



DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

RABBI AVI BERMAN

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In the month of Elul, 1995, when I was attending Yeshivat Shilo, I came home for Shabbat to my parents' house in Har Nof. That *Motzei Shabbat*, there was a *shiur* in preparation for Rosh Hashanah given by Rabbi Dovid Orlofsky, a former NCSY regional director. The *shiur* was about the importance of *kavanah* (concentration and intention) in *davening*, and not only was the *shiur* interesting, it was also very funny, in Rabbi Orlofsky's unique style. But one moment in particular from that evening has stayed with me ever since.

Rabbi Orlofsky spoke about how so many times we are *davening* while our minds are elsewhere, running on autopilot. Suddenly, we realize halfway through a prayer that we weren't paying any attention to what we were saying. I recognized that moment very well, as I'm sure many of you do as well. So what should we do when we have that realization? He advised that we should stop, stand still for a second, and try to have *kavanah* in at least the one *beracha* we are about to say.

**In loving memory of
our father, grandfather
and great-grandfather**

**Rabbi Samuel Adelman z"l
of Denver Colorado
on his 60th yahrzeit
Tuesday, October 27th, תשס"ז**

**Founder and Chairman
of the Youth Torah Pilgrimage
in 1953 - the beginning of NCSY**

At the time in *yeshiva*, I had decided to focus on working on my *kavanah* in *tefilah*. I studied the sources regarding the importance of *kavanah* in *davening*, and I discovered that the first *beracha* of Shemoneh Esrei, *Magen Avraham*, is the *beracha* in which *kavanah* matters most. In fact, the *halacha* is that ideally, someone who did not have *kavanah* in that first *beracha* should actually go back and say it again. (However, we generally hold that nowadays, a person should not repeat Shemoneh Esrei, because unfortunately, chances are that the person will not have *kavanah* the second time either.) I was determined to make sure that I would devote time to that first *beracha* every time I *davened*, because I realized that there is a special reason for it.

When reading this week's *parsha*, we see the tremendous challenges Avraham Avinu faced because of his *emunah* (faith and trust) in *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, in a generation where nobody else had this *emunah*. Avraham Avinu was an *ivri*, standing on his own against the entire world. With his *emunah* in *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, he listened to the command and literally picked up his life and moved to an unknown land, just because *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* told him to do so.

I am sure that many people reading Torah Tidbits right now are thinking of the day they picked up and left the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, France, and the many other countries our readers come from. You, dear reader, understand

the challenge that Avraham undertook better than many others, because you lived through a similar kind of experience.

My parents making *aliyah* with us in 1985 was in some ways much harder than it is today. Back then, there were not nearly as many flights going back and forth between New York and Israel, they were expensive, and not nearly as comfortable as they are today. Once you were in Israel, it was hard to stay connected. There was no WhatsApp, no FaceTime, and no Zoom. Back then it was aerograms. Back then it was seven shekels a minute on a Bezeq line, if you even had a Bezeq line.

A lot has changed, but that doesn't mean that making *aliyah* isn't a challenge today. No matter what, it will always be hard to say goodbye to loved ones and to your community, to look for a new job, and to learn a new language and a new culture. That is one of the reasons that we at OU Israel, together with other organizations, are doing our utmost to make sure that the absorption process in Israel is as easy and as comfortable as possible, on a spiritual level, an educational level, and a community level. I want to take this opportunity to praise Esti Moskowitz, OU Israel's Director of Anglo Engagement and Programming in Israel, who oversees the programs we run for English speakers across the country. Hearing feedback from so many people who tell me that their *aliyah* process has become so much more enjoyable, and that their settling in Israel has been so much more successful because of OU Israel's programs, is truly an incredible feeling.

But when I think of Avraham Avinu, I think of the *mesirut nefesh* he had, the love he had for *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, and the



passion he had for doing what nobody else in the world was doing: believing in God and listening to God, together with Sarah. He stood strong in every single *nisayon* he was given, from leaving Charan and going to the land of Canaan, to standing up against the entire world, and ultimately, as we will see in next week's *parsha*, to being willing to sacrifice his son Yitzchak, his only son from Sarah, because *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* told him to do so. That just goes to show what a giant Avraham Avinu was.

Therefore, when we think about the *beracha* of *Magen Avraham*, we should remember that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* gave us a forefather who literally showed us what it means, as they say in Hebrew, to go *ba'esh u'vamayim*, through fire and water, with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. And if we emulate him, we will go far. Avraham Avinu always trusted *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, and *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* was always there protecting him. *Hachnasat orchim* (having guests in our homes), doing *brit milah*, making *aliyah*, fighting enemies, these are things that we continue to do today that are walking in the footsteps of Avraham Avinu.

So it makes so much sense that this *beracha* in particular requires *kavanah*, because it is so much the essence of who

we are. And just as *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* was a *magen*, a shield, for Avraham Avinu then, *b'ezrat Hashem*, if we have the right *kavanah*, *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* will continue protecting *Klal Yisrael* today.

Recently, I got a call from a friend. He told me, "Avi, miracles are happening every day that don't make the news. *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* is clearly protecting our soldiers and our civilians. Just look at what happened on that FlyDubai flight a few weeks ago! He is giving us endless *siyata d'shmaya* - He really is *Magen Avraham*." He told me that a number of months ago, he took it upon himself to make sure to have *kavanah* in the first *beracha* of Shemoneh Esrei every single time he *davens*, in the *zechut* of *Klal Yisrael* wherever they are, asking that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* watch over them, and especially over our security forces and soldiers.

I told him that I think it is a beautiful idea. I know many people say *Tehillim*, many people are doing *chesed*, and much more, for the merit of the success and safety of our soldiers. What about *Magen Avraham*? We know that halachically, this *beracha* is so important that we are all supposed to have *kavanah* in it anyway, so maybe this is something more of us should

try. Some people might take it upon themselves for a day, some for a week, a month, or a year, to make sure to have *kavanah* in the first *beracha* of Shemoneh Esrei, *Magen Avraham*.

Before making a decision about whether to accept this, as you sit and read this week's *parsha*, think about the tremendous love that Avraham Avinu had for *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. Then think about the tremendous love that our dear soldiers have for the people of Israel, the Land of Israel, and the heritage of the Jewish people. They act with *mesirut nefesh* and love for *Klal Yisrael*, risking their lives at all times. Let us each take upon ourselves, for as long as we possibly can, to have *kavanah* in the first *beracha* of Shemoneh Esrei, *Magen Avraham*. I think the perfect time to do so is as we finish reading this week's *parsha* in *shul*. If you are reading this afterwards, you can accept it upon yourself then.

May *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* continue protecting *Klal Yisrael*. May we continue listening to all the commands of *Lech Lecha*, and we should merit to see Har HaMoriah rebuilt, with the Beit HaMikdash standing on it as it is supposed to. Hopefully, this Chanukah we will be celebrating not only the miracles that happened then in the Beit HaMikdash, but the miracles happening in our own day in the Beit HaMikdash. And *b'ezrat Hashem*, this coming Pesach we should see all of *Klal Yisrael* coming to the Beit HaMikdash to bring the *Korban Pesach*.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat,



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May the Torah learned
from this Torah Tidbits
and the zemirot sung this Shabbat
be in loving memory of

Dr. Abba E. Borowich z"l

אבא מנחם בן

שמואל צבי ויפה זעלדע ז"ל

on his 2nd yahrzeit - י"ג מר-חשוון

*Sandy Borowich
& Yaari, Galitzer,
and Milstein families*