

DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

RABBI AVI BERMAN
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As I have written about previously, my family made *aliyah* when I was nine years old. We arrived in Kedumim on a Thursday, and my parents insisted that before our first Shabbat in Israel began, we would have already visited three places. We went to Yerushalayim to visit the Kotel, and from there we drove to *Kever Rachel*, and then to *Maarat HaMachpela*.

That day really helped shape who I am today. My parents had taken us from America, from New York, where we had the Empire State Building, the Brooklyn Bridge, the Statue of Liberty, and wanted to impress upon us that now that we were in Israel, this is a place where the landmarks could not be more different. That we were now home, where our history is ingrained in the Land itself, where everywhere we step, we are stepping somewhere that belongs to our great-grandfathers and our great-grandmothers.

It was when we got to *Kever Rachel* that I saw the Torah come to life. In Parshat Vayishlach, we read about Rachel Imeinu passing away and being buried "on the road to Efrat" (Bereshit 35:19). Standing there, I could see that she truly is buried right there on the side of the road. Within our first few weeks in Israel, we also visited *Kever Binyamin*, which is not far from Kedumim, near Kfar Saba. Binyamin is also born in this week's *parsha*, at the very same time that Rachel Imeinu passes away. To read the *parsha* and then stand at Binyamin's *kever* and at Rachel Imeinu's *kever* is an experience I find difficult to express in words. But this is the reality of living in Israel. You are face to face with you and your people's history at every moment.

Binyamin is the last of the twelve *shevatim* to be born, the twelve tribes that make up the Jewish people. Although we don't know where every tribe has gone, more and more Jews are finding their way back to Israel every day. The different tribes teach us the importance of the fact that each one of us has our own unique face, our own unique story, our own unique name, and our own unique personality, and when we put it all together, that is what makes up *Klal Yisrael*.

A number of years ago, I had a meeting with Stuart Hershkowitz, President of OU Israel. He told me, "Avi, people do not know enough about what OU Israel does. The average person hears about the OU and says, it's about kosher and food. You're doing an amazing job of getting the word out with your column in Torah Tidbits, but we need to do more. People want to donate

ישראל
The OU Israel family
wishes Mazal Tov to
Rabbi Eli & Rebbetzin Zemira
Ozarowski and family
on the marriage of
their daughter
Temima to Shachar Shaya

to things they understand, to things they feel are important to support. If we don't tell people enough about what we're doing, how can they support our initiatives?"



He was 100% right. *Baruch Hashem*, the proceeds of OU *kashrut* go toward covering most of the overhead of our organization. But ultimately, if we don't raise the money for the programs themselves, to build, support, and expand them, then we can't keep them going. So we created a page in Torah Tidbits called "OU - Beyond Kashrut." We called it that because we understand that *kashrut* is a big part of what we do, but there is so much happening beyond the OU's *kashrut*. I go to communities and meet with groups that are really surprised when they hear about the incredible activities we are doing, whether with the English-speaking community in Israel or with teens at risk. Our incredible OU Israel staff work hard every single week putting the page together, and they have been doing so for about four years, each week highlighting a different thing OU Israel is doing.

And yet, last week's "OU - Beyond Kashrut" was the final one. That is not because we have stopped doing endless activities beyond *kashrut*. It is because of what I wrote above about the tapestry of the Jewish people, where each person has a different face, a different personality, and a different job. After four years of "OU - Beyond Kashrut," we realized that we want to talk about the faces, the people, and the names that are actually running these incredible activities. The "OU - Beyond Kashrut" page was an opportunity to talk about the program, but we want to show more, talk more deeply, and focus on the unique people leading these programs.

A page about the program doesn't allow us to really show the tremendous amount of hard work put in by the OU Israel team every single week, every single day, every single hour, around the clock, to make sure these incredible activities happen. And so I felt that the right thing to do is to show you how incredible these people are and to tell you a little about them: where they were born, what year they made *aliyah*, which program they work in, what excites them most, what gets them up in the morning, and a whole list of other questions.

Today, OU Israel has close to 500 employees across all of our different programs, and I want you to get to know them,

Mazal Tov!
to Sherry Luber and Family
on the engagement of their daughter and sister
Adina to Yechezkel

because one of the biggest blessings in my life is working with the most incredible people in the world. We want to share with all of our readers a greater sense of how incredible these people are, people who wake up in the morning with a purpose greater than themselves and go to sleep at night knowing that they have accomplished a tremendous amount for the Jewish people. Maybe they live down the block from you. Maybe they are the son or daughter of a friend of yours. Maybe they go to the gym with you. Maybe you go to the same *shiur*. Maybe you go to the same restaurant (OU-certified, of course). Whatever it is, the more we get to know these different people, the greater the chance that you will understand how great they are, so that I am not the only one who knows. And I know that I don't thank them enough for all they do, so I hope that having their pictures, their names, and their stories in a new column in Torah Tidbits will be a small expression of our gratitude for them.

The same way that *Klal Yisrael* comes from the twelve tribes, so does the OU Israel team, each one in their unique way, with their unique name, their unique family, and their unique passions, whether they work with Israeli teens at risk or with the *olim* community. Each one is inspiring, each one is uplifting, and each one is doing their own part to make up the beautiful tapestry of *Klal Yisrael*. I look forward to hearing your feedback about our different staff members, and please make sure to tell them as well how much you appreciate the great work they are doing.

My email appears at the end of this column for you to be able to contact me. As I mentioned, one of our goals is that you should know not only the people, but also the great activities they run. As we come toward the end of the fiscal year, I hope you too will consider making your donation to OU Israel, because *im ein kemach, ein Torah*, if there is no flour, there is no Torah (Pirkei Avot 3:17). We truly need your support in order to continue our activities and to take them to the next level. I thank you in advance, and I hope you enjoy getting to know my staff. I love them, and I am sure you will as well.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat,



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As Chanuka approaches, we want to help our over 200 poor and needy families so that they too can have a joyful, light-filled holiday.



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