Back in Israel

Canada in my Heart

Rabbi Yehudah Halevi, who lived about 900 years ago in Spain, wrote in one of his poems:

"My heart is in the East, and I am at the ends of the West. How can I taste what I eat ,and how could it be pleasing to me?"

Of course, he meant that his heart was in the land of Israel, east of Spain.

As I sit, think and write, here in the south of Israel, east of Canada, on Kibbutz Yotvata, I feel I have left some part of my heart in Canada.

Halevi in the same poem writes:

"It would be easy for me to leave all the bounty of Spain…" Spain at the time for Halevi was a great place to live. For my family and me, our time in Canada was wonderful. We met amazing people and were filled with joy to see and hear the support for Israel, and for the Israeli Reform movement amongst ARZA Canada members, and others as well.

On Rosh Hashanah, as I reflected back on my year - most of it was in Canada – I was happy and sad at the same time. I am happy to have had this wonderful experience, to bring the message of the IMPJ all across Canada, and to feel the support that we Israeli Reform Jews and Rabbis, need from our Canadian friends. I am sad that in Israel we still have a way to go, to become a true democratic society, practicing freedom of religion, and creating understanding that there is more than one way to be Jewish. We in Israel have a lot to learn from Canadian society and Canadian Jewry.

I am grateful for the 8 months I spent living, working and learning in Canada. I am a better Jew, a better Rabbi and, this may come as a surprise, a better Israeli. I learned to appreciate being Israeli, and knowing that we Israelis have true, loving and supporting partners in Canada. The shofar that we listened to on Rosh Hashanah, and will hear again at the end of Yom Kippur, is connected to the Hebrew word *l'hishtaper* - to improve, to get better at. ***Shofar, Lhishtaper***. The Shofar calls us to be better than we were before.

Progressive Judaism is a potential bridge between secular Israelis and Canadian Jews. I believe this. I work daily with these Israelis and I spent 8 months working with Canadian Reform Jews. I am proud and honored that I was, and will hopefully continue to be, part of that bridge.

May 5778 be a year of learning more together, and more from one another. May we continue to appreciate what we have, but also feel and acknowledge that our heart is partially somewhere else.

Shana Tova, Benjie Gruber