to

their house to see what remained, he found a single page sitting underneath a rock among the rubble. He brought it to show his mother.

At that moment, the former Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rav David Lau, was present in the home visiting the family. He looked carefully at the torn page and identified that it came from Parshat *Masei*. Because the page was double-sided, each side carried a different part of the *parsha*, and together they spoke to the family in a way that was almost impossible to ignore. On one side were the *psukim*

dealing with the *nachala* of the daughters of Tzlofchad from the tribe of Yosef. The mother shared with us that her own father's name was Yosef, and that the house in Beit Shemesh where they had built their lives was the *nachala* she inherited from him. On the other side of the page were the *psukim* describing the *ir miklat*, the cities of refuge, where someone who had caused a death unintentionally would flee for protection. The Torah explains that as long as that person remained outside the *miklat*,



the family of the one who was killed could still avenge the blood, but once he entered the *miklat*, he was protected there. Her husband, who was a kohen, had been on his way toward the *miklat* when the missile struck, and he was killed just outside the place that was meant to offer protection. As Rav Lau read the words aloud, the family began to realize how closely the message on that torn page connected to their own story. Sitting there during shiva, holding in her hands a page that on one side spoke of Yosef and his nachala, and on the other side of *miklat*, *kehunah*, and tragedy, she felt as though HaKadosh Baruch Hu had placed those words directly into her hands. She told us that seeing that page gave her a measure of comfort and closure. To her, this was not simply a coincidence, but a message from HaKadosh Baruch Hu reminding her that even when we cannot begin to understand His ways, He is still speaking to us.

When we visited the next family, they too had preserved a page from one of the sefarim that had been torn apart in the blast. This page came from Sefer Shmuel. Astonishingly, the exact passage on that page described a “great strike” in Beit Shemesh, as recorded in I Shmuel 6:19. The very next pasuk says, “*Mi yuchal la’amod lifnei Hashem HaElokim*

HaKadosh hazeh?” “Who can stand before Hashem, this holy G-d?” (I Shmuel 6:20). The family sat there showing us the page and speaking about the meaning they found in it. There was something so overwhelming in the fact that out of all the pages that could have survived, this was the one placed into their hands. It was as if HaKadosh Baruch Hu was reminding them that when He decrees that something should happen, no one can stand in the way. As painful as that realization is, it also brought them a certain clarity of *emunah*, that this terrible blow to Beit Shemesh, and to their own family, did not happen outside of HaKadosh Baruch Hu’s knowledge or control. It was one of those moments where words are almost impossible to find.

What was both heartbreaking and deeply inspiring was the level of *emunah* that these families displayed. Some had “only” lost their homes. Others had lost beloved parents, spouses or children. Yet even in the darkest moments of their lives, they spoke with a deep trust in HaKadosh Baruch Hu. This is not easy. Even when a person believes with complete faith that everything comes from HaKadosh Baruch Hu, these are the most painful moments a person can endure.

I know this because I spoke with Roni, whose father was killed in the attack. She is a participant in our OU Israel Teen Center in Beit Shemesh. As we sat there speaking with her, we could see the circle of friends surrounding her, supporting her and holding her up in her moment of grief. It was clear that she, together with many of her friends, will need continued strength and support in the months ahead. But one of the deepest truths of being part of the OU Israel family is that no teen is ever left alone in a moment like this. Our Teen Center will, B’ezrat Hashem, be there for Roni every

In loving memory of

Dvora Lieman a”h

who lived to the age of 104
Mother of Sandy Koslowsky

She will be deeply missed by
her children, grandchildren,
great-grandchildren,
and great-great-grandchildren

**May the Torah learning
in this Issue be לעילוי נשמתה**

step of the way, surrounding her with love, guidance, friendship, and the quiet strength of people who will continue showing up for her long after the visitors have gone home.

Last Shabbat I found myself reflecting on the fact that we were reading Parshat Ki Tisa and that the following week we would read Vayakhel-Pekudei. When one examines the structure of the Torah, something remarkable becomes clear. Nearly five complete *parshiyot* are devoted to describing the construction of the Mishkan. Yet the creation of the entire world at the beginning of Sefer Bereishit is described in roughly thirty verses.

Why would HaKadosh Baruch Hu dedicate so many more verses to the building of a single Mishkan than to the creation of the entire world?

Perhaps the answer lies in the nature of what was being built. When one looks closely at the Mishkan, it resembles a person's home in many ways. It has a sink, lights, a table, areas for eating, places for welcoming guests, storage for clothing, and an aron which houses our most precious possessions. The message may be that when building something large and impersonal, something detached from the individual, it can be described in only a few verses. But when building something personal, something meant to affect the lives of specific people and families, then every detail must be *meduyak*. Every element must be placed with care and intention.

This is a powerful message for how we build our own homes. We must think carefully about where we place the sefarim, where the couches will be, where the Shabbat table stands, where the Shabbat candles are lit, and where the Kiddush cups are kept. These choices transform a physical structure into a home built with love and values that our children

absorb every day.

All of these families whose homes were damaged had invested enormous amounts of time, love, money, and effort into building their homes. One Iranian missile may have destroyed the physical structure of those houses, but the spiritual investment that went into those homes cannot be destroyed. When a family invests deeply in the chinuch of their children and the spiritual life of their home, that investment continues to live on. The physical building may fall, but the spiritual foundation remains. That spiritual strength is what will carry the children, the spouses, and the entire community through these difficult times.

I want to share one more experience from that visit. While we were walking through the rubble of one of the homes, a siren suddenly sounded. Someone pointed out that this particular house still had an intact *mamad*, a safe room, and we all quickly moved toward it. Within moments, more than fifty people were packed inside that *mamad*.

As I looked around the room, I saw an extraordinary gathering of people. The family who lived in the home stood among us, still trying to comprehend the damage and the overwhelming process of rebuilding that lay ahead. Volunteers had come from across the

לעילוי נשמת
הרב יצחק קלמן בן ר' יהודה ז"ל
Rabbi Irwin Botwinick z"l
on his 15th yahrtzeit - ו' אדר

לעילוי נשמת
איידא בת הרב שרגא ליב ע"ה
Ada Botwinick a"h
on her 1st yahrtzeit - כ"ג אדר

**May they be מליצי יושר for
their family and all of כלל ישראל**

country to help. Sri Lankan workers from a neighboring home were there. Haredi women had come to give *chizuk* to the shiva families. Female soldiers were going from house to house offering help. Soldiers from Pikud HaOref were present. Teenagers were pitching in wherever they could. Our OU Israel team stood together among them.

There was barely room to move or even breathe, yet those ten minutes inside that *mamad* were remarkable.

I looked around and said to everyone in the room that we had such a mix of Jews here, and even a few non-Jews as well, and that we should take advantage of this moment to daven together. We recited a chapter of Tehilim for the families who lost loved ones and homes and for our injured soldiers and citizens. Then we made a *mi sheberach* for the owners of the home who had opened their *mamad* to us, a *mi sheberach* for our soldiers, and a *mi sheberach* for the families.

At that moment I found myself speaking silently to HaKadosh Baruch Hu. Too often we label people. One is Ashkenazi, another is Sefardi. One is Chassidish, another Litvish. One is traditional and another secular. But I said, "HaKadosh Baruch Hu, look at this room. Every type of Jew is standing together here. All of us are gathered in one room, all davening

together for the same things."

I felt that this moment was truly an *et ratzon*. In that *mamad* it made no difference where we came from. We were simply Jews standing together and praying.

I prayed then, as I pray now, that HaKadosh Baruch Hu should give strength and success to our pilots and our soldiers and that Klal Yisrael should receive all the help we need.

I left Beit Shemesh that day feeling something unexpected. Despite the devastation and grief, I felt a deep sense of hope. The spirit of Klal Yisrael continues to live and breathe strongly. May we merit to see the fruits of that *achdut* very soon and, be'ezrat Hashem, may we merit to bring the Korban Pesach *kehilcha* to this coming Pesach.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat,



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 **Mazal Tov to** 
Grandparents: Alan & Barbara Gindi
and Amy Scopp Cooper
and Rabbi Mark Cooper
on the birth of a **granddaughter**
to parents: **Shosh Gindi & Josh Cooper.**
Mazal Tov to **great-grandparents:**
Rachel Gindi and Saba and Ro Scopp

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