



## DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

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Some people love to travel, whether to go on vacation or to see Hashem's amazing world. It is something they devote so much time, effort, and money to. As Jews, perhaps we might say that it is in our DNA, as a nation formed while traveling for forty years in the desert. In this week's *parsha*, *Parshat Balak*, we read (Bamidbar 24:5) "*Mah tov u'ohalecha Yaakov, mishkenotecha Yisrael*" - "How goodly are your tents, O Jacob; your dwelling places, O Israel." Chazal tell us that Bilaam looked out at Klal Yisrael and saw our tents arranged so that no opening faced another, each family afforded its privacy, and praised us for it. Bilaam saw a nation that had learned how to travel, with dignity, with grace, and with mindfulness of how to keep the Torah and spread Torah in the field.

I have come to appreciate that flying is part of my job as Executive Director of OU Israel. I travel to meet my colleagues in North America, to speak in different communities and share what the OU is doing here in Israel, and to raise funds for the many OU programs we run across the country. And whenever I fly, I make a point of staying with close friends, with people I love.

Instead of going to a hotel, I find that staying with friends and family is so much more comfortable. Besides the advantage of saving the OU money, the real beauty of it is that you come to know people in a far more intimate way. When you spend a Shabbat, or even a few weekdays, in someone's home, you truly get to know who they are and they get to know you. Over the years, *Baruch Hashem*, I have developed wonderful relationships with

incredible people across North America, in both the United States and Canada. It makes flying so much easier when the family hosting you cares deeply about what we are doing in Israel, supports it, and feels part of the dramatic change the OU is making here. Whether I am in New York, New Jersey, Florida, Toronto, Los Angeles, or Vancouver, I am always staying with people I am very fond of, people who love me and whom I love in return.

Once a year I travel to Vancouver, British Columbia. Not because it is a large Jewish community, but because I have friends there who are quite literally like family. These are friends whom my wife and I met when we spent five years of our lives helping build the youth and future of the Vancouver community, through NCSY and through Congregation Schara Tzedek. The community has been led for the past twenty-three years by Rabbi Andrew Rosenblatt, and it is made up of truly wonderful people: deeply Zionist, passionate about the State of Israel, and, though they live so very far away, sending their children to learn in Israel, to earn degrees here, to make aliyah, and to serve in the IDF.

Being in the community every year, especially over Shabbat, is a tremendous treat for me. Each year Rabbi Rosenblatt asks me to speak in shul, to give the sermon and often to deliver other Torah lectures as well, and I always enjoy doing that. This year, as I sat in *shul* for *Parshat Korach* (currently, the Torah reading outside Israel runs a week behind Israel), I realized that it was exactly twenty-five years ago that I spent my first Shabbat in Vancouver, when I

came to look at the community before my wife and I moved there with our three boys. Twenty-five years, half a Jubilee, is such an incredible amount of time.

Throughout that Shabbat I tried to reflect on where I was twenty-five years ago, personally, emotionally, in my maturity, and in my Torah, when we first arrived to do work for NCSY, for the local *kollel*, and as the youth rabbi of Schara Tzedek. As the memories came flooding back to me, it was so heartwarming to me when I looked around. Heartwarming to see how much we made our mark and influenced the community positively; heartwarming to see how many lifelong friends and students we made there, and whom we have continued to host in our home in Israel over the twenty years since we returned; and heartwarming to understand how much the community shaped me in return, taking what I had received from my mother and father and from the yeshivot I learned in, and placing my wife and me in a community with such a powerful sense of unity.

In Vancouver, you find every type of Jew praying together: people in black hats alongside people who drive to shul on Shabbat morning, all standing as one community. That is unfortunately too rare today: a community that embraces everyone, where everyone wants to grow in their relationship with God, with one another, and with Torah.

At some point before Shabbat, Rabbi Rosenblatt shared something with me. He told me how he knows that every family that decides to leave Vancouver to make aliyah to Israel is a tremendous achievement, both for him as the rabbi and for the community at large, and that the shul is so proud of those who do so. I can say that because of this attitude, *Baruch Hashem*, there are families from Vancouver



now living all over Israel, from Mitzpe Netofa to Beit Shemesh, Efrat, Yerushalayim, Netanya, Tel Aviv, and many other places, individuals and families truly making an impact on Israeli society. And when he said this to me, you knew he meant every word. He viewed every individual and family that chose Israel as a major success.

At the same time, he said, he encourages those who are not making aliyah not to go searching for a larger community to move to. Every Jew in Vancouver, like every Jew in a small town across North America, is someone who makes a difference. Whether it is checking the *eruv*, helping with the *mikvah*, taking on roles in the shul such as *gabbai*, *chazzan*, and so on, or supporting the local kosher establishments, the Vancouver community rolls up its sleeves and does whatever is needed, but it needs solid members to stay and be an anchor for the Jewish community at large.

Nevertheless, he asked me to get up and tell the community what the OU is doing for *olim* and for the Anglo community in Israel. Explain to them, he said, that even if they cannot afford an apartment in Yerushalayim or Beit Shemesh, there are so many other options. Tell them about the JLIC presence we have built on campuses across Israel, and encourage them to send their children to finish high school and come study for a degree

here. Tell them about NCSY in Israel, so that families arriving with teenagers know their children will have the same kind of youth experience they had in North America. Tell them about our women's initiatives, our Yom HaAtzmaut and Yom Yerushalayim programming, our many Torah initiatives, and our Frontline Support for lone soldiers. Tell them about the work OU Israel is doing for teens at risk in Kiryat Shmona, Nahariya, Akko, and other cities across Israel.

I tried to do exactly that. But I took it a step further. I spoke about every Jew finding his or her *tafkid*, finding what they are good at and where they can contribute. I told them about Anglos who made *aliyah* and now volunteer in our teen centers, teaching our teens English, serving food in the centers, being part of the team working day in and day out with these young people, helping each teen discover their *tafkid*, and finding their own in return. I talked about all of our programs and the impact they are making in Israel, especially for *olim*. I spoke about how OU Israel has mapped out close to four hundred communities across Israel with significant English-speaking populations.

People need not think only of Yerushalayim, Beit Shemesh, Efrat, or Modiin, places so many feel they cannot afford. There are countless communities ready to embrace them with open arms, at far more affordable prices, where each person can find a home and a purpose. We have an incredible team, led by Esti Moskowitz, out in the field getting to know these communities and gathering the data, and *be'ezrat Hashem* we will keep adding wonderful people across the country and strengthening these communities, to better the State of Israel and to better ourselves.

A friend of mine from Gush Etzion, who happened to be in shul that Shabbat with his wife after a trip through the Rockies, came over afterward and shared how meaningful it was to hear that there are endless options in Israel, and that the moment a person decides Israel is for them, whether young or old, the OU will be there for them.

And I was especially moved by how many people came over to talk to me over the course of Shabbat and afterwards about their desire to make *aliyah*, about the things they were finishing up so that they could move to Israel. It was clear that my messages and Torah reached their hearts.

May we take the bracha we recite three times every single day in *Shemoneh Esrei*, “*Teka beshofar gadol licheruteinu, vesa nes lekabetz galuyoteinu*” - “Sound the great shofar for our freedom, and raise a banner to gather our exiles,” and turn it from a *bracha* into a complete reality, in which we see all our brothers and sisters choosing to come home, *be'ezrat Hashem bevinyan Beit HaMikdash* very soon.



Rabbi Avi Berman  
Executive Director, OU Israel

לעילוי נשמות

**בילא בת בנימין ע"ה**

**Bayla Gold** a"h

on her 7<sup>th</sup> yahrzeit ט"ו תמוז

and

**הרב אברהם שלום גולד זצ"ל**

**Rabbi Sholom Gold** zt"l

On his 3<sup>rd</sup> yahrtzeit - ט"ט תמוז

*The Gold, Koenigsberg,  
Nadav & Goldrieck Families*