



Musings on our Mission to Israel

January 26 – February 3, 2019

D'Var Torah
Lauren Eisen

For our d'var tonight, I'd like to share with you the experience I had last week in Israel. I am fortunate this year to be part of the Hartford Jewish Leadership Academy funded by Federation. The Academy represents a community wide, systemic approach to leadership development. Their goal is to train leaders who work together to inspire, engage and mentor others, building a vibrant, connected and vital Jewish community. We meet monthly and speakers are brought in to speak to us about leadership topics such as leadership skills development and community structure and resources- and a trip to Israel, underwritten by philanthropic donors, was part of our training.

Members of my group included other day school presidents, presidents of and representatives from almost every synagogue in the area, Reform, Orthodox and Conservative and other Jewish organizations for example,, JT Connect, Federation and the Jewish Historical Society. Over the course of the past week, the community that formed within our group was truly amazing. Across the board young and old, with all different Jewish perspectives--we all came together to form a tightly knit group.

I had not been to Israel since my USY Pilgrimage tour in high school. I was looking forward to seeing all of the change I had heard so much about.

Starting at our check in at JFK I saw first hand how our differences were going to be our strength. Our group leader (Heather Fiedler) was being questioned by security, in Hebrew, about the purpose of our group. Suddenly, the El Al officer switched from speaking Hebrew to English. He said, "You mean to say that you are all traveling together? Reform, Conservative and Orthodox?". Our leader replied, "Yes we are!". He was shocked!!

Throughout the week, naturally there were differences of opinion and and varying thoughts as to how to approach some challenges but we all listened to each other and respected each other's opinions. Listening creates a strong base that represents everyone.

Part of the itinerary was planned to focus on exposing us to the challenges the Israelis faced and the determination it took to overcome them. One example was the Ayalon Institute, an underground bullet factory, built in 1945 that was the manufacturer of munition for the fighters in the War of Independence.. No detail was omitted in concealing it by building it underneath a bakery and laundry at a kibbutz to disguise the noise and smell and to hide and provide ventilation. I could go on and on with the ingenuity including the UV lamps to tan the workers as though they had been working in the fields! The Israelis met the challenge.

At the Hartman Institute -We heard from a member of the ultra-Orthodox Haredi community. He left his family and went to serve in the army. Afterwards he went to school to learn to read and write. He was so inspired that he started a school for other Haredi members who wanted to be educated.

We met with Ofer Berkowitz, at the age of 35, was the youngest counselor to ever run for the office of mayor of Jerusalem. When we met with him, he told us that he created a movement of young, vibrant supporters who were eager to take over the the city. He lost the race by a very small margin. It is noteworthy as the city is 40% Haredi so it is difficult to win.

As we all know, in Israel, the greatest challenge of all is Jewish - Palestinian relations. How to co-exist. We met with activists on both sides who were trying to build community despite their differences. The one stop on our tour that I was not prepared for was a visit to Rawabi, a billion dollar city built by Palestinians in the West Bank funded by a Qatar businessman and a Palestinian private investor. We were told that this is to be the capital if a 2 state solution is implemented. Building after building was erected complete with shopping, restaurants and a 15,000 seat amphitheatre yet it seemed like a ghost town or a Hollywood movie set. A great backdrop but almost no population inhabiting it. There is much work yet to be done to reach this goal.

After visiting Israel, I am once again inspired by the "can do" philosophy and the rise to meet the challenge mindset. There is nothing that can't be overcome. We at Schechter have our challenges. We are working together to do our best to perpetuate our traditions and to instill Jewish values in our children.

Jill Dulitsky

Reflections on Meeting with Ofer Berkowitz, Jerusalem City Council

Leadership lessons from the mayoral candidate yesterday:

1. Have faith in what you are doing.
2. Believe in your teams.
3. Think creatively and break down walls.
4. Create a strong base that represents everyone.
5. Pay attention to how you market your work (talked about logo)
6. Empower people and remember you're working for them, not the other way around.
7. Create a structure for how workflow happens (talked about his executive sessions and broader sessions).

A Holy Sanctuary



Community Leadership Initiative participants learn to herd sheep at the Neot Kedumim reserve near Modi'in in Israel.

Friends, in this week's Shabbat message Jeff Smith, First Vice President of Congregation Beth Israel in West Hartford, shares his thoughts on the Torah portion and his recent mission to Israel with the first ever cohort of the Greater Hartford Jewish Leadership Academy's Community Leadership Initiative. I found his message of community inspiring, and I hope that you will too. Shabbat Shalom. - Howard

"Let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them." (Exodus 25:38)

This week's Torah portion is Terumah and, in it, the children of Israel are instructed to build a tabernacle, a place where G-d will reside. Having just returned from a leadership trip to Israel, this verse is particularly meaningful to me. The trip was part of a yearlong program called the Community Leadership Initiative (CLI) offered by the Jewish Leadership Academy. CLI is designed to enhance the leadership skills and commitment of those who will soon be assuming senior level leadership positions in Greater Hartford's Jewish agencies and congregations.

We did some amazing things on this unique trip. While I can't note all of them here, some of the most significant to me included:

- Visiting the Taglit-Birthright State of Mind Innovation Center, which showcases the technological and economic miracle that is currently happening in Israel.

- Experiencing Neot Kedumim, a nature reserve where we herded sheep as a team building and leadership exercise. We were charged with moving sheep from point A to point B. (Hint: you need to lead from the front of the group *and* from the back.)
- Struggling with our visit to the West Bank, where we toured the brand new 14,000-apartment Palestinian city of Rawabi and spoke with both settlers and Palestinians in Gush Etzion.

With a visit to Israel, one cannot help but be changed by the experience. So it was for me. Even after two previous trips, I experienced changes in perspective that I could not have predicted beforehand.

I felt privileged to hear a variety of narratives on the Palestinian issue from people who live with it every day. I developed an appreciation for the many difficult and convoluted layers that must be addressed by any potential resolution of the Palestinian Israeli conflict, and I felt pride in what Israel has accomplished in spite of its many political, social and environmental challenges.

But my most significant takeaway is from what I considered the peak event of our trip. I have been to the Western Wall before and I've always appreciated its historical significance, but I never really felt spiritually connected. This trip changed that.

On Shabbat, our group prayed together at Robinson's Arch, the portion of the Western Wall set aside for egalitarian use. This was toward the end of our week together and the many shared experiences and perspectives had transformed 19 acquaintances into a close-knit band of friends, and in many cases close friends. Praying together at the Wall finally made it feel like a holy sanctuary to me.

The challenge that we face now as leaders is to bring the spiritual connection we felt in Israel back to our community. We are stronger together, and our spirituality is what binds us. The connections we formed can only serve to strengthen Greater Hartford's Jewish community so that it, too, feels like a holy sanctuary.

Shabbat Shalom.

Jeffrey Smith

First Vice President, Congregation Beth Israel

Participant, Jewish Leadership Academy Community Leadership Initiative

Ben Wexler
CLI Israel Mission Recap

I think I had a lot of expectations for this trip. I've only been to Israel once but it was an amazing time and I expected the same. To say that this trip exceeded my expectations and then some would be an understatement.

This trip challenged and pushed me as a person, as a Jew and as a member of the Greater Hartford Jewish Community. One of the themes that we ran across time and time again was hard problems are easy to ignore but those that want to make a difference need to be able to face and tackle these problems. Our agencies and community face tough challenges that we often push aside because it may feel uncomfortable. We met with professors who talked about the current political situation in Israel. How the secular political party lost its control, in part, by ignoring and not respecting the ideas and people not in their party. We discussed the dueling narratives between Israel and those living in Gaza and the West Bank, and we touched upon the various narratives within the Israel narrative and the Palestinian narrative. We have to recognize other views and narratives. This pushed and challenged us to be a little uncomfortable. Uncomfortable is good. When we went to the city of Rawabi the group was uncomfortable. We didn't know what to expect but it wasn't what we saw. I will only speak for myself now but there were times that I felt that there was something being hid from us about the city and that thought made me uncomfortable. Why do I suspect that a Palestinian city would be hiding something from me? Is there a prejudice that I didn't think I had? Was I worried that a successful Palestinian City would be harmful toward Israel? Is that ok to feel that way? I had to confront why I felt this way and I'm not sure that I still fully do.

We met with Jerusalem mayoral candidate who lost by a slim margin. A secular Jew create a coalition that spanned the secular and right wing communities. His party now holds the most seats on the Jerusalem city council. He took steps to bring people together. It reminded me of the RFK quote, "Some men see things as they are, and ask why. I dream of things that never were, and ask why not." He faced a tough reality, a challenge to bring groups together that don't often talk. While he was unsuccessful in his bid for the Mayor his party grew, and gained seats. Truly inspiring. Time and time again we came across people leaning into tough and uncomfortable situations instead of looking away. If that does not inspire our group to do the same, nothing will.

Our time in Jerusalem also found me asking questions about the importance of the Western Wall in Judaism. Has it become more than a symbol and if so what does that mean? How should I be looking at it and other symbols and places important to the Jewish people. These are questions I am glad I was forced to look at. It has helped me grow as a Jew.

Lastly and perhaps most importantly this trip did something special. All trips and missions to Israel bring a group of people together. Being with each other for 12-15 hour days for a week will do that. However, I think this trip was different. We were inspired to improve our synagogues or agencies but at the end of the trip we were talking about how we as future leaders of the community can work together to bring the community forward. We want to face those challenges that our community faces and we want to be the first line of defense to move us forward. This would not have happened without this trip. I had known one or two people before the program started and got to meet the others a little bit during our classes but this solidified a group of people that would not have otherwise.

BETH EL TEMPLE—Presentation to Board

February 19, 2019

CLI LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM MY ISRAEL TRIP

1. How many people here have been to Israel?
2. Let me just briefly describe what CLI is all about. I have passed out an Itinerary for anyone who wishes to review it. Steve will be joining me in this presentation, and Lois also went to Israel, but is in Oregon tonight.

The “CLI” (Community Leadership Institute) is a community leadership initiative of current and future Jewish Community leaders funded by the Jewish Federation of Greater Hartford, The Jewish Community Foundation and 3 very generous families within the Jewish community. The course work started in September, where 23 of us meet monthly and we conclude the course in June. Our 7-day trip to Israel began on Jan. 26th and ended on Feb. 3rd. It was first class all the way! Though I have been to Israel before on other occasions, this mission was totally different, in that it focused exclusively on LEADERSHIP, skills development and developing strong bonds with future community leaders, so we can serve as resources for one another. There were 7 people from Beth El on the trip and 9 of us in total with the CLI group. Howard Weiner and Lois Koteen are Co-Chairs of CLI. Our cohort represents all the local synagogues, Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, JT Connect, Federation, the Jewish Day Schools, U of H and the Historical Society.

There is so much I could tell you about this amazing trip, but I am going to focus solely on the “Leadership Lessons” that I personally gained. I know you all want to hear about sheep herding, and Steve Rabb will describe a few of the key activities that represented the leadership and bonding experiences of our group. We would be happy to be more explicit for anyone who wishes further details. But in my 5 minutes tonight, I want to focus on the specific leadership lessons I took home from this Israel mission.

LEADERSHIP LESSONS:

It started for me at JFK Security. The officer asked me many questions, one of which was to describe why I was going to Israel. I replied it was a leadership mission. He then said, what is

your definition of leadership? Stunned, and without thinking, I said: do you want the short or long version?

He said you tell me! I think I recall putting 5 words together and praying I would not be detained.

From the various leaders I met at the think tanks, professors, strategists, to the 35 yr. old mayor, Ofer Berkowitz, who was the youngest counselor ever to run for the office of Mayor of Jerusalem, (he lost) to Rabbis and other Jewish leadership experts, all their journeys and personal triumphs just blew me away. Dr. Eilon Schwartz, Rabbi Shaul Farber and historian Paul Liptz left me with very deep thoughts about the complexities of Israel and leadership practices. Most particularly, how to think about and separate issues. Our guide gave the most phenomenal tour through the new museum at Yad Vashem, that left me breathless. "The Shabbat of A Lifetime, "dinner at the home of Avi and Rachelle Bell was wonderful. Best chicken soup ever.

The greatest challenges of the Jewish-Palestinian relationships were most complex and left a big impression on me. The visit to Rawabi, a billion-dollar city built by Palestinians in the West Bank funded by a Qatar businessman and a private Palestinian investor provided hope and yet doubt. We were told this was to be the capital of a 2-state solution upon its final implementation. Despite the high-end shopping center, 15,000 seat amphitheater, restaurants, and a school supposedly housing 350 students, it appeared to be a ghost city.

Sheep herding was quite difficult, but we learned to lead from front to back and vice versa while discussing who gets left behind, and what we should do as leaders with such individuals who do not wish to follow the group or the leader. These are just a few highlights of the many activities we shared.

Being a leader of the future is a compendium of new thoughts. Many of these leadership lessons were familiar to me in both my personal, community and professional life. These experts forced me to dig deeper and practice harder. Such leadership thinking involves the qualities of our lives, our businesses, our organizations, our Jewish community at large and our society.

In Israel, we saw firsthand how those conflicts promote constant conversations and arguments between socialism, a one-state and a two-state. One asks if these complexities will ever be solved?? Will we ever achieve peace?

MY PERSONAL LEADERSHIP TAKE AWAYS:

ONE MUST BE ABLE TO DEMONSTRATE THE FOLLOWING AS A LEADER IN THEIR ORGANIZATION AND WITHIN OUR JEWISH COMMUNITIES AT LARGE:

- Practice extraordinary levels of perception and insight into the realities of the world at large and into ourselves. Know your leadership style and how to use it. Different situations often require different styles.
- Practice extraordinary levels of motivation to enable oneself to go through the inevitable pain of learning and change, especially in a world with variable boundaries and complex political issues in which loyalties become more difficult to define.
- Know the emotional strength to manage your own and others' anxiety as learning and change become more and more a way of life- especially when one is trying just to exist in a basic life.
- Develop and practice new skills in analyzing cultural assumptions, identifying functional and dysfunctional assumptions, and evolving processes that enlarge the culture by building on its strengths and functional elements.
- Show the willingness and ability to involve others and elicit their participation, because tasks will be too complex, and information too widely distributed for leaders to solve problems on their own. Delegation is key. (1 state, two state)
- Show the willingness and ability to share power and control according to people's knowledge and skills, that is, to permit and encourage leadership to flourish throughout one's organization and work together in a community for more common goals. Not silos.
- Knowing how to bring individual performance, team performance and organizational performance into a "living" vision and develop values that enjoin us to do so.
- Ask lots of questions instead of giving answers, seek more common understanding instead of consensus.
- Perhaps the two most repetitious leadership lessons that came thru as most important to me, beside lead with humor, integrity and humility is to be open-minded and capable of respecting one's competitors or adversaries and learning from them, in leadership situations, political arenas, in our communities and businesses.

- Second, is to be action-oriented, which surfaces not as a desire to move for movement's sake but to move directly toward a clear goal with relentless follow-through. Do so with integrity, character, vision, mindset and confidence. Learn from your mistakes, admit when you are wrong.

We have lots of issues to solve within our own organizations, in our Jewish community and in Israel. The leaders I heard in Israel left me with the message that to be an effective leader who motivates, no matter what the obstacles, or world turbulence, is to turn your organizational pyramid upside down and inside out in order to achieve results, which may not always be a win for you as a leader but try. If you do not, you will never inspire hope and purpose in those who want direction and wish to contribute.

So, taking a moment to step into the shoes of Moses, who proved to be such a dynamic leader in both good and bad times, we learn from him that leadership is not about a title or a designation, it is about impact, influence and inspiration. As Moses said, it is important to communicate to those we lead what is right and what is wrong and stand firmly for what is true and correct.

Thank you CLI and to Beth El for supporting me in this wonderful leadership course and trip that added a treasure trove of insight and knowledge and meaning to my life. I hope that I can continue to be an inspirational leader at Beth El and continue doing so in our Jewish Community. I hope all of you will continue to be inspired as Beth El's leadership, take the opportunity to go to Israel, and keep these leadership lessons in mind as we move forward together. Lets always keep Israel in our thoughts and minds and pray for peace.

My only regret was coming home with an acute flu and bronchitis.

Respectfully Submitted,

Judith R. Rosenthal

First Vice-President and Fund-Raising Chair

My Israel Trip

Delivered from the BIMA

2/15/19

-Jeff Smith-

Thank you, Rabbi Pincus, for inviting me to speak tonight. I am most honored to be here to tell you about my amazing trip. However, I recognize that listening to someone talk about their trip, usually with a seemingly endless series of slides, can get pretty boring. Here I am telling you about **my** trip - and I don't even have the slides. Rabbi, I appreciate your great faith in me and I will try **not** to turn this into a giant snooze fest.

First, a word on how I happened to be on this Israel trip in the first place. This trip was part of a year-long program offered by the Jewish Leadership Academy of the Greater Hartford Jewish Federation. The program is designed to enhance the leadership skills and commitment of those who will soon be assuming senior positions in Greater Hartford's Jewish agencies and congregations, and to build connections between our various synagogues, schools and agencies.

So what did we do there? Well, we did a ton. Here are just a few examples:

We visited the Center for Israeli Innovation in Tel Aviv. The Innovation Center showcases the technological and economic miracle that is modern Israel. Israel ranks in the top three most powerful innovative countries in the world and nearly surpasses the United States in areas such as research and development and concentration of high-tech companies. Not bad for a resource poor country the size of New Jersey. Here are just two examples of what we saw there:

We saw a pair of glasses for the visually-impaired that not only could read aloud for the wearer, but could recognize people's faces and whisper their names into the earpiece. That would also be a handy gadget for those of us who see just fine but can't seem to remember anybody's name. We saw a device that miraculously makes drinking water out of nothing. It

looks like an ordinary water cooler, only there is no jug on top or piping. It extracts moisture from the air, adds a few minerals for taste and health and voila – a refreshing drink of cool, clear water. I admit, it's not a miracle of biblical proportions, but it's close.

We experienced a 600 acre nature preserve that is being carefully tended to allow for the growth of only biblical-era plants and animals. While there, we herded sheep as a team building and leadership exercise. We were charged with moving the flock from point A to point B. It was pretty funny to watch a bunch of city slickers trying to herd sheep, but we eventually got the hang of it. We learned that you need to lead from the front as well as from the back.

Leadership words to live by.

We visited a 1945 bunker where, for three years, young kibbutzniks spent 8 hours a day underground manufacturing millions of bullets for use in the expected war with the surrounding Arab countries. This was within a mile of a British camp and getting caught with guns or ammunition meant a death sentence. You know how they kept the factory a secret? The British soldiers liked the cold beer that was served on the Kibbutz. So the Israelis asked that the British call before coming by so they could chill the beer for them. And, incidentally, also cease all noise and smoke from the factory.

During our trip, we visited several locations in the West Bank. We toured the brand new 14,000 apartment Palestinian city of Rawabi, which I found pretty unsettling because the place was gigantic and we only saw a handful of people there. It reminded me more of a movie set than an actual living, breathing city.

Later, we spoke with Israeli settlers at the Etzion settlement block, which is just south of Jerusalem but in the West Bank. There they spoke to us about a one-state solution. Our guide later pointed out that, should Israel ever pursue a two-state solution, the Israelis there could very well end up on the Palestinian side of the line. In Israel, where you sit often determines where you stand.

We walked through 3,000 year old water tunnels built by King David to divert water into his city, making it siege proof. Those tunnels are still carrying water to this day, exactly as they were designed to. I remember thinking that the MDC could learn a little from those biblical engineers.

We also met with Rabbi Seth Farber, the founder of an [Israeli](#) not-for-profit organization that assists Israelis and those making Aliyah with the legal intricacies of proving Jewishness. In Israel, your status as a Jew can affect marriage, divorce, conversion, burial and many other aspects of civil life. In his efforts to champion the cause of a more inclusive interpretation of Jewishness, Rabbi Farber has sued the chief rabbinate in Israel's Supreme Court. Not once but six times.

I've told you a little about what we did in Israel, now let me say a few words about what I took back with me from the trip. With a visit to Israel, one cannot help but be changed by the experience. So it was for me. Even after two previous trips, I experienced changes in perspective that I could not have predicted beforehand.

I felt privileged to hear a variety of narratives on the Palestinian issue from people who live the issue every day. I have no new insights to give you, but I developed a new appreciation for the many difficult and convoluted problems that must be addressed by any potential resolution of the Palestinian Israeli conflict. Also, it became even clearer to me that as an American Jew, I may not like all that goes on in Israel, in fact I do not, but it is OK to disagree. In fact, it is the Israeli way to discuss and debate these issues, over and over, and always with great vigor.

In spite of Israel's many political, social, and environmental challenges, I look at what Israel has accomplished during its short 70-year existence and can't help but feel a sense of pride. Why I should feel pride is a mystery even to me as I don't live there and haven't made any of their sacrifices. However, I came back from this trip with even a stronger sense that these are my people and that my identity as a Jew is somehow linked to the State of Israel.

My most significant takeaway is from what I considered to be the peak event of our trip. I have been to the Western wall before and always appreciated the historical significance of it, but never really felt spiritually connected. However, this trip transformed that experience for me.

On Shabbat, our group prayed together at Robinson's Arch, that portion of the Western Wall set aside for mixed gender use. This was toward the end of our week together and the many shared experiences and perspectives had, for me, transformed 19 acquaintances into friends, and in some cases, good friends. For me, praying with this group at the Kotel changed a cold, stone wall into a holy place.

Now remember, this group came from all of the various Jewish movements and facets of the Jewish community. I can tell you that it did not matter whether we were Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, or none of the above. We all bonded together. I believe that as a Jewish community we can do the same.

There is strength in numbers and as a community, we are stronger working together than we are as individuals. So, my final takeaway is one of hope, that the Greater Hartford Jewish community will continue to grow, and that we will go forward together, mekhayil el khayil, moving from strength to strength.

And with that my friends, Shabbat Shalom