

CHIZUK MISSION REPORT NOVEMBER 9 – 17, 2022

By Judy Freedman Kadish, Director

Capturing the authentic flavor and essence of an AFSI Chizuk Mission can only be done by taking part in one but this will give you a general idea.



Day 1- Wednesday, November 9

Our 2022 Fall Chizuk Mission began on November 9 as we boarded the bus at Ben Gurion Airport. Our forever favorite bus driver, Ami, met us, and we knew we were in the most skilled hands as we set out on our journey. We also had the honor of being guided by **David Ha'Ivri**, who possesses extensive knowledge of Judea and Samaria, the area we planned to focus on almost exclusively on this trip.



David Ha'Ivri inside a former Canaanite home



Our first stop was at Oz V'Gaon, the wonderful Nature Center in Gush Etzion, where we were greeted warmly by **Yehudit Katsover and Nadia Matar**, leaders of the **Women in Green (WIG)** and founders of the Sovereignty Movement. They led the creation of the park and are now headquartered there.

We were briefed on their efforts during the recent Israeli elections, including the Sovereignty Youth's enthusiastic involvement in getting out the vote. Also joining us was **Yigal Dilmoni**, the outgoing CEO of the Yesha Council, who is starting a new NGO encouraging support for Judea and Samaria.



Yigal Dilmoni with Judy Kadish

While in this special place, we visited the Helen Freedman Park, built by AFSI together with the WIG, to honor the memory of our beloved former leader. It is a play and meeting area with a huge pergola. It is adjacent to the AFSI Way, a path from the Gush Etzion Junction for those who want to enter the park on foot. The pathway was built several years ago to honor the memory of Eliyahu Kramer, son of Rina Kramer.

Following fond farewells, we headed off to Hebron. We entered the **Maarat HaMachpela** and were happy to see Rabbi Simcha Hochbaum and to meet with David Wilder, a dear friend, and a leader of the Hebron/Kiryat Arba community. We had an opportunity to participate in mincha prayers inside Maarat HaMachpela, and then explored the Abraham Avinu neighborhood and its historic synagogue. We also stopped to visit Yifat Akobi, who has helped reclaim many Hebron homes and is now living in one that had lots of work done on it after a lengthy battle for ownership rights. Several homes have been completely renovated with only one or two apartments still available for purchase.



On the steps outside Maarat HaMachpelah



Our place in Susya. Stunning greenery.

Smiling but weary, we left to settle into our accommodations in Susya. We had a brief time to refresh and recharge and were off to dinner at an intimate café where the lights of Jordan shimmered in the distance on the opposite shores of the Dead Sea. Fabulous food in Mitzpe Yair and stories of our hosts' journey to Judaism were a par excellence end to our first day.

Day 2 – Thursday, November 10

Naomi Kahn of Regavim met us for a trip to Ancient Susya. Here we saw ancient burial caves, remnants of late Talmudic era civilization, archeologically notable synagogue ruins dating back to the Second Temple Period. **Seeing Hebrew writing in mosaic in this ancient synagogue reinforces our knowledge that Jews are indigenous to all of Israel.**

Naomi showed us how the Bedouins are settling all around and getting closer all the time to this area designated for Jews under the Oslo Accords. (Even though the Palestinian Authority has pronounced Oslo dead, we continue to refer to areas A, B, and C. A is all Arab, B is mixed, and C is for Jews.) We know that Susya is in area C but that Jews have been living in danger there for years.



Ancient synagogue remnant

We then left the ancient world and visited Carmel, where a Ph.D. has developed lotions and other potions from plants that grow ONLY in this area. After finding remedies for all (or most) of our ailments, we continued our journey.



Tirael Cohen, center, with the AFSI Chizuk Mission

The next stop was Bat Ayin, where we visited the home of **Tirael Cohen**, founder and head of Kedma. This organization has student villages on all the borders of Israel. Students living in the villages do service in the communities near their homes while attending university. The number of these villages grows yearly because the students get a discount on their housing and give back so much in exchange.

As dusk fell upon us, we made a last stop in P'nei Kedem to visit Gabe's Farm. Gabe has put his heart, soul, and finances on the line to preserve hundreds of dunam of land with plans for a herd of 400 sheep. Warmed by his enthusiasm but chilled by the weather, we left with promises to return.

As we entered the private home of a beautiful lady in Susya who had prepared our dinner, we were warmed by a delicious soup and filled with freshly baked breads, cheeses, and other delicacies. The story of her brave husband, who had been murdered while herding his sheep, will be with us all for much time to come.

Day 3 & 4 - Friday, November 11 and Shabbat, November 12

Our day began with a visit to Beit El and the home of **Yehuda HaKohen**. We always enjoy spending time with him and discussing the day's pressing issues.



Yehuda HaKohen talks to our group

From there, we proceeded to the Yeshiva at Har Bracha, in Samaria, where we were to spend Shabbat. Before Shabbat set in, we paid a visit to the Mount Blessing (Har Bracha) winery to sample wines and a mountaintop view of the area.

Kabbalat Shabbat Services at the Synagogue together with the community was a beautiful start to a lovely Shabbat. At dinner, we were visited by some local personalities. Yonathan Behar, one of the founding residents of the community, stopped by to see how we were settling in. During Shabbat

meals, we enjoyed a visit from Yonadev Saar, a teacher at the Yeshiva and brother of Gilad Saar*. We were pleased to meet with Tommy Waller from the Hayovel movement and hear about their tree-planting efforts.

Shabbat ended with a Melava Malka at the home of the Mayor of Elie, Ariel El-Maliach, and his beautiful family. Our good friend Gilad Ach, who heads AD KAN, the organization that goes undercover to expose threats to Israel, also stopped in to give us a fascinating update.

*(Chavat Gilad was built on family land and named after Yonadev's brave brother Gilad, who was murdered by terrorists.)

Day 5 – Sunday, November 13

An early morning departure got us to the Jordan Valley with time to explore. The first stop was an automated Maskiot Chicken farm. We visited the chicken coop and watched as each egg was wiped down by hand before being packed up. We hope this enterprise becomes profitable. The owner brought us in small jeeps to a magnificent lookout where he brought some bible verses to life, explaining that we were in the center of Biblical Israel and not in a border area.

Back on the road, we were ready for lunch and stopped in Rotem at one of our favorite cafes. The food and atmosphere are just wonderful. Rotem has an interesting history; it was started by one woman who was finished with army service and has grown into a town with some interesting homes and a shepherding training center.

From there, we travelled to Mechola where we shared some Chizuk with the people who run the farm that was burned this past Yom Kippur by terror arsonists. The terrorists can be seen on camera setting the fire but have not yet been caught.



Beautiful view of the Jordan Valley from Rotem

Then on to Bruchin, where we visited the pre-IDF Yeshiva that is flourishing there. Sharing dinner with some of the students was a pleasure. This is a place that deserves to flourish.

Day 6 - Monday, November 14

Another early morning departure found us headed out into the neighborhood. Our first stop was Itamar, where we visited the Chetzim Yeshiva. This Yeshiva serves boys who are having problems fitting into typical schools. They appeared buoyantly happy, and we understand that they learn here to take responsible places in the army and in life.

From there we headed up the hill to Tomer's farm where he and his family raise goats and sheep and the vineyard flourishes. He even tells us that after he moved in, various fruit trees appeared. It sounds as if they were welcoming him back home after a long absence.

We had lunch in Kedumim and then headed to Chavat Gilad for a mini symposium. Friends Ezri Tubi, Inon Dan Kehati, Yael Shevach, Ilana Shimoni and Daniella Weiss updated us on their current projects – all extremely exciting. We met in a beautiful artist's building, and we hope the owners and their patrons will move the burgeoning art scene in the Shomron forward.

For a quick dinner we stopped in Karnei Shomron, where we met with a young man named David Weiss. David's parents were part of the first Chizuk missions, and he maintains that AFSI changed his entire family's life trajectory. David lives in Israel happily and expressed his gratitude and appreciation for AFSI and our Chizuk Missions.

Day 7 – Tuesday, November 15

Tuesday morning found us headed to the Northern Shomron, where our first visit was with Benjamin Horgan, whose wife, Esther, was killed while jogging. He has created a small memorial area to her, which we visited and shared our condolences with him.

Our next stop was right outside Rechan at Shabi's farm. In addition to seeing their "pick your own" farm in the development stage. We had a wonderful lunch with New York style bagels. We were amazed that Mrs. Shabi can create these in Israel.

On our way to Jerusalem we stopped at **Solomon's Tomb**, a beautiful place for evening prayers.

Solomon's Tomb in Jerusalem



Day 8 – Wednesday, November 16

We had a free morning in Jerusalem. Some had business to attend to, and others just enjoyed the sights and smells. Some toured Jerusalem with our guide.



At Ir David with guide Rachel Cohen

Later the group met for a **special tour of Ir David**. We saw the remains of what is believed to be David's Palace and then were taken to a passage that has not yet been opened to the public – the Pilgrims Road. There was not an unmuddied shoe in the group.



New section of Ir David

Dinner was at the Kikar Musica with Doug Altabef, Chairman of Im Tirtzu, the largest Israeli grassroots student Zionist organization. The work they do is amazing.

Day 9 – Thursday, November 17

Those who chose to, ascended the Temple Mount, the holiest site of the Jewish people. They were relatively undisturbed by the Jordanian Waqf or the Israeli Border police and explored the Mount fully.

Once the group was all together, we met up with Dan Luria from Ateret Cohanim, the organization that is reclaiming the old city of Jerusalem. They always have new acquisitions, which is wonderful to see. We explored the old Jewish quarter, now called the “Muslim quarter,” where many reclaimed homes are being lived in by committed Israelis and their families. We climbed to see the view from the tallest rooftop in Jerusalem, Beit HaNof. It is breathtaking.

After a quick lunch we headed to Kever Rachel (Rachel’s Tomb). Praying at this tomb in a walled off section of Bethlehem always touches the heart. On this visit, we met with a family living beyond Kever along with 12 other families. They all study in a small Yeshiva located right there.

Our celebratory dinner was at Grill Bar in Jerusalem. We reviewed our trip and tried to decide which and where the most memorable moments and experiences of the Mission were. As usual, although we could see each other's points of view, we did not agree on everything. Just as it should be!