

In the Clear

Rabbi Josh Grodko | Parshat Bo | January 26, 2023

I am one of 8 children and after my father passed away, my mother remarried my stepfather who had five children of his own. The thirteen of us have settled in various places, from Israel to Maryland to Nevada to Florida to New York (and the list goes on). Our large family has spread its wings throughout the globe.

As some of you know, my older brother Yosef lives in town just around the corner from me. He sometimes comes to the JFX Shabbat service, so some of you reading this ramble probably know him. It feels like yesterday when about six years ago he called me out of the blue inquiring about the Cleveland community, hoping to get out of NY and settle somewhere with his family. I was so excited about the idea of having my brother join me here in Cleveland. Sure enough he came out for a visit, fell in love with the community, and six months later relocated with his family to University Heights.

I was looking forward to all the time we would spend together. Before he even moved, we planned to have a nightly learning session, be workout buddies, and looked forward to lots of brother bonding experiences.

Here's the thing, though. It all sounded good on paper, but life quickly got very busy. Our families grew, work got hectic, and even though my brother and I are very close, we weren't spending the time together as planned. If not for Shabbat services at JFX (shoutout!) we could go weeks without seeing each other.

About three weeks ago my brother and I decided on a whim that it would be nice to go for a quick getaway, just the two of us. Our vitamin D levels were in need of a boost, so what better place to go than the Sunshine State! So, we found some cheap tickets and took a 24-hour trip to Clearwater Beach, Florida (yes, our wives are awesome and graciously held down the fort and encouraged us to take this trip).

We were the last flight of the night Saturday night and breezed through security as we boarded the half-empty plane to Tampa. I must say I love my children dearly but traveling solo as opposed to with little kids really is a game changer! (You know that look people give you as you're boarding with kids hoping they won't be seated near you? I mean, how dare kids act like kids?! Maybe a separate ramble for a different week...).

For those who are not familiar, Clearwater Beach is about a 45-minute drive from the Tampa airport. Most of the drive is on a straight highway surrounded on both sides by the ocean. What a sight! One of the highlights of my trip was waking up first thing in the morning and taking a rejuvenating five mile jog along the ocean and through the city together. There's nothing like that fresh ocean breeze against your face,

the salty smell of the fresh air, as the body is being pushed to its physical limit.

After the morning workout (remember we were supposed to be workout buddies?) we took the rest of the day to relax and connect. We sat at the pool and at the ocean and really just enjoyed the time together. Before we knew it the day was coming to an end, and it was time to head to the airport for our 9 pm flight back to Cleveland. Luckily for us, there was a brand-new kosher restaurant in the area (opened several days before our trip), so it was a nice bonus to enjoy a kosher dinner before our return flight home.

It's never fun coming back to the cold Cleveland weather, but this trip, though short, definitely charged me up and it also taught me some lessons.

First, there's nothing like family. It is the memories we create that bond us together and last forever. Make the time and effort to spend quality time with those who are near and dear to you. It doesn't need to be a trip to Florida. It can be 5-minute drive to coffee, a walk around the block, or even a phone call.

Also, I feel like there a common misconception people have when it comes to vacationing. People often think that if you are going on a vacation it needs to be for a long period of time. While long vacations are certainly nice, I think you may be surprised by how good you feel even after a short trip. I remember a good friend telling me he was bored after day four of his 10-day cruise. I thought he was out of his mind, but now I think I understand. When you know it's going to be short you take full advantage of every second, and you don't need that "vacation from the vacation" when you return.

Lastly, it is important to make time for yourself. Emotional and mental health should never be overlooked. I don't care how tough or busy you think you are, but everyone needs to take some time out of their busy lives for self-care. Studies have shown that taking care of yourself has proven to reduce stress and increase happiness. You'll be improving your physical and mental health as well as boosting your self-esteem and improving relationships.

And hey, if you find cheap flights to anywhere where the weather is 70 degrees or warmer, give me a call and I'll tag along, even if it's just for 24 hours!

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Josh