

DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

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Since October 7th, something has shifted in the relationship between Jews on both sides of the Atlantic. On one side, our brothers and sisters abroad have showed such endless support for their family in Israel. Seeing what the Jewish people here were going through, they have stepped up in a big way and have showed their willingness to help in any way they could. We have seen so many Diaspora Jews coming to volunteer in the IDF, coming to join in National Service, and there is such a strong feeling of family between the two sides of the ocean.

It has also led, on the other side, to many requests for me to come speak to Israeli groups about Diaspora Jewry in general, and North American Jewry in particular. These Israeli groups are interested in understanding more about their fellow Jews overseas, especially after seeing and feeling that warm embrace after October 7th.

One such group was of community leaders from the Har Chevron Regional Council. The Har Chevron region covers about a million *dunams*, roughly five percent of the size of the State of Israel. It is made up of many *yishuvim*, stretching from Adora in the north all the way down toward Yatir and Tene Omarim, which are only 25 to 30 minutes from Be'er Sheva. It is an enormous expanse of land.

It was an honor to host them in our OU Israel offices, where they found out more about OU Israel and all about the work we do in Israel helping *olim* settle and feel at home here, as well as about our work with helping teens at risk. They were so moved by what they saw that they invited the entire OU Israel team to come spend a day in the beautiful region of Har Chevron.

That was about eight months ago. The outing was canceled because of the war with Iran, and then it took time simply to find a day that worked for as many of us as possible. Finally, this past Sunday, forty members of the OU Israel team went down together: our English-speaking team, our Hebrew-speaking team, program staff, IT and finance, all the different departments, led by our Director of Human Resources, Sara Berelowitz. It was a fascinating and emotionally uplifting day.

We began with a fascinating visit to Susya. Susya is an ancient Jewish city where approximately 3,000 Jews lived. Dozens of *mikvaot* have been found there, along with a shul built in a shape similar to the *Beit HaMikdash*. Its mosaic floor has words written in Hebrew, including *Shalom al Yisrael*, "Peace upon Israel," and there are *menorot* and other Jewish

In Loving Memory of

Elisheva (Gralla) Pokroy a"h
ישפה אלישבע בת נחמיה ע"ה

Beloved Wife, Daughter, Mother,
Grandmother, Sister, Aunt
On her 3rd Yartzheit - 9 Kislev

Pokroy, Gralla, Rappaport,
Strausz and Harris Families

symbols carved all over. We watched incredible videos explaining the fascinating city that existed there for hundreds of years, built up in the aftermath of the destruction of the second *Beit HaMikdash* and the exile of Jews from Yerushalayim.

From there we went to visit the beautiful farm of a wonderful woman named Dalia, where she runs workshops. She teaches people how to take food from grain to bread, about the *mitzvot hateluyot ba'aretz* (the commandments connected to the Land), and how so many of the basic Shabbat laws are tied to farm work. She also shared her personal story with us. She and her husband, Yair *Hy"d*, built up the farm together, and 25 years ago he was murdered by Hamas terrorists. But Dalia, together with her nine children, kept on building. She is an inspiration and a real symbol of Israeli resilience.

We then had a delicious lunch in the visitor center of Drimia, an OU-certified winery. We heard from Rabbi Yonatan Korach, our OU *mashgiach* for the winery, together with representatives of the winery who told us its story. What we heard was so much more than the story of a winery. It was an uplifting and inspiring Zionist story, one of people with a deep love for *Eretz Yisrael*, dedicated to building up the Land, planting its vineyards, and bringing forth its incredible fruits. We also heard from Ayala, representing the Har Chevron Regional Council, about the many different things the region offers, its *yishuvim* and their histories. Because of their close proximity to Be'er Sheva, some of the *yishuvim* are drawing people who work at Soroka Medical Center and at the university, so there is a lot of growth happening now.







They are building many new apartments in many of the *yishuvim* and are looking for more *olim* to come and join them.

Over the course of our time there, I had the opportunity to speak to the staff. I told them that I think Drimia is a beautiful name for a winery (it is the name of a flower that grows in Israel and elsewhere). But since our group was made up of English speakers and Hebrew speakers, I suggested

taking half the word in English and half the word in Hebrew. In English, the first half is "dream." In Hebrew, the end is spelled *yud-heh*, which is one of *Hashem*'s names.

So I told them that the name tells a story of Hebrew and English together. For *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* had a dream, so to speak, of seeing His sons and daughters come back to the Land of Israel. For so many years, that was also the dream of the Jewish people around the world: to come closer to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, to come back to the Land of Israel, and to live His Torah in His land. So, I told them, this winery and our visit truly represents the "dream of God," of building up the land, of putting in the infrastructure, of planting vines and producing the incredible fruits of the land.

With us in the group were two OU employees who recently made *aliyah*: Atarah, who made *aliyah* two months ago and lives in Rechovot, and Aliza, who made *aliyah* just three weeks ago and lives in Yerushalayim. I specifically pointed them out, because we at OU Israel get to see this dream happen every single day. While we still have a lot more to *daven* for, the fact that we can read about our forefathers and mothers in the Torah and then *walk where they walked*, and imagine the sights they saw, that is truly a dream.

From there, the whole staff went together to *Maarat HaMachpela*. Right before walking in, we all stood together and took a group picture, as we had done in Susya, and we looked into this week's *parsha*. And then, of course, we *davened*, praying for our soldiers, our children and family, for those wounded, and those who have dealt with terrible loss. As I wrote last week, in *Parshat Chayei Sarah* the Torah puts great emphasis on the *shidduch* of Yitzchak Avinu, and so there where our matriarchs and patriarchs are buried, we *davened* for all those who need *shidduchim*. In this week's *parsha*, we read, "Yitzchak *davened* to *Hashem* opposite his wife, because she was barren" (Bereishit 25:21). And so we *davened* for all those who want to have children and, unfortunately, have not yet been successful.

We saw the new roof on *Maarat HaMachpela* that was recently put up. It is absolutely stunning, and it makes *Maarat HaMachpela* so much more comfortable to *daven* in. We also saw all the remnants of Shabbat *Parshat Chayei Sarah*, when tens of thousands of people went down, as every year, to Chevron, including a number of my own children.

It was truly a beautiful day, a day on which we connected to the Land, the people, the Torah and our tradition. I cannot thank our incredible OU team enough for dedicating a full day to it, even though all of our schedules are so packed, with so much happening. Spending a day together and bonding was so meaningful. So many separate divisions in OU Israel were able to see each other, walk with each other, talk, connect, bond, and get excited and emotional about what they were seeing together.

I have no doubt that the inspiration, renewed energy and enthusiasm that our team brought back from this incredible day will be felt throughout OU Israel. It will give all of us even greater strength

Condolences to
Pesach Derdiger and family
on the passing of his

SISTER a"h

המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים

and motivation to continue serving the people who turn to us, strengthening each and every one of our programs and making them better and better. Ultimately, it is the thousands of *olim*, teens, families and communities we serve across Israel who will benefit from the inspiration our team experienced together in Har Chevron.

I encourage all of you to go down to this beautiful part of *Eretz Yisrael* and enjoy it, because it really is stunning. Even though we had cold weather and rain, it was beyond incredible. Everyone had a phenomenal time and came back rejuvenated and excited.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat,

Rabbi Avi Berman
Executive Director, OU Israel





