



MEMORIES OF AMERICANS FOR A SAFE ISRAEL'S CHIZUK MISSION

OCTOBER 30 – NOVEMBER 5, 2018

Adapted from the Notes of Glenn Richter

Tuesday, October 30

The trip began at Ben Gurion Airport where Judy Kadish and group welcomed one another as the excitement built for another AFSI Chizuk Mission.

It was a quick ride to the Jabotinsky Institute in Tel Aviv where we were guided by a young, very informed National Service participant named Hadass. Following a discussion, movie and tour we moved downstairs to the Etzel Museum. Shlomo, from the Ministry of Defense was our guide. Due to our time limitations he was only able to give us one insider's story, the one that complemented the exhibit on Irgun's 1946 bombing of King David Hotel.





We proceeded on to Jerusalem's Ir David (City of David). AFSI friend, Yehuda HaCohen met us for lunch in the arbor where we discussed his work with American students.

We then had a VIP tour of Ir David with Avi Baldasare, our extremely knowledgeable and entertaining guide. We were shown through King David's palace and past other biblical-era buildings, hiked through the new archaeological excavation of Roman drainage ditch beneath the main road running up to the



Temple Mount and learned about the Jews' attempt to hide from Titus' army in the drainage canal. We emerged just outside the southern end of the Temple Mount seeing new excavations currently underway.



Dinner was in Safra Square where our guest, Col. David Hacham, retired chief advisor on Arab affairs to seven defense ministers spoke informally with us.

Wednesday, October 31

Those who chose were up early to ascend the Temple Mount with guide Shmuel Cohen from the Temple Mount Heritage Foundation. We were pleased to see that conditions for Jewish people ascending the Mount, while far from perfect, continue to improve.

The entire group then proceeded to the new American Embassy in Jerusalem. While we were disappointed that the Ambassador had been called away on an urgent meeting, we were pleased to meet with a Deputy, Vladimir Lifshitz.



Next stop was Bethlehem where we visited and said prayers at Kever Rachel (Rachel's Tomb).

After a lovely lunch we visited the Knesset, meeting with Deputy Foreign Minister Tzipi Hotevely, and MK Yoav Kish. We had a short tour of the building and its artifacts and then were privileged to sit in on a plenum debate with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Tzipi Livni. Following dinner, we had a fascinating meeting with Jeff Daube, Israel representative of the Zionist Organization of America and activist with many Israeli causes.



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Thursday, November 1

After a short drive to Gush Etzion we met our guide for the morning, Josh Hasten, at Neve Daniel, to enjoy views from the Mitzpe Haelef outlook (the highest point in Israel other than the Golan). We then headed to the Gush Etzion junction shopping center. Our guide Josh, in addition to his being the International Representative of Gush Etzion and a well-known radio personality, was a friend of Ari Fuld who was murdered by a Palestinian terrorist in September. Josh's description of the murder and Ari's heroism was extremely moving.

Next, we headed to the Oz V'Gaon nature reserve and were amongst the first to see the new outlook area. Within the already flourishing section of Oz V'Gaon, volunteer students were busy laying down stones and otherwise beautifying the site. It's always inspiring to see and hear from Nadia Matar and Yehudit Katsover about the work in which the Women in Green are engaged.

In Elazar we visited the home of Malka and Yosef, parents of Yochai, killed in action. Yosef spoke of his son and the Of Kadima (Flying Forward) foundation established in his memory to assist needy soldiers.

Naturally, we needed to show solidarity with Netiv Avot by visiting the new area nearby, where temporary housing has been provided for the 15 families whose homes were destroyed by the government because they allegedly touched on land claimed by "Palestinians." Naama Yechezkel, whose house was demolished, invited us to see her temporary living space and showed us around.

Then on to Hebron and the Maarat Hamachpela (Cave of the Patriarchs). AFSI member Phil Rosenblatt sponsored a very lively Torah completion ceremony and celebration in which we were honored to take part.



Friday, November 2

Jerusalem City Council member Arie King joined us for breakfast. This was right after the mayoral elections but before the run-off. He was able to share many insights on happenings in the city.

Then on to Beit Hogla, where young pioneering Israelis have joined Erna Kobasa, the elderly Lady of Jericho, who has held on to the land for several decades. We heard from Rabbi Uri Pilichowski, who heads up the new AFSI program, **IF NOT US**, aimed at American students in Israel. We also heard from local Yonina Rubinstein. During lunch at the Pilichowski home, both Uri and AFSI Advisory Council member, Ken Abramowitz, spoke to us.



Shabbat Chaye Sarah was spent in Hebron. Forty thousand people including many young adults and teens were there to share in this special Torah portion.



We enjoyed a beautiful luncheon hosted by the Hebron Fund where many Government ministers and MKs addressed the capacity audience.

Sunday, November 4

Morning in Arad - our guide Benny Berlin brought us to the artists' quarter of town, where we visited Studieka and heard from owners Rami and Yafa Zamir. At Studio Heli, we were shown some of their creative processes.

After traveling through the desert, past Tel Arad and some of the many illegal Bedouin encampments, we arrived in Beersheva. The first stop there was The Beersheva ANZAC Memorial Centre (ANZAC =Australian and New Zealand Army Corps), a new memorial museum honoring the Australians and New Zealanders who joined British soldiers liberating Palestine from the Ottoman Turks in 1917 during World War I. 1,300 of the ANZAC and British troops who fell in the Negev and during the successful assault on Beersheva, are buried here, including the one known Jewish soldier. Oded and Penina and a former Australian were our guides. We viewed a dramatic recreation film and saw other historic film clips. Rabbi Pilichowski led us in a *El Molei Rachamim and Kaddish* memorial prayers for Capt. Van den Bergh, the only known Jewish soldier buried here.

In Beersheva we walked through the Old Town, had lunch at the very "happening" Kebab Emma Restaurant, and went on to view the home of an Ethiopian-Israeli mother and children hit by a Hamas rocket from Gaza only 2 ½ weeks before on October 17.

Next, we visited Ashelim, the Adiel neighborhood, established by the Ayalim organization. From there we could see some of the solar collectors and the solar tower.

That evening was spent in Yerucham at Desert Iris Hotel. After a lovely dinner we had a talk by Saar Elyakim Ben Yehuda of the Hebrew Israelites, based in Dimona, followed by excellent acapella entertainment by a member of that community.

Monday, November 5

On the way to Gaza-periphery communities. First stop was Kibbutz Kissufim. We went past some of ground burned by Hamas incendiary balloons, beyond Kissufim's security fence, to a potato field which adjoins Gaza and its city of Khan Yunis. Ilan (Keith) Isaacson, regional community security coordinator, spoke extensively to us. Next to the border, an IDF security balloon with cameras was floating in the air. Ilan showed us part of the nose cone of an Iron Dome defensive rocket. We could see and feel the sense of pride flowing from the "Rav Shatzim" that they were keeping their people safe from harm. They were very touched by the AFSI donation of security helmets for their people.

Leaving there, we proceeded to Shavei Darom, many of whose inhabitants were from Gush Katif.



We visited one of their most profitable industries, the Chasalat Alei Katif produce factory, whose products are kosher and bug-free. We met Uriel Nachum and Rabbi Moshe Bloom of the Torah V'Eretz Institute.

Afterwards we saw a film about the community. Some of the group prayed in the Synagogue which had the keys to the shul originally in Kfar Darom, Gush Katif.

Back on the bus, Shaul, from the One Israel Fund, modeled for us all the protective gear that community security coordinators must wear, including helmets provided by AFSI.

We were then off to Kibbutz Saad, near Gaza where Ayala Porat showed us around, including a garden of unusual cacti plants, near her home. She discussed the current situation from her porch, including the rocket that landed in her front yard. Ayala guided us through the kibbutz to the beautiful shul and the dining room.

We only had time to do a Sderot drive through, looking at both the many public bomb shelters and add-on safe rooms. We stood on the rise at Sderot's edge, looking into Gaza and seeing how close it is to one of Israel's major electric power stations.



It was time to wrap up another wonderful AFSI mission with a traditional farewell dinner.