



DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

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Forty-one years ago, my parents gave my siblings and me the greatest gift they could have given us: they made *aliyah*. They did not really know much about Israel beyond what they had learned in school, because neither of them had ever set foot here before they came. And they came straight from Brooklyn and Staten Island, to a *yishuv* in the Shomron called Kedumim, sitting between Shechem and Qalqilya, near another beautiful community, Karnei Shomron (where many Americans live in the neighborhood of Neve Aliza, not far from Kfar Saba). It was, to put it mildly, very different scenery from Brooklyn or Staten Island.

Whenever my mother tried to explain to relatives in the United States what living in Kedumim was actually like, she reached for the same example. Think about what you have in your backyard, behind your house in Brooklyn, she would say. Some grass, some trees, if you're lucky. What I have behind my house is Shechem, where Yosef HaTzadik is buried, and on the two sides of Shechem, Har Gerizim and Har Eival, the two mountains that come up in this week's *parsha*: "*Venatata*

et habrachta al Har Gerizim, ve'et haklala al Har Eival - And you shall put the blessing on Har Gerizim and the curses on Har Eival" (Devarim 11:29). This is literally one of the first places the Jewish people went right after entering the Land of Israel.

So the words Har Gerizim and Har Eival were ingrained in me, from my mother saying them again and again. And they were never abstract. As a young child, before the first Intifada, when Jews and Arabs generally got along in the area and Jews could walk around Qalqilya and Shechem without a problem, I remember walking around Shechem and going with my parents to Kever Yosef, simply driving there. These experiences of growing up there left a tremendous impression on my siblings and me. We understood that we were living in a very different place than Brooklyn, a place where the mountains we were looking at and the gravesites we were going to visit and *daven* at came straight out of Tanach and the Torah.

Har Eival is where Yehoshua built a *mizbe'ach*, an altar, when he came into the Land of Israel together with the Jewish people, right after forty years in the desert. For most of modern history, nobody could find Mizbeach Yehoshua. Then, in 1980, an archaeologist named Adam Zertal came across a large stone structure while surveying the mountain, and excavated it over the decade that followed. He found an altar built of unhewn stones, with a ramp rather than steps, standing on Har Eival exactly as it is written in *Sefer Yehoshua*. Inside it were thousands of animal bones,

May the learning
from this Torah Tidbits
be לעילוי נשמת

My beloved father

Milton Braun ז"ל

מנחם מנדל בן יחיאל מיכל ז"ל

On his 43rd yartzeit- כ"ו אב

You are greatly missed!

Judith Wasserman

and only from kosher species. There were also Egyptian scarab seals from the era of Ramesses II. It is about as close as you can get to verifying that this really is Mizbeach Yehoshua.

My next connection to Har Eival came while I was in Vancouver, and it came in a very painful form. In October 2000, terrorists opened fire on a group of Israeli men, women and children who had gone up the mountain, and Rav Binyamin Herling HY"D of Kedumim was killed. I knew Rav Herling. I remember frequently seeing him, sitting and learning in the *yeshiva* and *Beit Midrash* in Kedumim. He was a tremendous *talmid chacham*, a man I looked up to as someone so pious, such an extraordinary Torah learner and such an incredible teacher.

I had seen Har Eival many times looking out from Har Kabir, next to Elon Moreh, which this week's *parsha* also mentions (Devarim 11:30). And I always yearned to get to Har Eival itself, to see Mizbeach Yehoshua: the place where we know the entire Jewish people stood when they entered the Land of Israel, making very clear what is the right thing to do and what is the wrong thing to do, standing there between the mountain of the blessings and the mountain of the curses.

This past Sukkot, Omer Rahamim, the Director General of Moetzet Yesha, told me that Har Eival was open. I said to myself, I have not been up there in many years, and I would love to go and see the *mizbe'ach* now that I am an adult and can really appreciate it. On different occasions, I took two close friends, Avi and Asher along with their families, as well as Rabbi Daniel Rose from Baltimore and his congregants from BJSZ, out to Mizbeach Yehoshua on Har Eival. That was another moment of wow. It is so powerful to stand in the place where Yehoshua very likely stood.



Then the area became personal in a much closer way. My son was asked to partner in building a *yishuv* on Har Eival, a decision passed by the government and supported by the IDF. This was to be close to Yeshivat Elon Moreh, where he had received so much of his Torah education. He felt this was his calling. I knew this was a big decision, so I asked him to think about it for a day or two, and I told him that his job right now was to go back to *yeshiva* and learn. He said, "Aba, I feel like this is something I have to do." I spoke it over with my wife, and we told him that if he considers this his calling, then he should go and do it.

Everything went into planning, and then

one night he started sending us pictures: caravan after caravan after caravan coming up on trucks, along a paved but not particularly comfortable road leading up to Har Eival, the flattening of the land, the preparations. Pictures and videos throughout the night. And then, in the morning, a photograph of him standing on Har Eival with a cup of coffee in his hand and all the caravans in place. I remember waking up the next morning, suddenly seeing all these pictures and videos, and being deeply moved. Har Eival, being such an important aspect of my life, just became a home for my child.

The community has kept growing, and roughly five months on, there are twenty families living up there and a *yeshiva*, a branch of the Elon Moreh Hesder Yeshiva, with some fifteen young men sitting and learning.

So I look at Har Eival very differently now than I did last year when I read *Parshat Re'eh*. I raise my eyes to the heavens and think, wow, *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, You have given us the ability to turn this *yishuv* of Eival into a tremendous blessing, another place where Jews can live, where they can connect to their forefathers, connect to their history, connect to the Torah that was given to us thousands of years ago, and ultimately connect to *Bnei Yisrael*, and to the unique words in this week's *parsha* and throughout the Torah and Tanach.

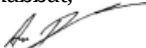
I see this as another step in *Bnei Yisrael* coming home. And we are not coming home saying that we will only live in the major cities. Every place in this country that carries such deep meaning, we want to be there.

Some are yearning for the city of Yerushalayim and everything that makes it special, the "*harim saviv lah* - the hills that surround it." Others are benefiting from Kiryat Arba and the whole beautiful area surrounding our forefathers and foremothers buried in Chevron. Others are living in Ma'aleh Adumim, drawing from the place where the *Kohen* would take the *sa'ir la'azazel* out on Yom Kippur, Midbar Yehuda. Others are up north in Tzippori, or by the Kinneret. There is just so much to benefit from. Every single place in this country really has such deep meaning.

And thank you, *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, for bringing us back Home. Thanks to our forefathers and foremothers, who for millennia prayed that He bring us home, "*Ve'techezenah eineinu* - Let our eyes see Your return to Zion in mercy," and "*Teka be'shofar gadol* - Sound the great horn for our freedom, lift up the banner to gather in our exiles." Now we are seeing the fruits of their prayers, which are enabling all of us to come home hopefully for the last time.

Before ending, I want to bless us all that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* should grant us an era filled with peace, growth, and abundant *berachot*. The *parsha* opens by placing both the blessing and the curse before us, reminding us that the choice is ours. As we look to our children, hoping they will always choose the right path, we realize that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* looks at us with that same desire; *b'ezrat Hashem*, may our commitment to choosing right merit His continued protection and *chesed*.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat,


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