

Ki Va Moed

The Time is Now

I write to you on the El Al plane returning from the State of Israel. I and four others, Steve and Nina Levine, Helene Ainbinder and Robin Sambur, under the auspices of SAJES, representing different facets of education in our synagogue. We were accompanied by four other synagogues, Huntington Jewish Center, Temple Beth Emeth of Mt. Sinai, Tehilot Shalom of Cold Spring Harbor and Beth Torah of Melville. We went on a ten day journey from July 5-14. Our mission was to experience Israel and the Israeli people through travel and exploration, discussion and engagement with a group of Israeli lay people and educators and to formulate engaging programs about Israel for our congregations. We were very busy traveling to the north near Tzvat to visit, study and pray in an ancient synagogue site; to daven and experience Shabbat in various synagogues in Jerusalem; to visit and pray at the kotel, our holiest of places; to visit exquisite museums of the Shoah and Jewish history and the modern state; to visit in Haifa, the San Francisco of Israel and to experience home hospitality of our new Israeli friends and to peer at Israeli society from the inside out. All the while reflecting on how we can keep this bond going in the coming years at our beloved synagogue, The East Northport Jewish Center. In our many discussions, we determined to heighten our focus on connecting to Israel in programming in various ways. We hope that you will respond to this initiative and allow it to grow your Jewish identities as families and individuals.

Finally, we will have a chance in



Israeli and Suffolk County participants in Jerusalem

November to welcome our Israeli friends who hope to travel to us to learn about American Jewish life. You will have a chance to meet them, to host them and to learn about their lives, their joys and their challenges. The possibilities for this unfolding connection are great. Perhaps a trip to Israel to experience Israel's magic to meet them on their home turf! In the meantime though, the following are the reflections of our participants.

– Rabbi Ian Silverman

Upon Becoming Engaged to Israel

by Robin Sambur

Two years ago, I had one of my "Ten Best" life experiences when I shared my Bat Mitzvah with our congregation. Being called to the Torah for my aliya in the shul that I love, was an important step for me as a Jew and it will be a special memory for me.

This summer, I had the opportunity to have a new Jewish sharing experience. Along with Nina and Steve

Levine, Helene Ainbinder and Rabbi, I shared ten days of pure magic with four other Suffolk County synagogues and a group of Israelis. When we started out, everyone approached one another with caution and some concern about how we would all get along. But we had a mandate, a goal—to work together to help Jews in America and Israel find what we had to offer each other. We would then work to bring that knowledge and feeling back to our communities. Our protective layers peeled back quickly to expose a core of commonality and friendship.

We stood together at the site of the remains of a two thousand year old synagogue and studied over a snack of hummus, olives and spiced wine after davening Mincha together. Imagine the awe of praying as your ancestors did. Standing in ancient footprints alongside new Israeli friends, we knew we were distant cousins derived from a vast pool of ancestry. We visited a kibbutz and studied Torah in an environmental setting that said "there is still a Garden of Eden". We visited volunteer



organizations and worked together as Jews helping others in need. We visited beautiful and inspiring museums which allowed us to see the connection between ourselves, the Bible, history, and the beautiful artifacts of our culture. We were also able to learn of the fight for Israel's independence in an incredible interactive museum. In 1948, the message was clear, after the Shoah, we had to establish a Jewish State. The message to me now is equally clear, we must maintain this State.

Because we had the unique opportunity to experience Israel with Israelis, we were able to see that the Americans and Israelis were like two sides of a Jewish coin. We saw that together, we were much richer than either is separately. At our farewell dinner, we all wrote spontaneous thoughts to one another, sang Israeli and American folk songs and finally hugged and tearfully said our goodbyes. I miss my new friends already. At this moment, I am feeling my Israel experience could not be topped. I am looking forward to the opportunity for my ENJC friends to welcome the Israelis when they visit us in November. In the meantime, I look forward to sharing some of our wonderful experiences with our ENJC family. We hope you will join

us in the coming weeks as we try to present our journey to you in picture, talk, song and dance. We also hope to share some new programming with everyone so that we can move to greater discovery of our Jewishness through Israeli engagement. Better still, let's go to Israel together!

Is This As Good As It Gets?

by Helene Ainbinder

American Jews, Jewish Americans, Israeli Jews, Jewish Israelis becoming friends and feeling like one big happy family. What a dream! At 35,000 feet on an El Al jet, I can tell you that I am definitely wide awake and living that dream. Landing in Israel and traveling to Tel Aviv to be greeted by 28 Israelis singing "Havenu Shalom Aleichem" brought smiles and tears and dispersed all our fears.

Ki Va Moed – The Time is Now...A variety of synagogues from Suffolk communities along with Israeli synagogues and various schools, shared stories of family, friends, but most of all, ourselves. The history of our people began to unfold from ancient to modern places with two wonderful scholarly Israeli guides, Shari and Ada – (Oren) along with Shellie Dickstein, Suri Jacknis,

Debbie Friedman – (SAJES) and Baruch our driver. We journeyed to Haifa and then to Jerusalem to savor Shabbat.

There is no Shabbat to compare or words to describe the sounds, smells, sights, tastes and feelings one receives in Jerusalem. Rabbi Ian Silverman, Steve and Nina Levine, Robin Sambur and I were invited to experience a unique spiritual and literally uplifting service that raised us out of our seats. Many mi'fgashim (meetings), magnificent fresh fruits, vegetables and dishes, some delicious and delightfully prepared by our Israeli hosts that opened their homes and hearts to us. We met very courageous and hamish Israeli and Palestinian children trying to grasp the olive branch that is so close to their hands. New beginnings are sometimes hard, and harder for those who do not want to share the start.

My eyes are slowly closing and my body needs rest. However, the master is demanding even though my task is not at an end. I know I am not alone. I have others to help guide me, may my dreaming keep continuing with you there beside me.



Ki Va Moed-A Few Thoughts

by Nina Levine

Not too long ago, in a State very near and dear to my heart, I took an incredible journey. On this journey I was joined not only by other members of my immediate synagogue family, Rabbi Ian (clergy), Helene

Ainbinder (educator), Robin Sambur (board member) and Steve Levine (lay leader), but also by members of four other diverse denomination Suffolk County Synagogues, five Israeli synagogues and three Israeli schools. The purpose of our Ki Va Moed (The Time is Now) journey was Israeli engagement. Our mission was and is to engage and imbue our congregations and communities with a feeling and longing for the land of Eretz Y'Israel.

I am still not sure how we are going to do this, but come along with me as I share with you just a little of what we did and shared and felt. Upon arriving at the Diaspora Museum in Israel (our first stop after arriving on El Al) we were greeted with spontaneous song by the Israeli Ki Va Moed participants. We immediately felt warmly welcomed and looked forward to a week of working and bonding with our newfound friends.

Throughout the week we participated in various ice breakers and mifgashes to remove any barriers that existed due to everyone's perceptions of each other and understandings or misunderstandings that might exist due to different language definitions. Although all the Israelis we met speak English, there are some differences in interpretation. One example I would like to share is the definition of "religious." In our community I would say that someone might be considered somewhat "religious" if they wore a kippa, kept kosher and went to shul regularly. Not so to the Israelis; "religious" to them means what we would consider Ultra Orthodox. It was interesting to examine the nuances in our interpretations.

One of the most amazing experiences I had was at a synagogue by the name of Shira Chadasha where some of us chose to worship on the first Friday evening of Shabbat that we were in Israel. This shul was started about three



years ago by a woman who wanted an Orthodox shul where the women were equal (quite a contradiction in terms!) The synagogue itself is a very unassuming building and I must tell you, it was packed! There was standing room only. It is a Modern Orthodox shul with a sheer fabric mahitzah running down the middle, separating the men and women, as well as the Aron Kokesh. Services are led by a woman, then by a man, and so forth. It is an equalitarian as well as halachakly "correct" shul. In order to begin services the congregation determined that they would always wait for ten men and ten women to be present. The services were awesome and inspiring with unbelievable ruach! I told my compatriots I'd love to bottle it and take it home.

Another meaningful part of the trip for me was the ability to say Kaddish everyday with the able leadership of Rabbi Ian and the Ki Va Moed participants. It was especially connecting to be able to recite our prayers at the ancient synagogue at Naboria where we explored Bridges to the Past and also at Pinat Shorashim at Kibbutz Gezer in a beautiful outdoor setting which brought us so close to nature and our beautiful land.

I have to say that sharing a meal of home hospitality with the family

of one of the Israeli participants was very special. We all had the opportunity to do this with various members of the group. It was a terrific way for all of us to bond with our newfound friends. I, along with Steve, had the opportunity to also spend time at another member's home and get to know that family as well.

Every time I visit Israel I am overwhelmed with emotion and appreciation at the opportunity to visit the land of our ancestors in this day and age. It is a land that so many people worked so hard for and continue to work to preserve as a homeland for all of us.

Almost Home

by Steven R. Levine

This is my fifth visit to Israel, having been here last just a year ago. I love being here, swept away by the vastness of this relatively small nation that my heart claims as its own.

Is it possible that I feel like I am home because the sights and sounds have become so etched in my thoughts? Our visit last year was for only about ten days and our visit before that was for but two weeks in 1996. Yet I am at home, even though my home in Suffolk County is six thousand miles away.

These thoughts introduced a visit to Israel that would become more meaningful than any other had been. Nina and I had opted to begin our “Ki Va Moed” (which means “The Time is Now” – and is also the name of a very popular, upbeat Israeli song) Israel experience by going to Israel a week ahead of the rest of our ENJC team. We would return our rental car at Ben Gurion and meet Rabbi Silverman, Helene Ainbinder and Robin Sambur the morning they arrived with the rest of the Ki Va Moed Suffolk County contingent.

We all got on our coach bus, and set out to meet many of the rest of the participants from the Jerusalem synagogues and schools who had also traveled to Tel Aviv for our initial meeting. We got off after a short ride and the Jerusalem contingent broke into a welcoming song of *Haveinu Shalom Aleichem* when they saw us walking towards them. We greeted each other like long-lost cousins. It looked a little bit like one of those scenes on daytime television when people are suddenly dramatically reunited.

It was a great start, but there was not an immediate melding. We were all trying to figure out where the other was coming from, what the other’s agenda was. In fact, it was not until we had all spent the better part of two days with the Suffolk County and Jerusalem contingents being continuously chopped, mixed and stirred together in carefully orchestrated and seemingly incessant sessions by the Oren and SAJES that magic happened.

The Friday morning session at the Dan Panorama Hotel in Haifa started at 8AM after 7 AM breakfast (the days were exhausting.) The presenter was talking and writing on an easel as her presentation progressed. At some point in her presentation, she wrote the name of the seminar and title of the song, “Ki Va Moed” in Hebrew on the

easel in summary to a list. It was a “morning person” I’m sure, who began to sing, “Ki Va Moed, Ki Va Moed,” and then another joined in, and then another. The loud, upbeat rhythmic melody brought several of us to our feet, and then immediately yielded a Hora as everyone in the room (American, Israeli and staff) joined in while continuing to sing and clap their hands.

It had happened. We had connected. Stilted conversations of the past couple of days were now turning into opportunities to reconnect and fill in the blanks. We started talking about the problems that we face in our communities and in our synagogues. We began to understand the nuances of the English language, and we began to work to understand each other. Personal invitations for evening visits to homes of our Israeli counterparts began to be extended.

Team members also started to focus our team objectives, and how WE wanted this to work. The coordinators of our seminar, SAJES and OREN, saw the need to reexamine the program direction. UJA-Federation of New York, who generously subsidized this program, was going to be getting a lot more than they expected. This was not going to be what was planned.

Almost in unison, the Americans and the Israelis acknowledged that we had common issues that we could all work on together. Up until that point, there was going to be more or less a simple partnering of Jerusalem institutions with Suffolk County institutions. As excited as all of us were about our new Israeli friends visiting Suffolk County in December, we also unanimously saw the need to collaborate locally at the same time as we coordinate across the Atlantic.

We also realized that Jewish Israelis from Jerusalem visiting us in Suffolk County is much more

complicated than us visiting there. In Jerusalem, virtually every hotel is KOSHER. It is easy to walk from almost any hotel to go to Shabbat services. Every block has a kosher restaurant. Fast food that is kosher can be had at McDonald’s, Kentucky Fried Chicken and Sbarro. It was a bit embarrassing to admit that being a Jew in Suffolk County is very different to being a Jew in Jerusalem. It was another valuable lesson that we explored together.

There is the old joke that when two Jews move into a brand new community, they build three synagogues; one for each of them, and one for both of them to boycott. But something wonderfully different happened in Israel in July. The teams started talking. Our ENJC team began sharing with the teams from Huntington Jewish Center, Reconstructionist synagogue Kehillath Shalom Synagogue of Cold Spring Harbor, and Reform synagogues Temple Beth Torah of Melville and Temple Beth Emeth of Mount Sinai. We started working together.

Amazingly, (well not really amazingly), the needs, issues, and problems at ENJC are not chronically unique to ENJC. We are working together as teams and institutions to grow together. Our “competition” is becoming our partner, helping us as we help them, and we are going to grow together. Our ENJC home is going to be better than we could have imagined as we partner locally and across the Atlantic.

Maybe it could have always been like this. Maybe it should always have been like this. But it is happening now. Ki Va Moed – The Time Is NOW.

