



Jewish Community Center of Paramus
Congregation Beth Tikvah
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A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Hillel Gold

Friday November 29, 2024 ~ Parsha: Toldot

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

On Marking My Third Anniversary Since Making Aliyah **A Shabbat Message to the JCCP/CBT**

This was a special week for me. Last Sunday, I celebrated my third anniversary of having made *Aliyah*. This coming February will mark two years since I permanently relocated to Israel and have been privileged to call Jerusalem my home.

One often hears people making the following remark about Israel, saying, “Oh, what a country!” But this is a remarkable country. In the 21½ months that I have been here, over half that time has seen Israel at war. It has been an exceedingly challenging time. Challenging emotionally. Challenging politically. Challenging economically. But despite all these challenges, it is heartwarming and exhilarating to be here, and to see the resiliency of the nation, the *hesed* (compassion), the kindness that people show to one another. It is challenging when family members must trade their civilian garb for their military uniforms and head off to *miluim* (army reserves), to protect and defend our country. One of my sons in law is currently serving a *miluim* tour of duty. We pray daily for his safety, and the safety of his unit, and that they may all, with God’s help, return home securely to their loved ones. It is heartbreaking to hear of young men and women who have been killed or injured, some seriously, in battle. It is even more difficult when the names are released and you realize that you, or a family member, knows the soldier or their family. Even for a newcomer like I am, it has happened too many times (of course, even once is already “too many”) that I have experienced only one degree of separation from the affected or bereaved family.

I had a chance today to visit the [Jewish Agency](#) for Israel. The Jewish Agency is tasked with being a conduit of the State of Israel to the Jews of the Diaspora, as well as assisting Jews within Israel. I was told the story of a young man who was critically injured by Hamas on October 7. I'll spare the gory details. He was wounded severely but to his great fortune was found by two Israeli policemen who happened to pass by. They saw him, wounded and near death, and raced him to the hospital, where a combination of medical professionals and God saved his life. As he slowly began to recuperate, the injured man asked about the policemen. Were they still alive? If so, how were they? He felt awful that he had not been able to thank them for their assistance on October 7 because he had lost consciousness that day. The Jewish Agency worked tirelessly to reunite the injured man with his rescuers, and he was able to express his deep thanks and appreciation to them. That is Israel.

Another brief description of Israel. On a WhatsApp group, someone posts a picture taken at a local grocery store. The picture is of a grocery cart filled with essential staples. A sign above the cart reads, "If you are encountering financial difficulty purchasing groceries, please take what is here." And it ends with the Hebrew word, *b'simha* (happily). That, too, is Israel.

Throughout my life I have always been a history buff, and in school, history was one of my better subjects. During my two decades in Bergen County, I was always mesmerized by the markers that noted "George Washington's Retreat Route" or other facts related to the Revolutionary War and early Colonial America. Yet, here, history does not go back a "mere" 200-300 hundred years. One must multiply that number tenfold. For me, living in the southern part of Jerusalem, I live moments away from being able to walk to the promenade that overlooks the Old City, the *Kotel Hama'aravi*, (The Western Wall) and the Dome of the Rock. Also, in this neighborhood, I encounter signs (and monuments to the fallen) that date back a mere sixty years to the Six Day War of 1967. *Arnona* the neighborhood in which I live, was the site of fierce battles between the IDF and the Jordanians in the Battle for Jerusalem. I am told that the pre-war armistice line between Israel and Jordan ran somewhere in the garden that is behind my apartment. This, too, is Israel.

Native Israelis sometimes have the unfair description of being rough and gruff. Indeed, that is where the term for native born Israelis, *sabra*, originates, as the *sabra* is a fruit that is rough on the outside yet sweet and tender on the inside. Nevertheless,

Israelis appreciate those who have chosen to voluntarily make Israel their home. They may talk fast, yet they want to help the new *olim* (immigrants to Israel) to adjust, to feel part and parcel of the local community and the country. Speak Hebrew to them and they will tell you how marvelous your Hebrew is, and encourage you to continue to do so. (Sometimes, others will hear a foreign accent and immediately switch to English and maintain that they want to speak in English so that they can practice theirs. But for those who remain steadfast and strong, those people will revert to Hebrew after a few moments. And that, too, is Israel!)

There is so much to experience, to see, and to feel living here. The story is told of a rabbi several hundred years ago who made the difficult trip from Europe to Israel. After being here, he was content to get back on his horse to return to his birthplace. But a certain pang tore at him, and without much persuasion he remained here for the rest of his days. It is that special a place.

As mentioned at the outset, I feel privileged to be able to live here in Israel and find it amazing (a favorite word that the locals employ with great frequency) that I am an Israeli-American. I am grateful to live here, and am grateful that the world of the 21st century enables communication to be such that despite many physical miles of separation, an emotional and virtual connection can be maintained in ways not possible even forty years ago (thank you email, thank you Zoom). And so, despite the many miles, I look forward to remaining in contact with you as time moves forward both with the written word and through the marvels of technology during my Monday evening classes.

And I look forward, too, to the day when we might be able to reconnect here in person. If you come, please let me know; I would love to see you and welcome you to this marvelous place.

Shalom From Jerusalem!
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P.S. As always, I look forward to your comments and feedback. Please feel free to reach out to me at the above email address.

