

Subject: TES Israel Trip Travelogue, Days 1-6

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Date: Thursday, December 21, 2017, 5:33:56 PM PST



December 19, 2017

Special Announcement
from Temple Emek Shalom
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**Travelogue from Rabbi Jackie Brodsky from Israel Trip, December 9-22, 2017,
with segments from other trip members, plus photos**

Here's the group!



Days 1 - 6

Day 1

"We started our journey walking off our jet lag on a 70 degree day along the boardwalk from our hotel in Tel Aviv to the ancient port city of Jaffa. We got a little glimpse from our wonderful guide, Bill, into Jaffa's connection to Greek mythology, St. Peter, Napoleon and Egypt. As we enjoyed the stories and the view we continued onto Neve Tzedek, the site of the first train station in that part of the world, now a great place for shopping and family fun. Neve Tzedek is also a newly gentrified neighborhood (Gal Gadot lives there!) which was full of renovation projects.

From there we went to Independence Hall where the presenter gave us the most passionate and amazing summary of Israel's modern history followed by a detailed recap of that historic day of May 14, 1948 when the State of Israel was declared. He recalled Ben Gurion's challenge with making the decision and how the council finally voted 6-4 to accept the offer of a very limited state. He also recalled Golda Meir crying for all those for whom this miracle was too late, but our presenter added how important this was for our future generations. We concluded by all singing Hatikva. Most of us were very moved by this visit.

Another moving moment was our stop at Rabin Square where our guide recounted the events that led to the assassination. The memorial was stark and a painful reminder of a difficult time.

This first day had more yet to come with a visit to Tel Aviv University where we met

with well-known environmentalist Alon Tal who gave us a brilliant lecture on Israeli initiatives on groundbreaking technology such as desalinization plants, drip irrigation, and all kinds of energy innovations.

We finished our tour day at the Museum of Jewish History) formerly the Diaspora Museum and saw exhibits on Bob Dylan (yes you read that right), synagogue models from all over the world, a children's interactive exhibit and a video on Leonard Cohen!

We had a wonderful dinner at Maganda Yemenite Restaurant in Jaffa and went back to the hotel for a well earned good night's sleep!

It's truly wonderful being here enjoying the miracle of the modern State of Israel!"

Day 2

"This was a wonderful day of learning about more of Israel's strengths and religious diversity.

Today we started with a walk to the relatively new Innovation Center developed by Birthright. Israel is a top tier country of start ups with amazing innovations... such as "Water-Gen" which makes water from air! ...and Mobileye which is at the forefront of the technology for driverless cars. I reflected on how important it was to bring this aspect of Israel into everyone's awareness, that of the "Start-Up Nation."

From there we went to the Nachalat Benjamin street market with artists selling their wares. We enjoyed appreciating and buying treasures and the festive atmosphere filled with art, shoppers, music and food...and even bought our Hanukkah menorah there in preparation for our first night of Hanukkah coming up tonight!

Our bus then traveled along the beautiful coast to Haifa - the port city in northern Israel noted for the peaceful coexistence between religions. Here we visited the Baha'i World Center where we descended the 700 stairs of its magnificent gardens. Our guide then shared the history and theology of this peaceful religion that originated in Iran over 150 years ago and was exiled and later found its home in Israel.

We concluded our tour day with a visit to an Ahmadiyya mosque where we learned about this branch of Islam of 80 million members worldwide that spreads peace as its primary message. We had a thought-provoking dialogue with our host then headed back to Tel Aviv to light our first Hanukkah candle."

Day 3

"Today we ascend to the holy city of Jerusalem. On route we stopped at Leket an organization that collects surplus food and distributes to the poor. It has been very successful -growing from 7 to 150 employees and greatly helping to stem the tide of poverty here. It is estimated that 22% of Israelis live in poverty. Our group really enjoyed doing this mitzvah work!

Our next stop was at the Knesset where we had a general tour followed by a very

special meeting with MK Amir Ohana. Amir is a unique and wonderful person. He is a member of the Likud Party and their only gay member in the Knesset. He spoke to us passionately about the wide reach of the Likud Party to many minorities here and its commitment to a safe and secure Israel. BTW Amir and his partner had surrogate twins that were born at Rogue Regional Medical Center in Medford where Rabbi Boettiger and I both met him and his children David and Ella who are now 2 years and a few months old. It was a very emotional reunion for all of us to see him again and we are very proud of his contributions to the State of Israel.

This evening we had a feast at the famous Moroccan restaurant Darna where our guest speaker was journalist Yossi Klein Halevy who has lived here 35 years- half the life of the country. He is now the author of wonderful books such as "Dreamers", " At the Entrance to the Garden" and the soon to be released, "Letters to My Palestinian Neighbor". He reflected deeply and passionately on the many facets of the Israeli- Palestinian struggle.

Sascha Meier recalls a memorable quote from him, " I have two existential fears. One is waking up and there is not a Palestinian state, and the other is waking up and there is a Palestinian State." He talks about how on one level a Palestinian State is a necessity and on the other hand it's impossible to implement as it would be too dangerous for Israel. He adds: "I want you to be partners in our anguish as our allies...even if we can't solve this and make it look like you want it to look." Sascha adds: "Do we not need to have compassion for all people involved in this struggle?"

Volunteering at Leket



At the Knesset



Day 4 (Note: because of the "embassy situation" we had been unsure whether or not we would be able to visit the Old City but fortunately it turned out that everything was peaceful and our visit could happen)

"We started our exploration of the Old City at the Jaffa Gate then headed for the old Roman market area known as the Cardo. We visited the famous rebuilt Hurva Synagogue which had been destroyed in the War of Independence and climbed to the rooftop from where we saw a breathtaking 360 degree view of the city. After a couple of hours to shop and explore we headed for the Kotel (the Western Wall) where it being a Thursday (as it is on Monday and Saturday) a bar mitzvah day we encountered throngs of celebrants as we made our way down to pray at the Wall. We then explored the area known as Ezrat Yisrael where on our 2015 tour Anais Graumann had her bat mitzvah. After stopping to pray here as we gathered on the next level to catch up with one another, the prayers from the muezzin wrapped its melodies around us in the most uplifting way, bringing us an inner calmness and peace. We all sat or stood there for what seemed a timeless moment.

(from Marty Towbin) "We went to the famous Ultra-Orthodox sector of Jerusalem known as Mea Shearim where we visited Rabbi Ozer Bergman, the noted Rebbe Nachman scholar who gave us a beautiful teaching. First he asked us to recall our experience at the Kotel and asked us to invite that experience into our presence again. He suggested that we do that as often as we can to keep it alive within us. Next he talked about the necessity to recognize and express joy each day and be grateful for even the smallest detail in our lives. He discussed the importance of

being non-judgmental towards ourselves and one another, saying each day is an opportunity to start over again and forgive our own and one another's unconscious mistakes. He challenged us to see the spark of light in each person particularly one who may have wronged us, and when we do that as a Jew we connect with and help our fellow Jews and all people - as an important way of doing *Tikkun Olam* (healing the world)."

From the Rebbe's talk



Day 5 Friday December 15

Yad v'shem Holocaust Museum and Mahane Yehudah food market and the entry to Shabbat

It is painfully difficult to put this experience in words so I will borrow some quotes from the museum :

"A country is judged by what it does and what it tolerates."

A German official:" it is important to deceive the Jewish people at all times until the very end."

Imrey Bathory, Righteous gentile from Hungary:

"I know that when I stand before God on Judgment Day I shall not be asked the question posed to Cain, "Where were you when your brother's blood was crying out to God?"

Rabbi Moshe Friedman the Boyanor Rebbe spoke these words prior to being murdered in the gas chamber: "Do not think you will succeed in destroying the Jewish people. The Jewish people will live forever," When he finished he cried out emphatically, "Shema Yisrael" and all the Jews cried out with him, Shema Yisrael!"

Kaddish by Andre Schwartz-Bart from "The Last of the Just":

"And praised. Auschwitz. Be. Majdanek. The Lord. Treblinka. And praised. Buchenwald. Be. Mauthausen. The Lord. Belzec. And praised. Sobibor. Be. Chelmno. The Lord. Ponary. And praised. Thereisenstadt. Be. Warsaw. The Lord. Vilna. And praised. Skarzysko. Be. Bergen-Belsen. The Lord. Janow. And praised. Dora. Be. Neuengamme. The Lord. Pustkow. And praised....Amen."

Then in contrast we went to Mahane Yehuda open air market where thousands of people were buying food in preparation for Shabbat.

Jared Finkelstein shares the following : "Yad v'shem started with a nostalgic video of Jewish life in Eastern Europe before WW2. We then went through a 3-hour curated journey of the war years ...then to go from there to Mahane Yehudah on the eve of the sabbath was very powerful because it was reminiscent of the hustle and bustle and aliveness of what we saw in the video. I found it beautiful and transformative as it depicted the survival, change and regrouping of the Jewish people. My family fled Europe and migrated to the States, and here in Israel I also observed Jewish life move and regroup... I saw the survival of our people... for me it went from immersing in the loss to witnessing a vibrant life- affirming place."

And from here we returned to our hotel to prepare for Shabbat including services at our choice of a modern Orthodox synagogue Shira Hadasha or the Conservative Synagogue Best Knesset Moreshet Yisrael or the Great Synagogue.... Shabbat shalom!"

Day 6

Shabbat

"The contrast between bustling Friday afternoon and Saturday's quiet was notable - even the few vehicles that were traveling on Shabbat had slowed down. As we walked from lunch with our cousin back to the hotel it was so soothing to watch young couples and families strolling in the streets after services. The playground we traversed was filled with couples and their children, meeting and chatting amongst themselves. The quiet day blended into the evening." *Stan and Miriam Schiffman*

"We had a free day on Shabbat in Jerusalem. The atmosphere was quiet and

reverent as most of the traffic and all commercial activity came to a standstill. In the morning, I said a small prayer that we would be able to see some Christian sites. As we walked out of our hotel, there was an Arab taxi driver leaning on the back of his car. He took us to several sites which have deep meaning for Christians. The Garden of Gethsemane and the church there with beautiful mosaics. Across the street, we were able to see Mary's tomb inside a Greek Orthodox church. We also went to a very old cemetery, Mount Olive. Looking back over the valley towards the old city, we saw the Golden Gate. This is the gate to the old city what remains sealed until the Messiah comes. It was beautiful to view Jerusalem from the other side of the surrounding Valley. Then, we went back to the old city to pray at the Western Wall and, lastly, we were able to see Schindler's grave in a Christian cemetery just outside the old city. This was a special day for us, as we tuned into a different aspect of Jerusalem." *Suzanne Mark*

"After hearing so much in rich conversations with our speakers about the different dimensions to some of the challenges facing Israel, the second half of our time in Jerusalem allowed us to turn inward, towards prayer and spiritual succor. Erev Shabbat brought davennen with lots of song, and delicious food, as did Shabbat morning. Rabbi Rosalind Glazer (from the Reconstructionist Movement) led us in song over Shabbat lunch, and shared with us some of her journey, as well as the different social justice work her synagogue in Jerusalem is engaged with. One of the more moving stories is how her community sponsors thirteen young men who are refugees from Eritrea (three of them have decided to convert to Judaism). She encouraged us - citing the Torah portion on Joseph's dreams - to both celebrate the early Zionist dream that led to the creation of the state of Israel, and to also help Israelis dream a new dream of how the state can grow and meet its challenges and opportunities in the years ahead. That evening, Asher Kruger, a Jerusalem area musician, led us in more music celebrating havdalah, Hanukkah, and bringing a beautiful teaching forward (picking up where Ozer Bergman left off) on how Elijah the prophet records the good deeds of the Jewish people each Saturday night, right after Shabbat has ended when we've all had our slates wiped clean! Even after his official time with us ended, Asher stayed late into the evening playing more music - from contemporary Yemenite songs to Bob Dylan." *Rabbi Joshua Boettiger*

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