A MESSAGE FROM ADAM

At the time of writing this column, I am only several days back in Calgary after a trip to Israel during which I participated in an executive leadership seminar. In addition, I had the opportunity to visit our partnership region of Etzba Hagalil (Galilee Panhandle), our PartnershipGether (PGG) friends in the north.

What became abundantly clear during my visit is that Israel is as complex as she is beautiful, as challenging as she is inspiring, and as meaningful and relevant as ever. Much of my trip was spent participating in a study tour provided by the Mandel Institute for Nonprofit Leadership’s Executive Leadership Program. Over the last twelve months, I have been participating in its inaugural cohort, comprised of sixteen North American Federation and JCC professionals, and seasoned faculty with varied academic and Jewish communal professional experience.

The Israel study tour was framed through President Rivlin’s presentation of the four tribes he believes make up most of Israel: Hiloni (Secular), Dati-Leumi (National Religious), Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox), and Arab. As such, our cohort engaged with members of all of these groups to hear about the challenges and opportunities in front of them, with whom we engaged—the Haredi woman who risked being ostracized by her community for starting a group for divorced women; the Bedouin woman who devoted her life to education and creating a school for her children; the kibbutzim who continue to build lives in more remote parts of the country and, in many cases, on the border; and the leaders in northern communities in the periphery who continue to build lives in more remote parts of the country and, in many cases, on the border just a short distance from Israel’s sworn enemies.

The final few days of my trip were spent in our partnership region in the north. It was a busy and meaningful time during which I was able to see our P2G efforts in action and to engage directly with Israeli professionals and volunteers. I saw the impact that a curricular STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) initiative is making in Metsudot School in Kfar Shemona, raising the quality of education for students in the area and serving as a pilot project that will lead to STEAM adoption in other schools. I planted a lemon tree for Tu B’Shevat with participants from Beit Geshor, a program for youth with special needs, and with Amyha Shlern, Mayor of Kfar Shemona.

It was my distinct honour to meet with Rachel Rabin, sister of the late Yitzhak Rabin and pioneer of Kibbutz Menara, creating the kibbutz before the State of Israel was declared. She shared stories of its early formation and highlighted its importance as a key location situated right on the border with Lebanon. And finally, I experienced the contrast of daily life in Metula, touring an active daycare and youth centre before driving along the border with Lebanon and visiting the site of one of the recently discovered tunnels being constructed by Hezbollah. Mayor David Azulai stood strong in his resolve to ensure Metula is a safe and welcoming community for its residents, and he thanked us for our continuing moral and financial support to his community and the rest of the region.

As I type this article, I recall how proud I was to be walking in Jerusalem, touring in Tel Aviv, visiting the Negev and Etzba Hagalil, and meeting the diverse groups of people who make up the very fabric of Israel. Our homeland is still young and continues to experience growing pains and great achievements, but it is ours and it is amazing. I still tear up when I sing Hatikvah, stand a little bit taller when I hear about another ingenious Israeli discovery, and above all I say a quiet thank you in my head whenever I picture the land of milk and honey, historic and futuristic, all rolled into one.

B’Shalom,

Adam Silver
CEO, Calgary Jewish Federation
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