

Farewell to Milwaukee:

June 25, 2017



What a time of contradictions! A wonderful time in terms of the beauty of nature, the weather, the sweet feelings people share with us as we say our goodbyes. Looking at the kids and the mileage they have done (physical, because we got to see so many stunning parts of the US), but also in terms of personal growth. At the same time tumultuous. It's dramatic to change our setting and uproot ourselves, once more, this time for good.

A few weeks ago, I sat in our kitchen and wrote:

"It's that time of year again when the mint faithfully shoves its leafy head through the still frozen ground, sprouting all over the shlichut house garden. This strong mint plant that was planted here years ago by a shaliach (perhaps Nilli, Alon, Nir or Rakefet) who probably just missed the mint tea with sugar he was used to having at home had no idea it would last through Wisconsin's

intimidating winters. The resiliency and perseverance of the mint brings to mind both Israel's resiliency and that of this shlichut program!

I sit here, in the same kitchen that generations of shlichim before me have sat in, gazing out the window at Milwaukee Jewish Day School and Bader Hillel Academy, where generations of shlichut children have gone as those cute bunnies and squirrels, soon to be replaced by pigeons and street-cats, when we return to Israel (our parallel universe). I sit here, sip my tea, notice the bitter-sweet taste of the mint leaves as they mirror my inner state.

If there is one thing I learned from being here is that you can experience contradicting emotions at once:

- I can long for home and feel at home at the same time.
- I can miss my friends and family while being amongst them.
- I can want time to speed up and slow down at once.
- I can love and hate winter on the same day.
- I can want things to be more similar to Israel and enjoy them being different.

Being a shlichah in Milwaukee was *Beshert*. I knew this community was a good *shiduch* for myself and my family. I got to fulfill the dream of being a community Shlichah, a long-time dream of mine. We also have to be a bit *Meshigane* to leave it all and follow the call. It takes trust and a feeling of Shlichut (mission).

Milwaukee is special. I knew nothing of it 3 years ago, yet discovered a treasure of genuinely nice people who share values of *Zedaka* and *Arvut Hadadit*, *kabbalat Ha'acher*, friendship, *Hachnasat Orchim* and *Tikkun Olam*. Coming from a kibbutz, we cherish community life. We were thrilled that so much of it exists here. My favorite part was making friends and being invited into your homes and hearts. I learned so much from you about how to sustain a thriving and diverse Jewish community with all the establishments. You have a lot to be proud of, including your Zionism (I was amazed at how many people know and love Israel, with all the complexities) and perseverance (maintaining the shlichut program for 50 years).

Something about this incredible unbroken chain of Shlichim. I first realized that the shlichut can officially be over but never really practically, when David, Nir and Rakefet were part of my interview process in Israel. So many years after the end of their shlichut, they still really cared about choosing the right person for their beloved Milwaukee.

Meeting with a bunch of former shlichim a few months ago was a bit of an epiphany. They shared many of the same fond memories of Milwaukee. It was as if we were all speaking of a common mythological X. We all gave advice to Keren and Oori who will replace us and at that moment I felt humble. We have a role, and we pour ourselves into it. As Moshe Katz wrote to me in an Email before we arrived: "Mazel tov and thank you for agreeing to be our next shlichah! We are very excited to have you and your family join a wonderful list of prior families representing our beloved Israel. You will paint your own creation and leave an indelible print on our community as each of your predecessors did." I hope I have left a print and I hope this program continues at least another 50 years.

Upon returning to our home on Kibbutz Tzora, Yonatan (who just graduated Nicolet) will attend a Gap year/pre-Army Mechina program called "Kol Ami". He arrived a teenager and is returning a young adult. His experience here in BBYO was transformative and the opportunities for personal development were wonderful (including learning to drive). Daniel (15) celebrated his bar mitzvah here in the wonderful Sinai Congregation and graduated MJDS last year. His friends await his return to high school with them and his informal role as "leader of the pack". Neta (11) arrived knowing zero English and absolutely flourished at MJDS. It seems she will leave behind many BFF's here as well as at Interlaken, where she is right now. Doron, who was a Stay at home Dad and the MJDS falafel cook, the singer in many community capacities, a fine lecturer on Israeli politics and the one who used the JCC membership the most will return to the Israeli Start up Nation's high-tech industry and I hope to continue the mission of bringing world Jewry closer together. I am happy to announce that I will take on the position of Missions Manager in the Fundraising and Public Relations department of the Jewish Agency for Israel and hope to welcome some of you as part of my new role. My time here has helped me prepare for a reverse – shlichut in which I hope to create a greater appreciation of your role as Jews living overseas as part of a Jewish People.

**Thank you to:**

Doron – for picking up and leaving your high-tech career in mid-air to follow me pursuing my dream. This Shlichut would not have been possible without your support of myself and the kids. You also added your own flavor by singing, cooking, and lecturing on Israeli politics.

Our 3 kids (Yonatan, Daniel and Neta) – who may not appreciate this until they are older, but who were abruptly uprooted from their natural environment and replanted here.

The Milwaukee Jewish Federation – for maintaining the Shlichut program for 50 years without letting the chain break, for providing for us and guiding the way.

Hannah Rosenthal and Caren Goldberg, for your leadership and for putting your trust in me with the Israel Staff trip.

Rabbi Hannah Greenstein, for your support, supervision, and no-nonsense approach to everything. I enjoyed working with you and the Israel Team, who are like a family to me.

Allison – for all the support, smiles and efficiency for teaching me all about historical reenacting.

Partnership2Gether Coordinators, Elsie Crawford and Susie Rosengarten, for fun and meaningful work with Shinshins and delegations.

All my co-workers – for making me laugh and joining me for Israeli salad lunch.

Marketing – who helped promote all my programs.

Ari Friedman – for keeping us safe and the house livable.

The Israel Center committee chairs with whom I worked with closely: Sharyl Paley, Eileen Graves, Jen Saber, Bobbi Rector, Monica Arnstein, Laura Grupe, Ari Domnitz and Pnina Goldfarb who showed me what lay leadership really is at its' best.

JCC staff – for all the times we partnered and for the membership. I always felt right at home between your walls.

The Jewish Agency for Israel - for choosing and training me and to Yonatan Sacker for being a resource and back up.

MJDS – for phenomenal teaching and being Mensches. With Neta you did the impossible.

BBYO – for providing a place where Yonatan's Leadership skills could grow and where he found purpose and friends.

All the families (and there were many) who reached out to feed, hug, hang out and check in on us, explain Midwestern culture, attend our *Simchas* (with our family so far away) and especially to the Carneols, who are our official adopted family here.

I am comforted by the fact that many of you will visit Israel at some point and we will get to see you. If you would like to stay in touch, please contact [Allison Hayden](#) (414-390-5724) and ask for a magnet with our contact information! We would love a chance to catch up, hear what's going on in "Cream City" while sipping Israeli mint tea.

Like a library book, we were only here on loan and are due back (hopefully not on a shelf). Our community, families (and cat) at home miss us deeply and although it has been a real pleasure and an empowering journey with many adventures and unforgettable moments, it is now time for us to return to where we belong, forever changed, with Milwaukee engraved in our hearts,

The Zehavis