

Dear Readers,

Just arriving in Newark after two weeks back at home in Israel, I wanted to share a few thoughts and feelings filling my mind and heart.

The most overwhelming feeling I was taken with on this trip was that of a hug. In the "Song of Songs" by King Solomon, it speaks about the hug given to us by the Almighty at Sinai, and how we are pining away to again experience that hug. In many ways, in our present exile and Diaspora period, Israel is that hug.

When I prayed at the Wall, hugging the wall and crying over the many problems and tribulations facing our people, I was overtaken by the feeling that the wall was hugging me back. I truly could feel my Father in Heaven crying with me. Visiting the grave of my beloved mentor on his yahrtzeit on my last day, I felt his hug. Visiting many of my relatives, close friends and rabbis, I felt and was hugged with joy by their joyous reception and welcome back home.

The next thing I was struck by is the intense dedication to Torah. I was overcome by emotion observing the esteemed Dean of the renowned Mirrer Yeshiva deliver an intricate Talmudic discourse in the study hall of the Yeshiva. This can be seen in any Yeshiva - except that this Rabbi Finkel is in an advanced stage of Parkinsons disease! The dedication shown by this profound discourse speaks volumes, especially seeing him answer the questions of students afterwards despite the depletion of his strength and immense pain. Always with joy and a smile.

This reflects the dedication of tens of thousands of individuals and families who make do with much less in order to keep the fire of Torah study alive in its full vigor and flame in our Holy Land. Their entire lives are dedicated to that end. Literally around the clock one can find large groups studying the Torah, Talmud and Kabbalah. At many of the prayer services, I felt swept off my feet into higher realms, together with these sublime individuals who belong to a higher realm.

Finally, it is so striking to observe the intense faith of our brothers and sisters in Israel. In America we are so preoccupied with the ominous threats from Iran, and rightfully so. Our discussions of Israel have much to do with the multitudes of enemies surrounding this tiny country, and they should be. Indeed, in Israel itself these things make the headlines of the daily papers. But life itself goes on as usual. The joy at a wedding or the celebration of life at a bris is not dampened by these threats. Deep down, the Israelis live a life filled with the faith that the Almighty who miraculously got us to Israel will continue to guard and protect us there.

My eyes were filled with tears when we departed from Tel Aviv, and I felt the last hug from the land. I look forward to my next opportunity to be elevated by a visit to Israel.