



Shabbat Matot-Masei/27 Tammuz 5777
July 21, 2017

Dear Shir Tikvah:

Last Shabbes, I was in Tel Aviv with colleagues. We were spending a Shabbat "off" from our program and had planned to spend time at the beach, attending services with Beit Yisrael T'filati at the Port of Tel Aviv, enjoy good food, friendship, and relaxing. Alas, the best laid plans... As fate would have it, I ate something Thursday night that gave me an unfortunate case of food poisoning and spent much of Friday in bed.

Fortunately, it passed quickly. By late Friday evening, I felt better and though I had missed davening, I decided to go for a walk alone through Tel Aviv. I wandered along the beach and then headed towards what I thought was a cafe that Michael and the girls and I dined at last summer.

Alas, I took a few wrong turns and I ended up walking through a park to find my way back to the hotel. There, I came upon a family having a barbecue and feast. As I walked past their delicious smelling fire, a young man came over to me and invited me to join them. They had walked from Eritrea and South Sudan for many months to escape political violence at home. They fled from refugee camps and these 11 people made their way to Tel Aviv. While the Israeli government has been slow in granting them asylum, they are nonetheless working to make a meager living-these 11 people live in two, three room apartments, each with a single bathroom. They all appeared to be in their late teens to mid-20s, except for the Mama who was closer to my age. (As she later shared, she isn't a biological mother to any of them, but her own children died and none of these young people have living parents, so together, they've woven together a family and she proudly took her place as Mama).

In the park, they were frying a doughy bread and were dipping it into various vegetable sauces and dishes. I was invited to sit with them and next to the young man. We talked about Judaism and Tel Aviv and Shabbat. Because Israel has welcomed them, they are adopting Jewish customs and practices-even observing Shabbat Tel Aviv-style. When I asked his name, the group quieted down and took a break from eating.

Jaala, a beautiful woman of 22, spoke.

"His name was Maseer when we left. But when the army came to our camp and beat us, he woke us in the night and we escaped. And then on the journey north, we met Mama and the other four girls. And he kept leading the way, keeping us safe at night, finding us food, killing scorpions in our tents..."

"So what is his name?" I asked the gentle group?

"They call me Moshe," he responded with humility and pride. "I am their leader. I am Moshe. Together, we will return to our promised lands."

Wow.

I was humbled to be invited by this gorgeous family and their determination to write a story here-in our Promised Land-where we live and embrace you as you bring us new foods, new Torah, new life.

Sometimes, wandering through an unexpected park we encounter people who faced immeasurable obstacles to seek a new path.

So here's to Moshe and his crew redreaming the Promised Land. And for the creative courage to discover your own promised land.

Shabbat Shalom,
Michael