

Beth Jacob Congregation, Dayton, Ohio. April 15, 2003

13 Nisan 5763

Dear Friends,

Children in our Beth Jacob Congregation, Dayton, Ohio, wanted to do something special for children in Israel whose families have been victimized by terror. For over two months they collected Tzedaka throughout the city and raised over \$700 for Operation Embrace. These children, ages 7-12, organized a Sunday trip to Columbus to the Build-A-Bear Workshop and spent the afternoon making dozens of original stuffed Teddy-Bears with their own hands.

Since I was going to Israel before Chanukah for a family celebration, I was able to take four of these large toy bears to the children of our congregation's adopted family, the Deriís, in time for Chanukah. The rest of the bears were sent to the Operation Embrace headquarters in Washington, DC, and were later distributed during winter break by Hadassah Leiberman & her daughter Chani to injured kids at the Tel Hashomer Hospital.

I had arranged to visit the Deriís on a Saturday night at their home in Jerusalem.† They live in a rundown neighborhood that was hard to find. I was lucky that my taxi driver lived in that neighborhood, so he knew just how to get there. It was a real thrill meeting Aliza and Eitan and their four adorable children. They were so warm, friendly and welcoming! We talked for a while. Eitan told me all about the horrible terrorist attack when he took four bullets to his body and how he lay in intensive care in the hospital for over a month. He showed me scars on his body and photos of himself after the attack. He is very brave and is thankful to be alive. He has true faith in G-d. The Deriís one wish is for more Jews to come to live-in, or at least to visit, Israel.

†The Deriís gave me a tour of their home. They live in a 2 bedroom apartment.† The children's room is so small that it only has enough space for 1 bed and 1 dresser. To sleep 4 kids in the room they have a bunk bed, and underneath it they have a pullout bed for the 2 smallest kids to sleep in.† Eitan was not earning a large salary before the tragic terrorist attack. He works for Bezel, the state owned phone company. After partial recuperation, he forced himself to go back to work, because of his dire financial predicament.

I must admit that I started feeling that although Teddy Bears were a nice gesture for the youngest child (she is 5 years old), and although the remainder of the children's Tzedaka was given to them, I wanted to do much more to assist this lovely family to get back on their feet again. When I left the Deriís, I left with so much more than when I came. I left with feelings of kinship, respect, admiration, and a renewed commitment to help our people in Israel.

Our Dayton Beth Jacob Synagogue is currently fundraising for Operation Embrace to bring more substantial gifts to the Deri family and to other victims of terrorism on our next Solidarity Mission to Israel in a few months. We really want to make a difference in the lives of our people in Israel.

Thank you, Operation Embrace Board, for organizing and facilitating such an important mitzvah and for enabling us Jews living in the diaspora to have a iKesherî, a real connection to Israel.

Beruchim Tihyu ñ May G-d bless you.