



August 2021

Dear Friend of Israel,

I spent a week at the annual Bible Seminars in Gush Etzion. **This is usually an amazing event, with thousands of men and women of all ages, from teenagers to seniors in their 80's and even 90's, coming from all over the country to study Bible** with the best Bible teachers in Israel. Usually, the place is alive with people: old friends meeting up for the first time in a year, lots of hugs and kisses and the excited exchange of thoughts from each class.

But this year it was all very different. Last year, in the midst of the COVID lockdown, we stayed home and watched pre-recorded classes on the Bible Seminar website, each of us in our lonely, living rooms. This year, there was the option of attending the lectures virtually, either pre-recorded or live-streamed, or attending the event in person. But with COVID numbers rising again with the new Delta strain, many chose the virtual option. And **what was most glaring was that there was hardly anyone there over 70. They were all watching from the safety of their homes.**

I enjoyed my week. I loved meeting the lecturers in person after more than a year of virtual Bible study. I enjoyed visiting the places I had not seen in nearly two years at the Har Etzion Yeshiva campus. But it was all so different. **The atmosphere was subdued, so many fewer people, and it all seemed so tentative.** We were back at wearing masks so it was hard to identify old friends and there was certainly a lot less hugging. I believe that people were asking themselves if we could go back to normal. Would we ever be rid of COVID?

**As I walked from lecture hall to lecture hall, I couldn't help but think of all those who were not there this year. Mostly the elderly.** I could not help but wonder if they were at home tuning in to the lectures virtually or if that was too confusing for them to attempt. If they were lonely. If they had withdrawn into themselves and created a new normal – a normal that was far too isolated. And I realized that as we emerge from COVID, we need to pay far greater attention to our elderly. They have had a terrible time of it. We might say they are in post-trauma. And it is our job, our responsibility to look after them, to reach out to them, to ensure that they are not alone.

This then, is our new priority. **We must double our efforts to reach out to the wonderful seniors among us, before it is too late. We must brighten their final years and bring smiles to their faces,** once again. And I hope you will help. The senior citizens of Gush Etzion, Har Gilo and Kiryat Arba need your help. Will you reach out to them today?

Sincerely,

Sondra Oster Baras  
Director, Israel Office

P.S. Enclosed is our latest Heartland Stories. In this issue you are the true hero, your donations have saved lives in Mitzpe Dani! Please read it and know that you are making a difference in so many lives. Thank you for helping keep families safe in Mitzpe Dani.