



DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

RABBI AVI BERMAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, OU ISRAEL
ABERMAN@OUIISRAEL.ORG

I was in fifth grade and living in Kedumim the first time my father took me to say *selichot* on *Motzei Shabbat*. I remember the *ba'al tefila* beginning, that familiar Ashkenazi melody for “*BeMotzaei Menucha kidamnucha techila* - As the day of rest departs, we come before You first.” Unfortunately, I remember I wasn’t that moved by it.

We had already been in Israel for a year, and when you live in Kedumim surrounded by people who do not speak English, you are forced to learn Hebrew very fast. But *selichot* Hebrew is another thing. I found it very challenging to understand. And even today, I’m not sure I understand everything in that complex poetry of *selichot*. Over the

years, I’ve learned that slowing down helps me understand the words better and connect more deeply.

There is a new phenomena happening over the past decade across Israel regarding *selichot*, something that seems to be growing stronger every year. And that is that the general public is showing up for *selichot*. There are *selichot* tours running through Yerushalayim, through Tzfat, through Chevron, drawing hundreds of thousands of people. In recent years, more than two million people have come to the Kotel for *selichot* and the *tefillot* of the *Yamim Noraim* between Rosh Chodesh Elul and Yom Kippur.

I remember having a discussion with the chief Rabbi of Tzfat Rav Shmuel Eliyahu Shlita about this thirteen years ago. Back then, it was popular to come the night before Rosh Hashanah and the night before Yom Kippur, but an average night of *Aseret Yemei Teshuva*, and certainly an average night of Elul, those were not times when people were showing up en masse for *selichot*. But Rav Shmuel felt back then that Am Yisrael wanted more. Something has changed among the Jewish people. Undoubtedly, October 7th and the ensuing war has encouraged so many, young and old, to take the time out and talk to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, to take advantage of this month of Hashem being so close to us in order to have an honest conversation with Him about what we feel are the important things in life and how we want to change the trajectory of the coming year.

Two weeks ago, I was in Pirchei Edna, the flower shop in Givat Ze’ev where I go to buy

In memory of
משה מרדכי
חנוך העניך הלוי
וביילה פינקל סג"ל ז"ל
MARTIN M. SEGAL ז"ל

On his third Yahrzeit
כ"ג אלול

Beloved husband of
71 years to Beverly

Much loved father, grandfather
and great-grandfather

He brought love and joy to all

Segal and Kaufman families

my wife flowers before Shabbat. I overheard a conversation between two fathers. Neither was wearing a *kippa*, but you could tell they were proudly Jewish. In this conversation, one father was saying to the other: “My daughter is going to *selichot* at the Kotel almost every week. She came home last night at three o’clock in the morning. “My daughter as well”, the second man said. Obviously she is inspired, but maybe it’s too much? Should we tell them not to go so many times?”

The fathers discussed this while I stood there super emotional. I thought, *HaKadosh Baruch Hu!* Look at the younger generation. Look how much they seek You, how much they want to connect. Our youth are saying, “Enough with TikTok and Instagram. We want real substance, a real connection

to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, to the *Ribbono Shel Olam!* We realize that at the end of the day, our safety and security lies in Your hands, and we want to have a say in the matter. So we want to talk to You.”

Something else that was so beautiful about that exchange between fathers is that I am so used to talking to people about the difficulties they face as parents. How difficult it can be to keep their children productive during the summer, away from phones and too much screentime, and away from bad influences. To hear that two fathers are complaining that their daughters are going to *selichot* at the Kotel too many times? That was really moving to me.

A big part of me wanted to tell them this. I wanted to say to them, “Listen to what you are saying! Appreciate what you have!” But



I didn’t. It was late on Friday morning, I was rushing to my radio show. So I paid for my flowers, mulling over the conversation on the drive home, and eventually turned the question on myself. These teenage girls, coming from less religious households, are going to the Kotel and speaking with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* every week during this time. What can I

**May the Torah learnt
from this issue of Torah Tidbits
be *לע"נ* our dear Mother and Bobba**

**Chana Ehrlich a”h
חנה בת משה ע”ה
on her 12th yearzeit - כ”ח אלול**

**Sorely missed by
*Ehrlich and Stodel families***

do in order to show *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* I want to do more, connect more? Can I spend a little more time than usual on my *selichot* to understand them better? Can I show up a little bit earlier to put myself in the right mindset for *tefillah*?

These wonderful feelings were reinforced a week and a half ago when my dear friend Shai Alon, the mayor of Bet-El, invited me to an end-of-summer concert he was hosting for the residents and friends of Bet-El. I don't generally enjoy concerts, but this one was something else. The three singers lined up were Aviyad, Shulie Rand, and Ben Tzur. I don't know if all the Torah Tidbits readers are familiar with all three names, but I assure you that the thousands of people who came to the Bet-El Amphitheater on that beautiful summer night were well aware of who these three incredible singers are. I knew the vast majority of the songs, enjoyed the atmosphere, and loved meeting many friends. But what uplifted my spirits more than anything else was seeing thousands of teenagers screaming out to the Ribono Shel Olam through song and dance with passion, enthusiasm, and excitement, screaming, among many other tefilot, *Hashem Melech, Hashem Malach, Hashem yimloch lolam va'ed*.



In loving memory of my mother

Pearl Katz a"h

פעסה בת אפרים זאב ע"ה

Memphis, Tennessee

On her 25th Yahrtzeit - 18 Elul

Ronnie Katz

Dear readers, I give us all a blessing that our *tefillot* on Rosh Hashanah, and the *selichot* leading up to it, should carry this energy. This *Motzei Shabbat*, we Ashkenazim join the force of *selichot* sayers that our Sefardi brothers and sisters have been doing since the beginning of Elul. Now that we are joining them, may we all have more inspiration, more connection, more understanding.

And then, *b'ezrat Hashem*, may we see the fruits of our *tefillot* and have a year that brings a *refuah shelema* to all our injured soldiers - those wounded in body, as well as in mind. A year of comfort for the families who for almost three years have given so much so that *Klal Yisrael* can be safe. And an election period that, *b'ezrat Hashem*, is going to be peaceful, in which our politicians speak about the good in themselves rather than the bad in others. May we all understand that we are all part of *Klal Yisrael*, and that we are all working to bring better days for the Jewish people.

When I look at the Kotel during this time and see so many different colors and so many different kinds of Jews, I want that *achdut*, that unity, to continue long past this season. I pray we can merit a year full of *achdut* for *Klal Yisrael*, with good health and a *refuah shelema* for all who need one, and then we will all be able to stand here next year with even more Jews, please God in a rebuilt *Beit HaMikdash*, saying *selichot* and thanking *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* for the privilege of this relationship.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat and a meaningful *selichot*,

Rabbi Avi Berman
Executive Director, OU Israel
aberman@ouisrael.org