



DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

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Something that always fascinates me is how organizations and companies figure out what their slogan should be, the one line that defines who they are and what they do. At OU Israel, our slogan is “Empowering lives and communities in our homeland.” Those are words I see all the time, on our materials and throughout our work, but what excites me is not just seeing them on paper or on a screen but seeing them come to life in front of me.

One of my other favorites is the slogan for the Jewish community in Chevron, “Kan hakol hitchil,” “Here is where it all began.” It’s so true. You can find *midrashim* that describe the Cave of the Patriarchs as the entrance to Gan Eden. You can find *midrashim* that tell us that Adam and Chava are buried there, along with Avraham and Sarah, Yitzchak and Rivka, and Yaakov and Leah. All these *midrashim* point us to one fact. Chevron is where it all started.

This week, when we sit in shul and start reading Parshat Bereshit, we are going back to the beginning. To the beginning not just of

our story, but of all existence. And in the end, so much of life is about the beginning. The Talmud talks about the concept of *girsu de’yankuta*, the learning and discovery that one has as a young person, which can be so impactful in shaping who they become and can stay with them forever. We know how important the education of our youth is. After all, the young men and women of today are being formed into the leaders of the future.

Over 25 years ago, I really had no idea what the OU was. I knew it involved kosher supervision. I had no idea that it took its profits, added them to donations from incredible Jews around the world, and used that funding to run phenomenal programs. Back then, all I knew about NCSY, pretty much, was that they had the famous “NCSY bencher” with Birkat HaMazon and a great song list. Aside from that, I had no idea about all the other incredible programs of the OU. I did not know about Yachad. JLIC was barely getting off the ground. I did not know about Jewish Action, the OU’s advocacy work in Washington, or so many of the other programs.

But then something happened that changed my life’s trajectory forever. A little over 25 years ago, I took a position running NCSY, the OU’s youth movement, in Vancouver, British Columbia, and the Northwest region. That is when I started being exposed to the amazing work that the OU does worldwide.

And aside from being exposed to it, I was suddenly bringing my family into this world called the OU. I was taking them to Shabbatonim and having tens of teenagers over at

May the Torah learning
from this issue of Torah Tidbits
be לעילוי נשמת

Joseph (Joe) Manasseh ז”ל
יוסף בן גבריאל מנשה ומעתוקה ז”ל
כ”ט תשרי on his fifth Yahrzeit

Greatly missed by
his children, grandchildren
and great grandchildren

Families Ross, Miller,
Lipnick & Manasseh

our house every single Shabbat in Vancouver for Shabbat meals and onegs. Slowly, slowly, my children grew up to be OU children.

Our oldest is 28 today, with four children of his own, and our youngest is 11. They only remember their father working for the OU, and their mother cooking endless meals and hosting thousands and thousands of NCSYers, JLICers, OU supporters, friends, and staff. The OU is ingrained in their minds and hearts. So when a week comes along when we are short on volunteers to distribute Torah Tidbits, for example, they make themselves available. “Okay, Abba, how can we help?” And when we host guests, they are always the first ones to give up their bedrooms.

I really felt it this past Sukkot, when my children dedicated the majority of their Sukkot and Chol HaMoed to spending time with many different OU participants. Whether it was going on trips with friends of ours from around the world to see incredible places across the country, or hosting hundreds of people who came to spend time with us in our sukkah, they were there.

But more than anything, I was extremely moved by what my wife and children did on Thursday of Chol HaMoed.

Less than a year ago, we created a new program called Frontline Support, which is designed to be there for English-speaking soldiers serving in the IDF. Some are *chayalim bodedim*, lone soldiers, and some simply have not found their own community within the army. Baruch Hashem, Israel is blessed to have many hundreds of volunteers coming from all over the world to serve in the IDF, and that influx of international volunteers is crucial because we need as many soldiers as possible.

These *chayalim bodedim* have a



tremendously uplifting effect on those around them. Often, they serve in units with Israeli soldiers who don’t always understand why they have to give so many years of their lives to the army. Then suddenly they see someone who is not legally obligated to serve coming and serving, and talking about why he or she came. It gives the Israeli soldiers a great feeling. “Wow, if they can do it, then I can definitely do it.”

When lone soldiers join the army through Hesder programs, that automatically gives them a community, with friends who

strengthen each other and rabbis who come to teach them Torah and invite them back to yeshiva for the holidays. Frontline Support was created for those who did not join the army through these programs, helping them form their own community and their own support structures.

The program is directed by Rabbi Ian Schwartz, working directly under Esti Moskowitz, our Director of Anglo Engagement and Programming in Israel, both of whom are doing a phenomenal job running programming for the English-speaking population in Israel. Rabbi Schwartz, who grew up in Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania, is doing an incredible job creating a home for these *chayalim*.

The program includes not only community, but also mentorship. These mentors have gone through much of what the soldiers are going through, having made aliyah, served in the IDF, and built families in Israel. They now serve as leaders and role models for the *chayalim*, learning with them, hosting them, and running events with them to make sure they have a religious, Torah-oriented community both while they are in the army and when they come out for Shabbat or a *chag*.

So I invited all of them to my sukkah for a Sukkot event. Rabbi Schwartz and his staff did a truly phenomenal job on the programming side, and I told them to leave the culinary and logistical side to my wife, my kids, and me, as we consider it a tremendous honor to have them over. There is nothing more impactful than the atmosphere of a home. Baruch Hashem, Hashem blessed us with a big sukkah and a big yard, and we were able to host over a hundred *chayalim* for a beautifully uplifting evening.

Standing in my sukkah that night, looking around at more than a hundred young men

and women who had come to Israel to serve and protect the Jewish people, surrounded by a community that wanted them to know they were not alone, I thought about those words, “Empowering lives and communities in our homeland.” Sometimes a slogan can just be a line. That night, I felt like I was truly watching ours come to life. We were empowering these remarkable *chayalim*, helping them build community here in Israel, and at the same time they were strengthening all of us.

I want to give tremendous public thanks to my children for all their work and self-sacrifice these past few weeks. They gave numerous days of Chol HaMoed to the OU in general, and to this one event in particular. They went shopping with me early in the morning, spent days beforehand chopping vegetables and cooking, stood over the grill, cleaned the house and the sukkah, and did whatever else it took to make sure everybody felt at home. Then they served and cleaned up afterward until 2:00 in the morning. They gave everything they had.

It was really impressive to see their dedication to making sure it happened in the most incredible way, with tremendous recognition that these soldiers are heroes, young men and women who came to Israel in order to fight in the IDF.

And it brought me back to Parshat Bereshit, and to the idea of *girsas de'yankuta*.

We have been so privileged to raise my children as givers, who see themselves as part of the OU mission. We speak often at OU Israel about empowering lives and communities in our homeland. That evening, I realized that this mission had become part of their lives as well.

They were not helping simply because I had asked them to help with an OU event. They

understood instinctively that these young men and women had come to Israel to serve Am Yisrael, and that welcoming them, feeding them, and making them feel at home was our privilege.

When my wife and I saw how our children went way beyond the call of duty to make sure the evening was done in the best way possible, with as much love as possible, we knew that the values they had grown up seeing had become their own.

We are in the parsha in which the world begins, and the ability to start a world is also a moment for us to look at ourselves and ask, "Where should I start?"

We are all starting a new year, and in a certain way, the rest of the year depends on how we start it. Nobody hits a target unless they start off by aiming correctly. Starting the year off correctly will, *b'ezrat Hashem*, bring all of us endless *nachat* from our loved ones and help us continue being passionate about what we do and how we do it.

So let's continue doing what we do, and doing it with passion.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat,



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